TALKING ABOUT ACCOUNTABILITY: A QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE DISCOURSE OF WELFARE-TO-WORK PROGRAM MANAGERS

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by

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Welfare policies have historically faced criticisms from both sides of the political aisle in the United States (Gilens 1999; Neubeck and Cazenave 2001). The critical reception of welfare policies is evident in how public discourse surrounding welfare generally portrays welfare as a program that facilitates complacency and dependency (Gilens 1999; Misra et al. 2003). Public discourse further represents welfare recipients as lazy, promiscuous, unmotivated, selfish, and undeserving (Collins 1990; Gilens 1999; Rousseau 2009; Misra et al. 2003). Thus, the public often views welfare as a program that enables the “lazy” lifestyles of individuals experiencing poverty. Yet, criticisms of both welfare programs and recipients tend to stem from stereotypes and controlling images about clients (Gilens 1999; Neubeck and Cazenave 2001; Rousseau 2009). Overall, it is apparent that welfare policies and discourse are highly ideological. Specifically, previous work establishes the presence of several ideologies in welfare and its surrounding discourse, including neoliberalism (Soss et al. 2011), paternalism (Soss et al. 2011; Jackman 1994; Ben-Ishai 2012), and racism (Collins 1990; Neubeck and Cazenave 2001; Rousseau 2009).

Many of the dependency criticisms persist despite the 1996 welfare reform, which broadly focused on moving clients toward work participation (Neubeck and Cazenave 2001; Handler 2003). Thus, the legacy of negative stereotypes about clients and poverty continue to
affect public opinion about welfare. Welfare officials implement these controversial policies within the context of public discourse that negatively represents both welfare programs and recipients. The shift in welfare policies from the 1996 reform further affected how officials implement welfare policies. Specifically, the reform lacked clear implementation goals and involved devolution of welfare to the state and county levels. The managers administering welfare are thus in a high-pressure situation in which they must navigate and enforce unclear policy goals, including holding clients accountable to these uncertain goals. The goals are connected to standards and expectations for clients—or accountability structures. Accountability structures are a central feature of the welfare bureaucracy in which managers are accountable to county, state, and federal performance requirements and—on the other side—managers and frontline workers hold clients accountable to both formal requirements (meeting program goals) and informal standards (e.g., wanting clients to become “good workers”).

Amid public discourse and ambiguous accountability structures, how do welfare program managers incorporate ideology into how they talk about the program and their expectations for clients? In my dissertation research, I explore how cash assistance program managers draw on ideology when they talk about holding clients accountable to both formal requirements (meeting program goals) and informal standards (e.g., wanting clients to become “good workers”) of the cash assistance program. I build on previous literature by focusing on managers (rather than frontline workers) who play a unique role in prioritizing goals and thus are in a unique position to discuss standards to which clients are held accountable. My analysis further contributes to an interesting intersection of literatures in inequality (race, class, and gender), discourse, ideology, organizational accountability, public policy, and mothering.
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

In the following review, I draw on a variety of literatures to inform and contextualize my analyses. First, I discuss general aspects of welfare including the specifics of the current cash assistance policy, public discourse surrounding welfare, and the bureaucratic structure of welfare. I then move into discussing literature specific to my three empirical chapters. Specifically, I detail previous research on accountability processes and structures and ideologies relevant to welfare (e.g., racism, neoliberalism, paternalism, and mothering ideologies).

THE CONTEXT OF WELFARE: PROGRAM, PUBLIC DISCOURSES, AND BUREAUCRACY

In 1996, President Clinton and a predominantly Republican congress reformed welfare, passing the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA). PRWORA ended Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) and created Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) (Gilens 1999; Handler 2003; Neubeck and Cazenave 2001). The cash assistance programs under both TANF and AFDC are for “able-bodied, working-age poor” (Gilens 1999:12). Unlike AFDC, TANF provided block grants to states, ultimately giving states more discretion over how funds are spent (Gilens 1999; Iversen 2000). This 1996 welfare reform intended to transform welfare from an “entitlement” program to one that focuses on wage-labor and transitions to work (Handler 2003; Iversen 2000; Quadagno and Street 2005). The 1996 welfare reform relied on assumptions that there are sufficient jobs for all
people looking for employment, that jobs will provide opportunities for advancement, and that welfare recipients are in-need because they lack the motivation to work (Handler 2003).

The major changes to cash assistance during the transition from AFDC to TANF include the creation of work requirements, time limits, and family caps (Handler 2003; Hays 2003; Neubeck and Cazenave 2001). The work requirements mandate that clients log a certain number of hours per week at a place of employment or a worksite selected by the program to receive benefits (Handler 2003). When clients fail to reach these requirements, states are required to reduce clients’ funding through “sanctions” (Handler 2003). Though the states have discretion over whether they withhold some or all the benefits a family receives, most states have implemented strict sanctions. Specifically, 37 states implement “full-family” sanctions that withhold all the benefits that a family would receive (Handler 2003). Additionally, welfare agencies themselves are subject to sanctions if they fail to meet specific participation goals.

The federal time limit for receiving benefits from the cash assistance program that TANF created is five years, at which point individuals are no longer eligible to receive cash assistance. Finally, TANF implemented family caps for cash assistance, which involve denying families an increase in assistance for any additional children they may have (Neubeck and Cazenave 2001). The specifics of welfare policies (including criteria to become a recipient, time limits, and guidelines for receiving extended benefits) vary across states (Iversen 2000; Neubeck and Cazenave 2001), but across the board they provide insufficient assistance to mobilize individuals out of poverty (Epstein 2002; Gilens 1999; Handler 2003).

While PRWORA and TANF have reduced the number of individuals on welfare (a 12% decrease in the first year; Gilens 1999), this outcome is mostly due to more stringent requirements for participation in the cash assistance program than previous policies mandated,
rather than clients reaching the self-sufficiency goals of the program (Epstein 2002). Thus, the “successes” of welfare reform have primarily been in terms of reducing the number of cases by eliminating entitlements, increasing work requirements, and using the private sector to provide services (McDonald and Reisch 2008). The welfare program also provides little incentive for individuals to participate, as it lacks the resources to transition clients to living-wage employment and thus substitutes receiving benefits for working low-wage, dead-end jobs (Myles and Quadagno 2000). Some of the barriers that welfare clients encounter on the road to becoming self-sufficient include lack of education and job experience, lack of means of transportation, poor living conditions (unsafe neighborhoods, drug trafficking, problems with landlords, struggles to pay bills), lacking self-efficacy, and feeling undermined by the way the program operates (Perry-Burney and Jennings 2003).

In 2005, Congress reauthorized TANF and made policy changes that were proposed under the Bush administration (Allard 2007; Center on Budget and Policy Priorities 2005). While many aspects of cash assistance remain the same, there were a few crucial changes. First, the reauthorization narrowed what counts as work-related activities for clients. This change created a greater focus on transitioning clients to work and limited state discretion to make decisions about how clients meet program requirements (Allard 2007; Center on Budget and Policy Priorities 2005). Second, state agencies must do more administrative work counting and verifying how clients spend their work-related activity hours (Allard 2007; Center on Budget and Policy Priorities 2005). Third, the reauthorization required anyone receiving any benefits under TANF (not just cash assistance) to complete work-related activities (Allard 2007; Center on Budget and Policy Priorities 2005). Specifically, states are no longer able make exceptions for individuals who may be “hard-to-serve” or “noncompliant” (Allard 2007). Finally, the TANF
reauthorization provided money to programs that support and encourage marriage and two-parent families (Allard 2007; Center on Budget and Policy Priorities 2005). Overall, the 2005 TANF reauthorization added more pressure to states to meet participation rates by getting clients to participate in work-related activities.

Since cash assistance policies vary from state to state, I further elaborate on the policies in Ohio, the location of this study. The cash assistance program in Ohio, Ohio Works First (OWF), provides cash assistance to families in exchange for completing work-related activities. To be eligible for assistance, families must have at least 1 minor child or an expectant mother who is at least 6 months pregnant (Ohio Department of Job and Family Services 2015). Ohio was not among the states that adopted a “family cap” (Soss et al. 2001). As such, clients in Ohio can receive additional cash assistance if they have more children (Soss et al. 2001). The time limit for participating in OWF is 36 months (2 years shorter than the federal time limit), with opportunities to apply for extensions to receive additional assistance (Benefits.gov 2015). Hardship extensions may begin immediately following the 36-month limit, while “good cause” extensions require a 24-month waiting period (Benefits.gov 2015). The criteria for determining both “hardship” and “good cause” vary by county (Benefits.gov 2015).

To receive assistance, heads of household must complete work-related activities, which may include: “on-the-job training, community service, and education directly related to employment” (Ohio Department of Job and Family Services 2015). If clients fail to complete the required work activities, their case may be “sanctioned.” Ohio has tough sanctioning policies that deny the entire family’s assistance if clients do not meet any of the program requirements (Soss et al. 2001). As is evident from this overview of the welfare program, the existing cash assistance policy can be difficult for welfare personnel and clients. In this research, I study the welfare
program managers who must prioritize and enforce these policy requirements. Through my analysis, I seek to further understand how these managers incorporate ideologies into how they talk about formal and informal goals and their enforcement within Ohio Works First.

**Public Discourses and Welfare**

Welfare has historically been politically charged and has received a lot of media attention. As such, it is important to consider the public discourse surrounding welfare; especially since media and discourse are influential in shaping how the public thinks about issues (Gilens 1999; Johnson et al. 2009; Rousseau 2009; Van Dijk 1987). Discourse refers to "a connected set of statements, concepts, terms and expressions which constitutes a way of talking or writing about a particular issue, thus framing the way people understand and act with respect to that issue" (Watson 1995:816). Mass media and public discourse are often controlled by elites—such as politicians and those who control the media corporations—and commonly present negative views of welfare and its recipients (Misra et al. 2003; Rousseau 2009; Van Dijk 1987). Yet, Misra and colleagues (2003) find that there is a “competing discourse” that acknowledges that welfare policies themselves do not always produce a dependent population of clients. The rise of social media has also affected the creation of public discourse. Sandlin and Maudlin (2012) find that internet discourse can be another space in which stereotypes are reproduced. Yet, social media also present spaces in which resistance to these negative stereotypes can emerge.

Negative representations of welfare recipients in public discourses include “welfare queens,” “welfare chiselers,” “generations of welfare dependency,” and “children having children” (Gilens 1999; Neubeck and Cazenave 2001; Rousseau 2009). These images often rely on stereotypes of welfare recipients as Black mothers who are dishonest, immoral, sexually
promiscuous, exploitative, irresponsible, lazy, and responsible for many social problems (e.g.,
violent crime, the decline of families) (Neubeck and Cazenave 2001; Rousseau 2009). There are
also “deserving clients” that people tend to agree should receive support (Gilens 1999). Those
that the public considers deserving are people who genuinely want to work (Gilens 1999). While
the stereotypical image of welfare recipients draws on the image of the welfare queen, the
average welfare recipient is really a white woman in her mid-30s with an average of 1.9 children
working a minimum wage job and using welfare as a supplement (Handler 2003). Many welfare
recipients have difficulty finding and keeping jobs, but use welfare for only a few years (Handler
2003). Those who are on welfare longer often have difficult barriers that keep them unemployed,
including not completing high school and experiencing mental health issues (Handler 2003).
Further, some research finds that the focus on day-to-day survival makes transitioning off
welfare difficult and often costly for single mothers to achieve (Edin and Lein 1996; Zucchino
1997).

The ideologies in public discourse (further discussed later), have often relied on the
assumption that poverty is a problem of individual failure that can be resolved by changing
behavior surrounding work ethic and family structure (Kingfisher 1996; Naples 1998; Neubeck
and Cazenave 2001; Rousseau 2009). The administrations of Presidents Reagan and Clinton
played a particularly significant role in this focus on the personal defects of people experiencing
poverty rather than the structural conditions of poverty (Kingfisher 1996). In the 1970’s, Reagan
relied heavily on race-based politics, coining the term “welfare queen” to describe welfare
recipients and further labeled recipients as lazy, promiscuous, and irresponsible (Neubeck and
Cazenave 2001; Rousseau 2009). For his part, Clinton built a platform around ending “welfare as
we know it,” with the emphasis on neoliberal values highly visible simply from the legislation’s

Discourse on poverty influences how policies are created and viewed and thus has repercussions for maintaining or resisting inequality. Gilens (1999:134) specifically describes how media representations influence “the importance viewers attach to different political issues, their standards for making political evaluations, their beliefs about the causes of national problems, their positions on political issues, and their perceptions of political candidates.” Consequently, when public discourses and media portray oppressed groups in unflattering and unsupported ways, there are real consequences in the realm of policy decisions. Additionally, policies and discourses often frame people experiencing poverty and their needs in a way that may not be accurate or helpful to fixing the problem (Sykes 1988). Specifically, since public discourse often represents poverty as a matter of individual failure, consumers of this discourse may often overlook the many structural forces that contribute to inequality. The content of public discourse may be especially relevant when considering that the policymakers and the individuals implementing welfare programs are also consuming these media. In the following section, I further consider the role of bureaucratic structure, program managers, and welfare implementation practices in the experiences of welfare clients.

Bureaucratic Structure, Program Managers, Welfare Implementation

The current welfare policies and public discourses surrounding welfare are an important backdrop to how the welfare program is structured and implemented. The bureaucratic structure and demands of welfare managers’ jobs provide further context to the setting, constraints, and discretion of current welfare programs. Bureaucratic processes are depersonalized, designed to maintain social control, and contain disguised dominance (Ferguson 1984; Weber 1946). The
rules of bureaucracy can be onerous and contradictory (Bardach and Lesser 1996; Brodkin 2008; Hoshino 1973; Lipsky 1980; Soss et al. 2011). Employers often view employees as expendable, meaning that if workers resist policies they risk replacement (Ferguson 1984; Weber 1946). Service bureaucracies often have inadequate resources; ambiguous, contradictory, or vague goals; and difficulty evaluating progress toward goals (Bardach and Lesser 1996; Brodkin 2008; Hoshino 1973; Lipsky 1980; Soss et al. 2011). In welfare agencies, for example, there are conflicting goals of helping clients and eliminating dependence on the system (Lipsky 1980).

Specific to the welfare bureaucracy, there have been many issues with how official administer TANF at the bureaucratic level (Handler 2003; Iversen 2000; Myles and Quadagno 2000). The 1996 reform involved a transition to focusing on eradicating welfare fraud and a shift to greater surveillance of clients (Handler 2003; Myles and Quadagno 2000). These changes are costly and involve additional work for clients in terms of making appointments and completing paperwork (Handler 2003; Myles and Quadagno 2000). The 1996 reform and the 2005 TANF reauthorization also transformed frontline workers and managers into “eligibility clerks who are undertrained, underpaid, and overworked” (Allard 2007; Handler 2003:233). Furthermore, the heightened focus on surveillance of clients and preventing welfare fraud has prevented TANF from building the infrastructure to get welfare recipients into the workforce (Handler 2003). Not only are the goals and requirements of welfare mismatched, but the program is underfunded and lacks the resources to support transitioning clients to employment (Epstein 2002; Handler 2003; Lipsky 1980). For example, to place clients at worksites, local welfare agencies must reach out to neighboring organizations, which places even greater strain on the welfare agencies (Handler 2003).
The program managers administering these welfare policies operate in a constrained bureaucratic structure (Ferguson 1984; Swift 1995). While it is notable that welfare program managers work in this constrained environment, it does not erase the power dynamics between them and clients, who may be at the mercy of public assistance to survive. The program managers that I propose to study supervise frontline workers, and thus generally have less interaction with clients. Program managers perform a wide range of tasks that generally include supervising caseworkers, performing administrative tasks (such as eligibility and sanctioning), and establishing organizational goals and culture (Handler 2003; Jewell and Glaser 2006; Riccucci et al. 2004; Riccucci 2005; May and Winter 2007; Watkins-Hayes 2009). While program managers have less interaction with clients than frontline workers do, they impact welfare implementation by establishing agency priorities and supervising frontline workers (May and Winter 2007; Riccucci 2005; Riccucci et al. 2004; Pearson 2007). Specifically, program managers influence the program the most by translating welfare policy goals into organizational goals (Jewell and Glaser 2006; May and Winter 2007; Meyers et al. 2001; Riccucci 2005; Riccucci et al. 2004). The goals that managers prioritize influence the culture of the organization and the way frontline workers do their job (May and Winter 2007; Meyers et al. 2001; Riccucci et al. 2004). Managers’ supervision and delegation can also improve frontline workers’ knowledge and thus make differences in terms of helping clients find jobs (May and Winter 2007). Scholars have further found patterned ways in which managers act, with some social service managers being more inclined to focus on meeting deadlines (“Efficiency Engineers”), other managers focusing on helping clients (“Social Work” managers), and still other managers falling between these two extremes (“Conflicted” managers) (Watkins-Hayes 2009; Taylor and Seale 2013).
Managers, like street-level bureaucrats, are often in difficult situations where they must reconcile contradictory policy goals and/or find the rules “restrictive and negative” (Meyers et al. 2001; Pearson 2007:741). The individuals implementing welfare policies struggle with moral dilemmas in implementation (Handler 2003; McDonald and Reisch 2008). They negotiate wanting to help clients and see themselves and the organization as legitimate, and the need to comply with bureaucratic regulations to keep their jobs (Handler 2003; McDonald and Reisch 2008; Watkins-Hayes 2009). Welfare managers have varying levels of support for the program and empathy for clients. Some managers are critical of the complexity of the program and the difficulties and barriers (e.g., discrimination) clients face meeting them (Pearson 2007; Watkins-Hayes 2009). There are also some workers that view sanctions and time limits as useful tools to help clients transition to work (Watkins-Hayes 2009). McDonald and Reisch (2008) also note that the prevalence of conservative ideologies in recent years has changed the nature of social work jobs in the US. This has resulted in some organizations describing “good workers” as those who support these conservative goals and values (McDonald and Reisch 2008).

In this section, I have further detailed the bureaucratic context and the role of program managers in implementing welfare policies. This literature demonstrates how welfare program managers are in a difficult position wherein they navigate trying to be effective managers despite contradictory policies and bureaucratic constraints. Moving forward, I explore literature that is more specific to my empirical chapters. First, I discuss accountability by defining relevant concepts and then applying these concepts to the welfare program. Then, I review literature on ideologies relevant to social welfare, namely, racism, neoliberalism, paternalism and mothering ideologies. For each of these ideologies, I discuss both the historical roots and current relevance,
which provides insight into the connection between these ideologies and social welfare across time.

**ACCOUNTABILITY AND IDEOLOGY**

For welfare managers, part of implementing the program involves upholding formal (e.g., sanctions, time limits) and informal (e.g., norms and expectations) goals, or accountability processes. Program managers specifically play a role in determining organizational goals and influence how they are enforced (Jewell and Glaser 2006; May and Winter 2007; Meyers et al. 2001; Riccucci 2005; Riccucci et al. 2004). In this section, I draw on literature pertaining to accountability processes in institutions to further explore how program managers talk about holding clients accountable to both formal and informal standards. I further explore a variety of ideologies associated with welfare and its surrounding discourse, specifically focusing on racism, neoliberalism, paternalism, and mothering ideologies. Uniting these two literatures, I seek to examine how ideologies are present in the ideals to which program managers talk about holding clients accountable.

**Accountability**

Accountability refers to standards that a social actor is expected to uphold and often involves reporting one’s performance to another social actor or entity (Bardach and Lesser 1996). Social actors in institutions are often accountable to superiors for achieving specific results (Bardach and Lesser 1996). Accountability is often a feature of organizational life and is subject to the structure and relationships in the organization (Bardach and Lesser 1996; Broadbent and Laughlin 2003; Roberts 2001). A common form of accountability within organizations is managerial accountability, in which social actors with greater power (managers) have expectations for the behavior of less powerful social actors in exchange for the lower-
powered actor receiving resources (Broadbent and Laughlin 2003). Managerial accountability is characteristic of the relationship between welfare managers, frontline workers, and clients. In these relationships, clients are accountable to frontline workers who are in turn accountable to program managers (who are accountable to their superiors). Through this chain of accountability, the hierarchical nature of the welfare bureaucracy is readily visible. In my research, I examine how program managers talk about holding clients accountable to various criteria. Through their supervisory role, program managers are likely aware of how clients are held accountable to organizational standards; yet, the frontline workers—who interact more with clients—are likely to be the workers enforcing these standards under the supervision of the program managers. One central component of accountability for clients is that they must meet specific work participation benchmarks to receive benefits.

A central feature of accountability is the standards to which individuals are being held. Ranson (2003:470) points out how these standards are often reflective of other aspects of our society:

The dominant relations of accountability are not value-neutral but reveal the practices, structures, and codes that shape the public sphere. The forms of accountability express: the public purposes that are valued; the knowledge claims that are regarded as authoritative; and whose authority acquires legitimacy. Answers to these questions in the public sphere define a conception of the public good underpinned by a structure of power and authority: accountability constitutes and evaluates the relationship of the public to the polity. Other scholars similarly discuss how assumptions about a population can influence the accountability standards we develop for them (Broadbent and Laughlin 2003; Miller 1983).
Miller (1983) specifically describes how assumptions about the differences between clients in a work experience program influenced the standards that were incorporated into the program. Some common standards that individuals in organizations may be held accountable to include delivering results and making decisions that reflect organizational priorities (Bardach and Lesser 1996). These accountability standards relate to welfare because clients are expected to complete tasks of the program and they are also policed on whether the decisions they make align with the priorities of the welfare policies. As Miller (1983:142) finds in a study of a Work Experience Program (WIN) under AFDC “WIN workers sought to make the ‘hard-core unemployed’ responsible for their behavior and accountable to the government for the welfare they received”.

Accountability standards are further complicated in bureaucracies such as welfare agencies because of goals and regulations that are often complex, unclear, and contradictory (Bardach and Lesser 1996; Brodkin 2008; Hoshino 1973). Scholars find that street-level bureaucrats in general (Brodkin 2008) and welfare managers specifically (Hoshino 1973; Jewell and Glaser 2006; May and Winter 2007; Meyers et al. 2001; Riccucci 2005; Riccucci et al. 2004) often must reckon with a wide range of unclear and contradictory goals and unclear lines of authority. As such, it is often unclear who is being held accountable in what ways and to whom (Brodkin 2008; Hoshino 1973).

Accountability involves processes to uphold expectations. The way the processes operate may be formal or informal and often depend on the specifics of the relationship (Broadbent and Laughlin 2003; Bardach and Lesser 1996; Roberts 2001). In managerial relationships where one social actor possesses more power than the other, there are often formal accountability processes in place. (Broadbent and Laughlin 2003). Furthermore, accountability in managerial relationships is often structured to be more intrusive (Broadbent and Laughlin 2003). Formal
options tend to come in the form of incentive or punishment and involve performance measures and means of evaluation (Bardach and Lesser 1996; Roberts 2001). Sanctions are a common way in which welfare clients are formally held accountable for failing to meet program standards. There are also informal accountability processes, which may include putting pressure on social actors (Miller 1983) and surveillance (Ranson 2003). For example, in a previous study my colleagues and I found that welfare program managers contrasted less successful clients with other groups as a means of conveying their expectations for clients (Turgeon et al. 2014).

Theoretically, accountability and the processes used to enforce it are intended to motivate people to succeed (Bardach and Lesser 1996). Some of the perceived benefits of accountability in organizations include producing results (Bardach and Lesser 1996), teaching individuals various skills (Bardach and Lesser 1996; Miller 1983), and alleviating fear of blame being directed at organizations (Bardach and Lesser 1996). While these benefits may or may not be realized, there are often further implications of accountability that make it even more important to study. Specifically, accountability standards and processes may reinforce individualistic understandings of phenomena (Roberts 2001) and may be used as a way for more powerful actors to assert competence and socially control less powerful actors (Miller 1983). Similarly, in my master’s thesis I found that welfare program managers rely on individualistic understandings of poverty if clients did not meet both formal (work participation) and informal (embodying work ethic) standards (Turgeon 2016).

In this section, I detailed the general structure of accountability processes as well as some of its application within the welfare program. In this research, I examine how welfare program managers talk about holding clients accountable to various formal and informal criteria. As managers, these individuals can influence how the policies are implemented and thus affect
clients’ ability to receive benefits. In the next section, I discuss several ideologies that underpin discourse surrounding welfare that may influence how managers talk about accountability processes.

**Ideology and Welfare**

Individuals in power often produce ideologies that privilege a view of the social world that functions in their favor (Jackman 1994; Marx 2008). Dominant groups may use ideologies to subtly manipulate members of subordinate groups (Jackman 1994). Thus, ideology works to create social control in a way that subdues confrontation (Jackman 1994). Jackman (1994) further argues that ideologies come to be embedded in institutions and are thus ritualistically threaded into the fabric of everyday life, divorced from individual social actors. As a policy intended to reckon with social inequality, welfare has many ideologies that bear upon it. In this section, I draw on literature of many of the ideologies related to welfare: racism, neoliberalism, paternalism, and mothering ideology, to illustrate the historical importance of these ideologies to welfare. Further, my analysis involves examining the extent to which these ideologies are present in the standards to which program managers hold their clients accountable.

**Racism**

The first ideology associated with welfare that I discuss is racism. Welfare policies have historically been racialized, with policymakers generally ignoring the needs of mothers of color (Neubeck and Cazenave 2001). Controlling images of Black women have been instrumental in shaping ideas about welfare recipients since individuals experiencing poverty have predominately been portrayed as African American (Gilens 1995, 1996, 1999). An implication of this has been that whites’ attitudes towards Black people are important factors that influence public opinion of welfare (Gilens 1999). Controlling images are representations of a group that
assert ideological control over them (Collins 1990). Two racialized controlling images that are relevant to welfare recipients are “the matriarch” and “the welfare queen” (Collins 1990). The matriarch image is tied to poor, single-headed Black households, poverty, “bad” mothering via spending too much time outside of the home, emasculation of male partners, and failure for a woman to submit to her husband within the familial gender hierarchy (Collins 1990). The image of the matriarch plays a role in blaming Black women for poverty and the outcomes of Black children in a way that ignores structural racial inequalities (Collins 1990). In the 1960s, the Moynihan report furthered associated poverty with Black families by presenting Black families as “suffering a sickness that is primarily attributed to the failings of Black women as wives and mothers” (Rousseau 2009:51).

In the 1970s and 1980s the “welfare queen” image emerged as a conniving and lavish mother of color who makes money off the welfare system (Collins 1990; Neubeck and Cazenave; Rousseau 2009; Soss et al. 2011; Stafford et al. 2003; Zucchino 1997). The welfare queen image is tied to images of “breeder women” during slavery, a desire to control the reproduction of a group that exploits state funds, opposition to national values, “bad” mothering (like the matriarch), and laziness (unwilling to fill role of mule/failed mammy) (Collins 1990; Rousseau 2009). Attributing these characteristics to Black mothers is one of the ways that politicians have constructed Black women as unfit mothers who are undeserving of welfare benefits (Neubeck and Cazenave 2001; Rousseau 2009). Constructions of the welfare mother blame Black mothers for the continuation of poverty (for failing to pass on desired values), and reinforce heterosexual family structures as a remedy to poverty (Collins 1990). This image of the welfare queen is influential to public opinion about welfare (Foster 2008). Furthermore,
Americans struggle with supporting a program that they think benefits this caricature (Foster 2008).

Policymakers and physicians used propaganda relying heavily on negative stereotypes of poor women and women of color to create a panic around their reproduction (Flavin 2009; Rousseau 2009). Involuntary sterilizations were performed on many non-white and poor women and framed as a way to help them achieve financial security (Flavin 2009; Rousseau 2009). While these very real consequences illustrate the power of controlling images of Black women, recent welfare reforms have often claimed racial neutrality by targeting poverty and not outwardly using race-based language (Neubeck and Cazenave 2001). Yet, scholars have noted how welfare is racialized in a subtle way that mirrors the colorblind ideology (Bonilla-Silva 2002; Omi and Winant 2015) present in many other aspects of our society (Monnat 2010; Neubeck and Cazenave 2001). Colorblind ideology holds that we live in a post-racial society and thus that race no longer has any implications on the outcomes of people’s lives (Bonilla-Silva 2002; Omi and Winant 2015). Colorblind ideology thus legitimates individualism and meritocracy by assuming that people have equal opportunities to succeed and, consequently, that people of color are to blame for their outcomes (Gallagher 2003).

The rise of colorblind ideology indicates that people use race and are racist in more covert ways that are not often identified as racist (Bonilla-Silva 2002; Mallinson and Brewster 2005; Van Dijk 1992). Covert racism includes subtleties in talk and discourse that often use impression management techniques to obscure racism (Bonilla-Silva 2002; Van Dijk 1992). Yet, there are real indicators that racism still influences welfare policies (Neubeck and Cazenave 2001; Soss et al. 2011; Rousseau 2009). For example, a result of state discretion in forming programs under TANF was that states that had larger Black populations systematically
implemented harsher rules (Soss et al. 2011). Since the policies themselves are racialized, Monnat (2010:680) argues that, “individuals who administer welfare policies do not have to be explicitly biased; even unbiased caseworkers who carry out the policies of welfare reform contribute to racial inequality within the system.” Furthermore, racial biases are usually disguised by the fact that evaluation research on welfare never considers race and that there are also class-based issues (Neubeck and Cazenave 2001).

In this section, I have detailed how racism has consistently and significantly influenced welfare policies since their inception. In my research, I examine how program managers incorporate racism into how they talk about holding clients accountable to formal and informal criteria.

Neoliberalism

In addition to racism, another ideology that has been central to the formulation of welfare policies is neoliberalism. Quadagno and Street (2005:56) describe the US as a liberal regime and suggest that the implications for welfare are that “liberal states discourage welfare dependency by relying on social programs with complex eligibility rules such as means testing, residency requirements, and family responsibility clauses.” Emerging in the 1970s, neoliberalism takes liberal ideology a step further by “treating market liberties as a model (and substitute) for political freedom” (Soss et al. 2011:20). Neoliberalism subscribes to individualism and the functionality of free-market forces, holding that the labor market offers individuals from any social standing the opportunity for social and economic mobility (Wiggan 2012; Connor 2010; Soss et al. 2011).

Neoliberal ideals have entered public opinion regarding welfare. Gilens (1999) finds that survey respondents reported believing that people should do everything in their power and
exhaust all their options before applying for government assistance. Thus, welfare clients are encouraged to take low-wage work regardless of whether it will help them move out of poverty (Monnat and Bunyan 2008). Through a neoliberal lens, then, people experiencing poverty are perceived as individuals lacking the personal effort and cultural capital (Bourdieu 1977) to achieve market success (Wiggan 2012). This perception of clients has often been reflected by the “culture of poverty” discourse. Culture of poverty arguments hold that individuals failing to possess certain values, attitudes, and life styles, or cultural capital (Bourdieu 1977), are responsible for the creation and reproduction of poverty (Banfield 1970; Grusky and Ku 2008; Moynihan 1965; Ryan 1976). The history of the culture of poverty literature is laden with individualism, personal responsibility, and victim-blame (Moynihan 1965; Ryan 1976) and fails to acknowledge how structural constraints make it difficult to “escape” poverty.

The rise in the prevalence of neoliberal ideals has marked a shift in welfare as a safety net from market forces to welfare as a training program intended to transform clients into market actors (Soss et al. 2011). Given the perceived shortcomings of clients (i.e., lacking work ethic, motivation, and behavioral competency), state intervention in welfare programs has often focused on teaching clients market rationality and using “low benefit levels, administrative rules, and degrading rituals” to “incentivize” clients into the labor market (Soss et al. 2011:204). Neoliberalism is often presented as empowering by attributing agency to people to succeed (Connor 2010); yet, the ideology obscures the varying constraints that may prevent individuals from reaching market success and the unequal circumstances that individuals strive to achieve goals from (Jackman 1994). Neoliberalism thus offers a means to reproduce the existing status quo (Jackman 1994) by legitimating capitalism and upholding stereotypes that label those experiencing poverty as morally inferior—especially regarding work ethic. Neoliberalism is
further influential to the implementation of welfare. Soss and colleagues (2011) argue that the shift to more neoliberal goals affects how welfare officials see their roles in assistance, how they think of policy goals, and how they think of people experiencing poverty.

Neoliberalism is explicitly present in much of the discourse surrounding welfare, as well as the ideals behind welfare reform. In my research, I examine how program managers draw on neoliberalism when they talk about holding clients accountable to the formal and informal accountability standards of the welfare program. Given the program’s focus on “work ethic” and transitioning clients to work, I find that neoliberalism is prevalent in the program managers’ discourse.

**Paternalism**

Another ideology that is influential to welfare and poverty—and often works in tandem with neoliberalism—is paternalism (Soss et al. 2011; Rousseau 2009). Jackman (1994) argues that paternalism is an ideology that the dominant group often utilizes to exert social control while upholding the appearance of benevolence. Through paternalism, the state can define the needs of those experiencing poverty and then construct interventions that ultimately act as a means of social control (Jackman 1994; Neubeck and Cazenave 2001). Paternalism is visible in public discourse concerning welfare, which not only chastises welfare recipients for lacking work ethic, but also portrays individuals experiencing poverty as incompetent and child-like because they do not possess the “skills” to move out of poverty (Baker 2010; Rousseau 2009).

Paternalism is visible in TANF via underlying assumptions concerning “cultural” differences among races (Neubeck and Cazenave 2001). Specifically, the assumptions of TANF hold that African American culture devalues work ethic and thus creates dependency (Neubeck and Cazenave 2001). Yet, Rousseau (2009) points out the fallacy of constructing the
stereotypical Black welfare mother as in need of white people to train them to be good workers by discussing the historical reality of Black women’s continuous (and often exploited) involvement in labor. Still, by identifying “cultural differences” policymakers justified creating policies that involved greater intervention in the lives of individuals experiencing poverty (Neubeck and Cazenave 2001).

Paternalism is further visible in the welfare programs via heavy surveillance of clients throughout as well as the punitive actions in the program (Baker 2010; Soss et al. 2011). Surveillance and monitoring of clients is designed to help clients change their behavior. Additionally, policymakers and officials rationalize punishment and/or discipline to correct behaviors that are perceived as not conducive to becoming self-sufficient and moving out of poverty (Soss et al. 2011). Policymakers and officials often present discipline as “for clients’ own good” as an incentive to get clients to meet program goals (Soss et al. 2011).

The current welfare policies are paternalistic in how they define the needs of clients, include heightened surveillance, and discipline clients to correct their behaviors. Through these components, welfare policies construct clients as childlike and dependent. In my research, paternalism is another ideology which I examine within accountability processes. Specifically, I examine how program managers incorporate paternalism into how they talk about holding clients accountable to formal and informal standards.

**Mothering Ideology**

The final ideologies that I consider are mothering ideologies. The “mother” status is salient to welfare because to receive cash assistance, recipients must have at least one child under eighteen years of age and a high percentage of welfare recipients are single mothers (85% of TANF recipients are women; 90% of TANF recipients identify as head-of-household (U.S.
Department of Health and Human Services 2012)). Beyond these factors, representations of welfare recipients typically depict clients as mothers of color (Collins 1990; Neubeck and Cazenave 2001; Rousseau 2009). As such, an examination of ideologies surrounding welfare should include mothering ideology. I specifically examine how welfare program managers draw on mothering ideologies when they talk about holding clients accountable to formal and informal standards. In this section, I first describe the hegemonic ideology of mothering in our society: intensive mothering. Then, I describe mothering ideologies that fall outside of this pervasive white, middle-class norm of mothering, such as othermothering, extensive mothering, “best I can” mothering, and economic nurturing.

**Hegemonic Mothering Ideology: Intensive Mothering** Throughout history there have been a variety of ideologies concerning parenting (Arendell 1999; Collins 2006; Crowley 2015). Overall it is clear that parenting in general, and mothering practices specifically are contentious and subject to scrutiny from a variety of sources (Crowley 2015; Hays 1996). The extent of disagreement over which mothering practices constitute the “best” way to raise a child have led to the origin of what we now call “mommy wars” (Crowley 2015). The level of scrutiny applied to mothering practices is evident in the following quote by a mother from the UK, “there is no ‘good enough’ mothering in the eyes of the media or the government. Mothering is a career with high expectations where failure is all too easy” (Pederson 2016: 35).

While there are a variety of ideas about mothering practices that are debated in public discourse as well as among mothers themselves, intensive mothering has emerged as a hegemonic mothering ideology (Arendell 1999, 2000; Hays 1996). Intensive mothering, which is viewed as the criteria for being a “good mother” involves mothers being self-sacrificing, prioritizing their children above all else by investing time, energy, and vast resources to facilitate
children’s growth and development (Arendell 1999; Buzzanell et al. 2007; Hays, 1996). To meet the standards of intensive mothering, women are discouraged from prioritizing their own wants and needs (Arendell 1999; Hays 1996), instead focusing all their time and energy on child-rearing.

Intensive mothering reflects middle-class values and requires a child-centered and resource-intensive (e.g., time, energy, and money) approach to parenting (Hays 1996) and thus embodies Lareau’s (2003) concept of “concerted cultivation” and Johnston and Swanson’s (2003) conceptualizations of “traditional” and (especially) “neotraditional” mothering. Intensive mothering also relies on essentialist constructions of mothering wherein women are perceived to naturally be better parents than men (Hays 1996; Vissig 2014). Women face immense pressure to enact the ideal of intensive mothering, and engage in “defensive ideological arguments[s]” when they fall short of these stringent standards (Vissig 2014:104). Mothers may also engage in intensive mothering practices to try to protect and ensure children’s class position (Milkie and Warner 2014).

While women across classes may or may not embrace the ideology of intensive mothering, white middle-class women have access to greater privilege and resources that make them the most likely to “successfully” enact its practices (Hays 1996, Collins 2006; Johnston and Swanson 2003). Although intensive mothering is often sought after and viewed as the “right way” to mother by many (Hays 1996), recent scholarship has developed a critical lens, noting that intensive mothering is costly to mothers by creating unrealistic expectations of mothering practices, devaluing women’s own wants and needs, and holding mothers responsible for their children’s outcomes. (Arendell 1999, 2000; Johnson 2014; Taylor 2011). For instance, Johnson (2014:268) describes intensive mothering as “an institutionalized form of discrimination against
single, poor, and minority mothers that seeks to ‘other’ and shame women who cannot and/or will not mother this way.” Yet, through the lens of intensive mothering, many view diverse forms of parenting as invisible, deviant, and non-ideal because they vary from normative conceptions of what motherhood should look like (Arendell, 1999; Collins, 2006; Hays, 1996; Vissig 2014). These negative constructions of mothering practices are visible in debates surrounding fit and unfit mothers, as well as in the prevalence of racialized controlling images concerning mothering practices (e.g., “the matriarch” and “the welfare queen”) (Collins 1990, 2006; Rousseau 2009).

**Black Motherhood: Othermothering.** Studies examining the real experiences of Black mothers (including single Black mothers experiencing poverty), have found little evidence of the existence of the “welfare queen” (Collins 1990; Rousseau 2009; Zucchino 1997). Juxtaposed with the controlling images of Black mothers described above (see the “Racism” section), are more positive representations of Black mothers as sources of empowerment and community mothers (Baca Zinn 2000; Collins 1990, 2006). Mothers may find a strong sense of meaning and value in motherhood, seeing it as an experience that allows for “self-definition” and resistance of the oppressions of the outside world (Collins 1990; Stack 1974). Motherhood responsibilities are also often shared in African American communities (Collins 1990). Blood mothers (biological mothers) often create women-centered networks wherein “othermothers” (often kin or fictive kin) and community members (such as neighbors) are involved in child care (Collins 1990). Because responsibilities associated with parenting are shared among community-members, this mothering ideology is more compatible with work outside the home. Collins (1990) also describes how young Black girls are often socialized into the idea of othermothering by participating in child care activities. Women can gain status within the community through their
roles as othermothers (Collins 1990). Yet, Collins (1990) mentions that these community based mothering practices can be difficult to uphold with high crime/drug rates in inner-cities.

**Economic Nurturing.** Economic nurturing is a third mothering ideology that warrant discussion. Economic nurturing initially emerged as a means of justifying women’s entrance into the workplace (Keller 1992, 1994). Specifically, work outside of the home was paired with a traditionally feminine attribute, “nurturing,” to uphold traditional constructions of womanhood. Magazines were a central space in which work outside the home was framed as a form of nurturing to make it more compatible with femininity (Johnston and Swanson 2003; Keller 1992, 1994). Since that time, women have continued to face tension in balancing work and family demands. As such, economic nurturing continues to offer a way to frame family and work demands as compatible rather than as in competition with one another. Specifically, economic nurturing involves framing work outside of the home to provide for children (Keller 1992, 1994; Johnston and Swanson 2003). As such, work outside of the home becomes a more child-centered practice that is not viewed as incompatible with work outside of the home. Through this ideology, then, work is presented as a way for women to accumulate resources to provide for their children.

**“Parent-Centered” Mothering** There are also approaches to mothering that center parents’ needs. “Natural growth,” “extensive mothering,” “best I can” mothering, and “feminist mothering” are mothering ideologies that emphasize mothers’ needs in the context of meeting the demands of parenting. Lareau (2003) conceptualized natural growth in her observations of working-class parents. Natural growth parenting involves parents meeting children’s basic needs, children being less involved in organized activities, and children having more autonomy over their free time (Lareau 2003). These parents worked outside of the home, established clear
boundaries between themselves and children, and focused on teaching children respect and deference to authority (Lareau 2003). The space between parents and children allows these mothers to focus on meeting their own needs rather than “micro-managing” their children.

Additionally, some mothers reject both “ideal mother” and “ideal worker” standards and adopt what Christopher (2012) terms “extensive mothering.” Extensive mothering practices involve women delegating child care, but also limiting the intrusion of paid work in family life. The race- and class-diverse sample that Christopher (2012) interviewed reported feeling in-charge of their children’s care, involved in their lives, and a lack of guilt over spending—and preferring to spend—time working outside the home. With intensive mothering, justifications for employment tend to revolve more around need, and children’s benefit. For extensive mothering, justifications also included personal benefits for the women working. Such benefits included being good at what they do, self-confidence, and independence. Single mothers also referenced economic need as a reason for working outside of the home, but most of them also said they would still want to work, even if the economic need isn’t there.

“Best I can” mothering is a form of mothering that seeks to move away from “the mommy wars.” According to this mothering ideology, women should strive to make the best choices that they can for their children, given their social and economic position (Johnson 2014). While public discourse and debate often scrutinizes the choices that women make while raising their children, the reality is that women parent under a variety of conditions (Kurz 2007). Specifically, poorer women and women of color often parent under more oppressive conditions with fewer sources of social support (Kurz 2007). As such, “best I can” mothering seeks to move away from mothers scrutinizing one another’s child-rearing practices and move towards broader acceptance of one another’s parenting practices (Johnson 2014). Overall, this is quite a broad
mothering ideology that encompasses many possible mothering practices for raising children. It relies on the assumption that parents strive to do what they can for their children (Johnson 2014). However, it also seeks to provide more autonomy and less judgment around parenting practices (Johnson 2014).

Finally, “feminist mothering” is a mothering ideology that shares aspects of mothering from many of the ideologies that I have already discussed. Like extensive mothering, feminist mothering is compatible with work outside of the home (Christopher 2012; Johnston and Swanson 2003; Keller 1992, 1994). Like othermothering, there is a community component to parenting in which community resources are central to raising children (Collins 2006; Johnston and Swanson 2003; Keller 1992, 1994). However, uniquely, this model of mothering advocates for sharing responsibilities among parents and thus involves less burdens on mothers themselves (Johnston and Swanson 2003). Additionally, feminist mothering is unique in calling for a cultural shift in which both children and mothering responsibilities are valued (Johnston and Swanson 2003). While many of these mothering ideologies value children, only a couple (e.g., “best I can” and extensive mothering) highlight the needs of mothers as well.

I bring together literature on accountability processes and a variety of ideologies associated with welfare to inform and contextualize my research question and analysis. Given the highly ideological history and public discourse of welfare, I seek to examine the extent to which these ideologies are visible in how welfare-to-work program managers talk about holding clients accountable to both formal and informal expectations.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

DATA

To examine how welfare managers incorporate ideology into how they talk about accountability processes, I use qualitative data comprised of 69 semi-structured interviews with Ohio Works First (OWF) program managers from 69 of the 88 counties in Ohio in 2010-2011. The program managers are predominantly white (95%) women (75%) with a post-secondary degree (11% high school, 12.5% some college, 21% associate’s degree, 40% bachelor’s degree, and 15% graduate degree). Program managers have a range of responsibilities associated with implementing the Ohio Works First program. Many program managers oversee supervising caseworkers, managing the work experience program, verifying completion of program requirements, and making arrangements for supplemental services. The program managers operate in a bureaucratic structure, in which they are often subject to depersonalized, isolating, and highly constrained regulations (Ferguson, 1984; Swift, 1995).

I was not involved in the data collection or early open coding processes. The P.I. collecting the data, Tiffany Taylor, worked with undergraduate and graduate research assistants in the Sociology Department at Kent State to conduct the interviews (1 per county) over the telephone and asked program managers a series of 48 questions about the program’s goals and effectiveness, clients’ performances and successes within the program, causes of poverty in the county, and demographic information about the manager. The questions were primarily open-
ended (e.g. “what are some of the challenges in helping people become self-sufficient?”, what do you think is the most common reason that people do seek the OWF services?), though some questions asked the program managers to choose among pre-specified options (e.g., “overall, how effective is the Ohio Works First program in your county in assisting participants in attaining self-sufficiency? Very effective, effective, somewhat effective, not effective, don’t know?”). There were also several questions that involved probes to follow-up the main question (e.g. do you have any specific examples of clients who have been able to achieve self-efficiency? what kinds of things do they seem to do differently?). The interviews range from less than an hour to over two hours, with an average length of around an hour.

All the interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed, and identifiers—for both the county and the program manager—were removed and pseudonyms were assigned to ensure confidentiality. I first entered the project as a member of the research group—comprised of Tiffany Taylor and several graduate students—during the open coding process. Emergent themes that began to draw group interest included the ideological context of welfare, how program managers navigated presenting both themselves and clients, and how managers talk about their clients’ mothering. These themes resulted in earlier manuscripts that focused on how program managers use discursive maneuvers to talk about themselves and clients (Turgeon et al. 2014; Turgeon 2016); managers’ expectations for clients’ mothering (Gross et al. 2014; Taylor et al. 2017; Turgeon 2016); and how managers’ talk includes ideological rhetoric (Taylor et al. forthcoming(a); Taylor et al. forthcoming(b)). This dissertation research builds on those previous projects.
ANALYSIS

In this research, I examine how program managers incorporate ideology into how they talk about both formal and informal accountability processes. Specifically, I examine how managers talk about holding clients accountable to formal (associated with rules, e.g., sanctions, time limits, work requirements) and informal (expectations not specifically connected to program rules, e.g., behavioral expectations) ideals and to what extent these ideals involve ideologies embedded in discourses surrounding welfare, race, poverty, and mothering. To do this, I developed coding schemes for ideology and accountability, used these schemes to focus code the interviews, and wrote analytic memos to capture emerging themes. Throughout my analysis, I draw on literature from Critical Discourse Analysis to emphasize the importance of language in how ideologies are maintained and reproduced in everyday life through talk (Bonilla-Silva and Forman 2000; Bonilla-Silva 2002; Fairclough 1985; Fairclough and Wodak 1997; Mallinson and Brewster 2005; Sykes 1988; Toolan 2002; Van Dijk 1993).

Coding: Ideology

In earlier work with these data (Gross et al. 2014; Turgeon 2016; Turgeon et al. 2014), my colleagues and I have found neoliberalism, paternalism, and intensive mothering to be prominent ideologies that are visible in the expectations that program managers express for clients. History and scholarly research alike also indicate that racism is another ideology that is crucial to welfare (Gilens 1999; Neubeck and Cazenave 2001; Rousseau 2009). Using existing literature as the framework for these ideologies, I developed coding schemes for each of these ideologies and then used Atlas.ti to apply these codes to the data. For each of these ideologies, I used critical discourse analysis to break ideologies down into their component parts to have concrete ways that I could apply codes. Below I detail these codes for each ideology.
For racism, based on the literature, I developed codes for the controlling images surrounding welfare—the “welfare queen” and the “matriarch” (Collins 1990; Rousseau 2009). In coding for the welfare queen, I looked for multiple descriptors of attributes connected to this controlling image, including laziness, hypersexuality, comments on family structure (single mother), desire to take advantage of state resources, and how these attributes influenced mothering practices. Since the poor in general are often stereotyped as lazy, I was more selective with my coding. To address this, I applied the “welfare queen” code only in instances where descriptions met at least two of these criteria. With “the matriarch,” the coding criteria focused on blaming mothers for poverty, talk of emasculation, and family structure. Yet, in terms of controlling images, managers were much less likely to bring up emasculation or overtly racist processes. Thus, the matriarch is a controlling image that was not grounded in these data of program managers’ talk about accountability processes. I employed critical discourse analysis to connect these descriptors to “the welfare queen” and “the matriarch.” However, there was evidence of the welfare queen through descriptions of clients—though managers did not overtly reference “the welfare queen.”

In coding for colorblind racism, I similarly strove to look for subtle ways in which managers used racialized language. However, this was difficult since there is significant overlap in racialized language and ways in which people in poverty are described. In a previous paper, my colleagues and I focus more on the specifics of the semantic moves that managers use to talk about their clients in a class-based framework (Turgeon et al. 2014). Due to the difficulty in disentangling race- and class-based talk, I kept my focus on these controlling images and how they operated as a form of colorblind racism.
Neoliberalism

To code for neoliberalism, I broke it down into multiple component parts based on definitions and explanations of this ideology across a variety of literature (Baker 2010; Soss et al. 2011; Wiggan 2012). The indicators that I included were (1) emphasis on employers making a profit, (2) individualism/lack of structure, (3) meritocracy, (4) encouragement to take any form of work, (5) emphasizing feeling value through work and/or the importance of work, (6) emphasizing work ethic and/or motivation, and (7) describing clients as customers. I coded “talking about employers making a profit” managers talk about how employers make a profit from clients completing work activities at their sites without having to pay them. This constitutes neoliberalism because the state (i.e., the welfare program) is pushing clients to use their labor in a way that produces profits for businesses.

I coded for “individualism/lack of structure” when managers talked about the importance of individual effort and/or failed to account for greater structural obstacles when talking about poverty and/or meeting the requirements of the welfare program. I applied the code for “meritocracy” when managers talked about hard work paying off, or the concept of clients having opportunities for advancement and social mobility. To code for “encouragement to take any job,” I focused on instances when managers encouraged clients to take any work they could find and/or to work as many jobs as possible. This constitutes neoliberalism because it is the push to be part of the labor market regardless of whether it is worthwhile for clients (i.e., low-wage, long-distance work).

I coded for “the importance of work” when managers talked about work as something that is important and/or when managers would talk about how clients could and should feel personal value from their participation in the labor market/work. I also coded neoliberalism when
managers talked about “work ethic and motivation.” I applied this code when program managers associated individual effort (i.e., work ethic and motivation) with labor market success or failure. Finally, I coded for neoliberalism when program managers talked about “clients as customers of the program.” When program managers refer to clients as customers, they reflect the view that welfare programs are part of the labor market and thus can be used as justification for treating clients not as people in need that require help, but as people voluntarily taking part in the program.

There are certainly points of overlap between these codes (i.e., work ethic being related to individualism). However, each of these indicator codes does capture some specific elements of neoliberalism that others do not. As such, I used all of these codes and allowed for overlap among them. I counted evidence of any of these components as an indication of neoliberalism, since this is a state program and so if it is emphasizing these elements of labor market participation, it fits the bill of neoliberalism. I used critical discourse analysis to develop these codes by focusing on the components comprising neoliberalism. However, it was less necessary to use critical discourse analysis throughout the coding process because managers were much more forthright with their emphasis of this ideology.

**Paternalism**

For paternalism I had two broader indicators, developed from discussions of paternalism in the literature (Ben-Ishai 2012; Jackman 1994; Soss et al. 2011) that accommodated all instances of paternalism. The indicators that I used for paternalism were (1) portraying clients as incompetent and childlike and (2) experts know best/clients own good. I coded for “portrayals of clients as incompetent or childlike” when managers talked about clients as lacking basic skills (e.g., how to get to work on time, how to get up in the morning, how to dress, etc.) or talked
about clients needing guidance. I applied the second indicator, “experts know best/clients own good,” when managers talked about how they defined clients’ needs, discussed and justified surveillance, and dismissed clients when they communicated their wants or needs.

In the process of coding for paternalism, I found that there was often a blurry line between managers talking about wanting to help people in-need and constructing clients as incompetent and childlike. To disentangle this, I used critical discourse analysis to consider the power dynamics between managers and clients. Generally, if managers focused on talking about clients in need of help because they (clients) lack resources or because of structural conditions, I did not consider it paternalistic. However, in cases in which program managers appeared to exercise their power as a means of defining clients’ needs and/or monitoring clients in the name of benevolence, I did consider this paternalistic. Like with neoliberalism, I found that there was often overlap between the indicators for paternalism. That is, managers would often present clients as childlike and then call upon their expertise or position to suggest that the welfare program offers the best course of action to help clients.

**Mothering Ideology**

While I present a variety of mothering ideologies in the literature review, I narrow my focus in this analysis to four mothering ideologies: intensive mothering, economic nurturing, othermothering, and “best I can” mothering. My initial coding sheet also included codes for natural growth and extensive mothering. However, there was a lack of evidence for these mothering ideologies in the data. In short, I narrow my focus to these four mothering ideologies because (1) they are the most relevant to mothering and mothers on welfare, and (2) managers did not acknowledge most parent-centered models of mothering. Additionally, as I was coding, I found that managers often described clients’ mothering practices as rooted in stereotypes about
mothers. As such, the “racism” code for the welfare queen also presented an imagined ideology of mothering that managers often referenced. Thus, I incorporated this code into my analysis of mothering ideologies in addition to the four ideologies referenced above.

To code for intensive mothering, I used indicators (based on Hays’ (1996) work) of (1) resources allocated to children, (2) energy invested in children, (3) self-sacrifice, and (4) talk about prioritizing or providing more for children. Overall, these indicators reference a strong investment in raising children that reflects the values of intensive mothering. Managers’ talk about intensive mothering were closest to the “ideal” when they drew on multiple indicators. However, in my findings I also discuss instances in which partial elements of mothering ideologies are evident. Overall, these codes emphasize the child-centered and resource-intensive nature of intensive mothering.

For othermothering, I focused program managers talking about mothering practices as shared among social networks. The central component of othermothering is the involvement of a variety of social actors (e.g., kin and fictive kin) involved in the rights and responsibilities of raising children (Collins 1990, 2006; Stack 1974). As such, this code focused on managers’ discussions of child care and who is involved in caring for children. I used this code broadly, focusing on managers’ permissiveness concerning who cared for children in general and managers’ opinions of relying on informal child care networks.

For economic nurturing, I used work by Keller (1992, 1994) and Johnston and Swanson (2003) to develop codes focused on (1) encouraging work outside of the home, (2) talking about the importance of providing resources for children, and (3) making the connection between work outside the home and nurturing children. While the nurturing component is poignant in conceptualizing this ideology, in my analysis I do also discuss partial endorsements for this
mothering ideology in which managers encourage work outside of the home without explicitly discussing the connection to how this provides for children. I expand on this point across my findings, noting how managers’ endorsement of work outside the home is still consistent with this ideology, though it does not fully capture the nurturing intent.

For Best I Can mothering, I developed codes based on Johnson (2014) that used indicators of (1) when managers expressed openness about the choices that clients made around parenting, and (2) any recognition that clients were doing what they can given the situations that they are in. Additionally, I noted when managers were essentially discouraging this ideology by expressing disapproval of particular mothering practices. While these moments of discouragement are not embodied in a particular code, they are present throughout my coding notes and memos.

Coding: Accountability

At the same time that I coded for ideology, I also coded for accountability processes. Specifically, I coded managers’ talk for both formal and informal accountability processes, drawing on literature on these processes to do so (Bardach and Lesser 1996; Broadbent and Laughlin 2003; Roberts 2001). I applied the “formal accountability” code when managers mentioned specific rules, policies, and procedures. In other words, I coded “formal accountability” for things that managers talked about as required or part of the program requirements. I also coded for formal accountability when managers talked about how these requirements were enforced and the procedures for making decisions around enforcement.

The coding process for informal accountability was a little more nuanced, as informal accountability involves analyzing managers’ talk for standards not directly related to the formal components of the program. Thus, the standards for informal accountability often focused on
things such as behavioral expectations that managers described for clients. I also applied the “informal accountability” code when managers used informal means of enforcement. In terms of enforcement of informal accountability, I coded for when managers talked about encouraging or discouraging clients—in other words, applying social pressure to get clients to do certain things.

While I did have distinct codes for formal and informal accountability, as I was coding I discovered that there was some ambiguity and overlap among these accountability structures. The ambiguity between formal and informal accountability may be a product of the fact that the goals and aims of the policy itself are often vague and contradictory (Bardach and Lesser 1996; Brodkin 2008; Hoshino 1973; Lipsky 1980; Soss et al. 2011). As such, it was not always clear where the specific policy requirements ended and the personal expectations from managers began. To address this ambiguity, I allowed for overlap in the “informal accountability” and “formal accountability” codes. I further took detailed notes throughout my coding to disentangle the accountability structures and explore the relationship between them. For instance, managers often talk about how the formal work requirement facilitates the development of desirable skills that relate to an informal ideal of worker standards (e.g., developing work ethic, learning how to balance work and family demands, etc.). I also further researched the policies and resources available to welfare-to-work programs in Ohio to help me distinguish between the formal and informal accountability structures.

Analytic Memos

As I coded, I took detailed notes for each quotation that I coded to elucidate the relationship between the quotation and the code that I applied to it. I also used these notes to begin to analyze the relationships among ideologies, between ideologies and accountability, and between formal and informal accountability processes. After every five interviews that I coded, I
also expanded on the notes I was taking by writing theoretical memos that explored additional points of connection among these factors and processes (Lofland et al. 2006). As I progressed, I also utilized constant comparison (Charmaz 1990; Glaser 1965) to compare trends in the first five interviews to trends in the next five interviews and so-on. As such, my memoing process allowed me to expand on my analysis and build on the themes and patterns that persisted across the interviews. These analytic memos further helped me note negative cases in which program managers used ideology or talked about accountability in a way that diverged from emerging patterns.

As my analysis unfolded, I noted the pervasiveness of neoliberalism and paternalism across managers’ talk. These two ideologies were highly visible in managers’ talk about both informal and formal accountability processes. Since these ideologies, and especially neoliberalism, dominated the interviews, the first two findings chapters explore how managers draw on neoliberalism and paternalism while talking about various elements of accountability structures. Furthermore, in coding for mothering ideology, I noted an entanglement of the ways that program managers talk about mothering and racism as embedded in the controlling images of mothers on welfare. As such, I decided to incorporate my discussion of racism into the third findings chapter, which focuses on the mothering ideologies that program managers draw on throughout their talk about accountability structures in the program. I made these decisions as a result of extensive memoing about how my findings were thematically related to one another.
CHAPTER 4

NEOLIBERALISM AND PATERNALISM: INTAKE, SANCTIONS, AND TIME LIMITS

In my findings I discuss how welfare-to-work program managers incorporate ideology into how they talk about formal and informal accountability in the cash assistance program. In chapters four and five, I explain how these managers draw on neoliberalism and paternalism in their talk about various aspects of the welfare program. Specifically, in chapter four I consider neoliberalism and paternalism in the intake and enforcement (e.g., sanctions and time limits) processes; and in chapter five I consider these ideologies in the work assignment and measures of its effectiveness (e.g., participation rates). Finally, in chapter six, I move on to illustrate how program managers draw on mothering ideologies in their talk about accountability processes.

In this chapter, I examine how program managers draw on neoliberal and paternal ideology in their talk about the formal rules of the welfare program as well as how these rules are enforced. Specifically, I focus on how program managers talk about (1) the intake process and (2) sanctions and time limits. The intake process (consisting of application, assessment, and creating a self-sufficiency contract) establishes the formal rules that clients are expected to follow to receive cash assistance. As such, this process plays a large role in establishing the formal accountability structure. I also examine how program managers talk about sanctions and time limits, both of which play a role in enforcing components of the formal accountability structure. Specifically, clients receive sanctions if they fail to complete required activities (e.g., required work hours, submitting documentation, attending meetings). Clients reach time limits if
they use their allotment of time on the welfare program. Thus, time limits hold clients accountable to the three to five year time limit for receiving cash assistance. Both sanctions and time limits enforce aspects of the accountability structure established during the intake process. In this chapter, I examine how managers draw on the ideologies of neoliberalism and paternalism when they talk about these features of the accountability process. Again, neoliberalism involves efforts to apply labor market logic to all areas of social life (Soss et al. 2011:20). Neoliberalism further highlights the importance of individualism and market behaviors and suggests that these characteristics serve as the criteria by which we measure both individuals and institutions (Soss et al. 2011). Paternalism involves assuming that individuals lack the competence or discipline to achieve specific goals on their own and thus require coercion or assistance (Soss et al. 2011).

I find that program managers draw on neoliberalism during both intake and enforcement (i.e., sanctions and time limits) processes to question clients’ willingness to work. Specifically, program managers suggest that the primary reason that clients do not apply for cash assistance, receive sanctions, and reach time limits is that clients lack work ethic and are unwilling to work. This talk reflects neoliberal values because program managers focus on individual effort and clients’ ability or willingness to embody labor market values. While program managers draw on neoliberalism in a similar way to talk about both intake and enforcement processes; there is variation in how program managers draw on paternalism in their talk. Specifically, managers draw on paternalism when they focus on assessing and modifying clients’ behaviors. Through the assessment (part of the intake process), program managers focus on clients’ behaviors and define their needs. When talking about sanctions and time limits, however, program managers draw on paternalism to explain how clients receive sanctions and reach time limits when they lack competencies and do not take the program seriously. At both points, I find that program
managers use these ideologies to evaluate clients at critical moments in the accountability structure.

**THE INTAKE PROCESS**

Program managers draw on neoliberal and paternal ideology to talk about the formal intake process for Ohio Works First (OWF). This intake process includes (1) clients applying for OWF, (2) intake workers assessing clients, and (3) clients and intake workers creating a self-sufficiency contract with the terms of clients’ benefit receipt. During discussions of these formal processes, program managers also talk about their informal expectations for clients. While interviewers asked managers a question about clients applying for OWF, they did not explicitly ask about the assessment process or the creation of self-sufficiency contracts. However, when managers did talk about the assessment process and the self-sufficiency contracts they illustrated paternalistic and neoliberal aspects of these processes.

Program managers talk about the intake process primarily in response to a question asking them why more people who are eligible for OWF do not apply for it. Managers nearly universally respond to this question by saying that the reason that more people do not apply for OWF is that they do not want to participate in the work requirement. For example, James said:

They don’t want to participate in the required hours that the state requires to meet federal participation rate[s]. Basically no one wants to work…There’s lots of people that can receive OWF but they don’t want to work off their benefits.

(James, white man)

In this quote, the manager vocalizes the common sentiment that the reason that individuals experiencing poverty do not apply for cash assistance is a formal requirement of the program: the work assignment. James specifically describes how some people will not apply for OWF
because they “don’t want to participate in the required hours,” which illustrates how the work assignment often deters people experiencing poverty from seeking cash assistance. Both the manager’s and the policy’s emphasis on labor market participation reflects neoliberal ideology (Soss et al. 2011). Specifically, prioritizing work participation is consistent with the documented neoliberal trend in the transition from welfare as a safety net to welfare as a training program for the labor market (Soss et al. 2011). Additionally, by talking about how clients “don’t want to work off their benefits” (emphasis added), James—like many other managers—suggests that not applying for the program is about clients’ lack of work ethic. It is also important to consider how assuming clients “don’t want to participate in the required hours” connects to long-standing stereotypes of welfare clients as lazy. In discussing the intake process, many managers do not include extenuating circumstances (e.g., lack of transportation and decline in industry) as reasons that clients may not be able to participate in the program. By suggesting that clients do not want to work and failing to consider clients’ extenuating circumstances, program managers contribute to individualized narratives surrounding poverty.

A few program managers explicitly talk about how the formal work assignment deters clients from applying for OWF. For example, when asked about why more clients do not apply for OWF, Melanie responded:

When they come in here to uhm, apply for that assistance and they find out the work requirements, they- for the small portion of them, decided it would just be easier to, ah, just find a job […] So really it’s the work requirement that holds them back from getting assistance. (Melanie, white woman)

In this quote, Melanie attributes clients deciding not to apply for OWF to “it be[ing] easier to, ah, just find a job.” As such, the manager draws on neoliberal ideology to suggest that it is just a
matter of effort for clients to find paid employment. This reflects neoliberalism because it draws on the tenet of “personal responsibility” to suggest that labor market success is solely a product of individual effort. However, as Handler (2003:231) describes, one of the faulty assumptions behind welfare reform was that “there are plenty of jobs for those who want to work.” Thus, when program managers assume that finding a job is a matter of effort—and one that is “easier” than participating in OWF—they ignore the lack of availability of employment, among other potential barriers that clients might face. Furthermore, Melanie illustrates how the formal requirements of the program (i.e., the work requirement) may deter clients from applying for assistance at all.

While managers’ talk about the intake process predominately echoes public discourse by emphasizing neoliberal ideals (i.e., clients’ personal responsibility), most managers also acknowledge that clients are in real need of assistance. For example, one manager said, “they’re desperate for a form of income, they’re unemployed, um can’t find a job, or aren’t able to do a job, or can’t find ch-you know, child care” (Hallie, white woman). Further, some managers go beyond acknowledging clients’ needs and resist paternalistic discourses by talking about clients as competent people who strategically apply for OWF. One manager specifically said:

They’re time limited so they want to save those time limited checks for maybe a time when maybe they would not be able to work. In other words, if I can work today, I’ll try to find a job in case there’s ever a time when I can’t work or I’m disabled then I could utilize this time limited lump of cash. (Amy, white woman)

Amy—and a handful of other managers with similar responses—presents clients as rational social actors who often make strategic decisions about when they will use assistance. In presenting clients as competent, these managers demonstrate that some of the informal
accountability expectations (i.e., expectations for how clients will behave) counter both neoliberal and paternal representations of clients. These managers counter neoliberal discourses surrounding poverty and welfare by acknowledging that if people do not apply for welfare, it may be due to clients being strategic, rather than a reflection of poor work ethic. They also counter paternalistic discourses by not assuming that clients are incompetent and child-like. As such, these few managers play a role in undermining how both other managers and the public at-large often apply problematic ideologies to welfare clients.

Another aspect of the intake process that reflects paternalism is the assessment process. During this formal process, welfare officials (usually caseworkers) conduct an assessment in which they ask clients a variety of questions about their lives. Most managers only describe the functionality of assessment as a process that helps caseworkers decide to which work activities they should assign clients. However, the few managers that delve into greater detail about the assessment process illuminate the paternalistic underpinnings of this process. Beyond inquiring about clients’ work skills and abilities, the assessment asks clients about their behaviors. For example, one manager talking about the assessment process said:

So we kind of do a family assessment to find out a little bit of background about that person, so we can direct them. It would be really--it wouldn’t be beneficial first of all to a client that actually has a problem being around people unless we know through this assessment and through so forth and so on that it’s only a social skill and they need to gain that social skill for example. Um, so just family screening. Again, we’ve had that for a long time and it also talks about domestic uh, relations, it talks about alcohol and drugs[...]. (Krystle, white woman)
In this quote, Krystle describes the assessment process and how welfare officials ask clients about their “background,” “social skill[s],” “domestic […] relations,” and “alcohol and drugs.”

Thus, the assessment involves asking clients about their behaviors, which previous research finds to be an invasive procedure for clients to go through (Ferguson 1984; Watkins-Hayes 2009). Subjecting individuals to invasive procedures such as these in the name of benevolence is a way in which social actors can use paternalism to enact social control over less powerful others (Jackman 1994). Furthermore, the fact that the assessment focuses on behavioral aspects of clients implies that helping clients may be a matter of behavior modification rather than helping them address structural barriers (e.g., facilitating clients’ access to educational opportunities).

Thus, this formal component of the accountability process (i.e., the assessment process) is paternalistic because it seeks to address perceived behavior deficiencies of clients. While managers themselves are not responsible for the creation of this process, they do invoke paternalism to frame the intrusiveness of this process as helpful and necessary to evaluate clients’ needs.

In response to the “needs” that emerge from the assessment process, caseworkers work with clients to develop self-sufficiency contracts. Self-sufficiency contracts are an explicitly formal means of accountability for the program that detail the terms of clients’ benefit receipt. Clients develop these contracts with caseworkers who then hold clients accountable to these terms as they move forward into work participation. In the quote below, Gene describes the process of formulating a self-sufficiency contract with clients:

There are a number of requirements that an individual must do in order to receive Ohio Works First. Um, they have to sign a self-sufficiency contract and plan.

That’s true and um, in each county in the State of Ohio um, they sit down with
our worker and formulate and plan and do how they’re trying to become self-sufficient. (Gene, white man)

Through this quote, Gene talks about self-sufficiency contracts as a means of holding clients formally accountable to participation in the program. Specifically, the contracts dictate the terms to which clients must comply to receive cash assistance benefits in OWF. Neoliberalism is visible in how the plan to achieve self-sufficiency is referred to as a “contract.” That is, by calling it a self-sufficiency “contract” there is an implication that it is a matter of personal responsibility and individual effort for clients to fulfill its terms, which ignores the many extenuating forces at play that constrain clients' lives. Thus, the self-sufficiency contract is a clear manifestation of how accountability processes can reinforce individualistic understandings of phenomena (Roberts 2001).

Managers’ talk about self-sufficiency contracts also reflects the neoliberal commitment to emphasizing labor market values through the focus on getting clients to work. Rose (white woman) illustrates this point by describing self-sufficiency contracts as “a plan, something that would gear [clients] toward working.” The emphasis on getting clients to work is significant because it illustrates how OWF focuses on changing clients to make them better workers rather than alleviating hardship and meeting clients’ needs. In sum, self-sufficiency contracts (a component of formal accountability) make alleviating poverty about clients fulfilling the terms of a contract and thus individualize the problem of poverty. Furthermore, managers incorporate neoliberal ideology into their talk by validating the importance of clients learning work skills and becoming better workers (i.e., reinforcing labor market values) to become self-sufficient.
SANCTIONS AND TIME LIMITS

Sanctions and time limits are formal accountability features that enforce both the formal goals of the program and the informal goal of transforming clients into better workers. Sanctions serve as penalties when clients fail to meet the required number of work activity participation hours; while time limits uphold the three to five year limit on receiving cash assistance. When OWF clients receive sanctions, they stop receiving benefits. Ohio has a three-tiered sanction system wherein subsequent sanctions last for incremental periods of time. Time limits mark the point at which clients are no longer eligible to receive cash assistance because they have used all their allotted time on the program. Overall, sanctions and time limits enforce the accountability structure established in the self-sufficiency contracts during the intake process. I find that program managers draw on neoliberalism and paternalism in similar ways to talk about both sanctions and time limits.

In talking about the basic procedures for sanctions and time limits, managers often give them the appearance of neutrality. However, there are nuanced ways in which ideology emerges from the procedural descriptions of sanctions and time limits that many managers offer. Below, I provide examples of how managers talk about sanctions and time limits. When asked about the procedures for sanctioning, this manager replied:

Uhm, I mean I think it’s pretty cut and dry…Uh, but I think the self-sufficiency plan overall is pretty specific in what people are required uhm to do. And, it spells out what the sanctions are should they not fulfill a requirement of their plan. So, uhm once a person fails to participate satisfactorily according to their plan then it’s, I mean, it’s a simple sanctioning process in terms of uhm the worker imposing it and the system sending the notice to them…then, of course, they’ll
have the chance to comply with their plan and get their benefits reinstated. (Kathy, white woman)

In this quote, Kathy gives an overview of sanctioning. The formal accountability processes she describes involves clients no longer receiving benefits if they “fail to participate satisfactorily according to their plan.” While there is some neoliberal ideology visible in how sanctions reinforce the focus on work by removing clients’ benefits if they do not meet the work requirements of the program, the manager presents sanctions in a primarily procedural way that makes them sound neutral.

Program managers similarly talk about the procedures for time limits in a way that emphasizes process and suggests neutrality. When an interviewer asked Shawna, a white program manager, about the procedure for time limits, she responded:

Well, each month that they receive a check - a cash benefit - they get a letter that tells how many months they have left, so it’s like the clock ticks. And, um, when they get to the 36 months, we send a computer-generated termination notice that, that tells them that their benefits will end at the end of whatever given month. And then their benefits, their cash benefits, stop. They are given the opportunity that if they have a hardship reason that would fit the criteria that each county is allowed to set, that they can come in and apply for hardship, and then the benefits can be extended, but many of them seem to not do that. (Shawna, white woman)

In this quote, Shawna offers a description of how time limits operate. She describes the process as a series of steps that appear even less ideological than most managers describe sanctions due to the less visible connection to work. While program managers primarily talk about the general procedures of sanctions and time limits in an impartial way, they often draw on ideologies perceptibly more
to discuss how and why they implement sanctions and time limits. Furthermore, the underlying intent of these formal accountability processes—to enforce a policy dedicated to getting clients to work—reflects neoliberal and paternal ideology (Soss et al. 2011). For sanctions, managers primarily invoke ideology as they compare sanctions to expectations and disciplinary actions in paid employment. For time limits, though, managers use ideological talk to suggest that clients run out of time on the program because they lack the motivation to work and/or the ability to plan ahead. However, there are also several program managers that acknowledge how forces outside of clients’ control may be responsible for clients interacting with these formal accountability processes.

When program managers discuss why they sanction clients, their talk is significantly more ideological than when they describe the general procedures for sanctioning. Managers primarily draw on ideology to compare the rationale of sanctions to the expectations of paid employment. Through this comparison, managers imply that using sanctions to incentivize clients is reasonable and deserved because it mirrors workplace conditions. The desire to mirror workplace conditions is neoliberal because it demonstrates how both managers and the cash assistance program push clients to embody market values. While this is not inherently negative, the emphasis on labor market values as a solution to poverty ignores and obscures broader structural issues (e.g., lack of employment opportunities) that interfere with social mobility. Program managers also speak paternalistically about clients by implying that they do not understand what it takes to succeed in “real work” and thus need to be taught by the program. For example, when asked about sanctions, Renae responded:

> What we do to determine if somebody should be sanctioned or not is we always encourage that they’re contacted, we try to make this program mimic paid
employment whenever you’re talking about a, a WEP assignment, and so it’s the same things as whenever you have a job, if, if I was sick, I wouldn’t just not show up today and then come in on Monday and say ah yeah, I wasn’t there because I was sick on Friday. I’m scheduled to be here on Friday, if I’m not going to be here, I need to call in (pause) anytime before the start time and up to one hour after work to let my employer know what’s going on and, and when I anticipate to return to work, if it’s because I have a doctor’s appointment, um, then, it is the same as whenever, if I have a doctor’s appointment at 3 o’clock in the afternoon, I’m not going to take the entire day off, I’m going to come here and do what I need to do and then, leave early and make it in time for my doctor’s appointment and then go to the doctor’s appointment, when I get back, then either the same day or the next day, I bring a slip in that shows that I actually went to the doctor’s appointment (Renae, white woman)

In this quote, Renae explicitly states that managers “try to make this program mimic paid employment,” which illustrates how labor market mentality—a central focus of neoliberalism—frames how managers believe clients should participate in the program. This initial statement illustrates how OWF emphasizes transitioning clients to paid work. In the remainder of the quote, Renae goes on to offer examples of specific standards that “mimic paid employment” that clients should follow to avoid being sanctioned. It is noteworthy that while most managers acknowledge that clients are in real need when talking about intake, several go on to express these very specific neoliberal standards of what clients should have to do to receive the benefits they likely need to survive. This quote is also paternalistic because the manager implies that clients do not understand the expectations of paid employment. Renae stresses this through
implicit comparisons in which she demonstrates her knowledge of these expectations (e.g., “if I was sick, I wouldn’t just not show up today and then come in on Monday…”) and thus implies that clients do not always understand them. By assuming that clients do not meet these standards because of a lack of understanding, Renae fails to acknowledge the additional or alternative barriers clients may face to achieving these expectations, even if they are aware of them. For example, Perry-Burney and Jennings (2003) find that lack of education, transportation, safe neighborhood conditions, and self-efficacy interfere with clients’ ability to become self-sufficient.

Program managers similarly engage in ideological talk when they explain why clients reach time limits. In this talk, many managers suggest that clients reach time limits because they lack the desire to work and/or the ability to “plan ahead.” Neoliberalism and paternalism are evident in these explanations that attribute clients’ interaction with accountability structures (i.e., time limits) to personal deficiencies. Furthermore, there is a notable contrast between the neutral description of the process of time limits and the ideological ways managers talk about the execution of this process. For example, when an interviewer asked Marcus, a white program manager about why clients reach time limits, he said:

Truly, I think when an honest to goodness OWF participant comes in here and is really wanting to remove whatever barriers are there and obtain self-sufficiency…They’re going to do so. Those percentage who hit the wall as we call it, reach the thirty-six-month limit…In my estimation probably haven’t put their best foot forward. (Marcus, white man)

In this quote, Marcus draws on neoliberalism when he attributes avoiding time limits to clients “really wanting to remove whatever barriers are there and obtain self-sufficiency.” In doing so,
he makes success in the program a matter of personal responsibility—a central tenet of neoliberalism. Furthermore, while Marcus gives credit to clients who succeed, it is problematic that he attributes this to “really wanting to remove whatever barriers are there” (emphasis added). Thus, even in praising clients and acknowledging that there are clients who work, Marcus draws on neoliberalism to put this responsibility on the clients’ desire to work and ignores other barriers.

Some managers suggest that clients reach time limits because they do not plan well. For example, another manager, Marina, talks about why clients reach time limits, saying:

We’re asking them to be—we’re asking them to, to be, um (pause) oh, have some foresight to what it is they want to do and how to get there, and then to take those steps to get there. Um, and I think for our typical OWF clients, that, they don’t know how to do that. It’s not something that they, has been a part of their lives, having things planned out, um, or knowing how to make those decisions to move yourself from one point to another point. (Marina, white woman)

In this quote, Marina suggests that many clients reach time limits because they do not “have some foresight to what it is they want to do and how to get there.” By saying that clients reach time limits because they lack foresight, Marina paternalistically implies that clients are not competent enough to plan ahead. Marina expands on this paternalistic construction of clients when she says that clients don’t “know[ ] how to make those decisions to move yourself from one point to another point.” Research suggests that individuals experiencing poverty often diligently labor to assemble resources for their survival (Nelson 2005; Stack 1974; Zucchino 1997) and thus many clients may lack the resources to make and/or implement plans. By suggesting it is a matter of clients lacking the ability or skill to plan, managers do not fully
consider the circumstances of their clients. Similarly, some managers question whether clients take time limits seriously. For instance, one program manager (Karen, white woman) said: “I think it is, I don’t think they believe that there is a time limit.” In saying this, Karen presents clients as naïve for not taking time limits seriously.

While neoliberalism and paternalism are evident in how many program managers talk about sanctions and time limits, there are also several managers who offer accounts of sanctions and time limits that do not draw on these ideologies as much. These managers acknowledge how extenuating circumstances often interfere with clients’ abilities to meet the demands of the cash assistance program. Rose, a white woman program manager summarizes common alternative explanations for why clients reach time limits. Specifically, Rose says that clients reach time limits because there is “no employment or they have medical, mental reasons that keep them from being employed.” Rose illustrates how program managers do not universally draw on neoliberalism and paternalism to understand why clients interact with formal accountability structures in the welfare program. Many managers also acknowledge that some clients reach time limits while waiting for their application for disability benefits to process. By recognizing that a variety of extenuating circumstances may be (at least partially) responsible for clients reaching time limits, program managers like Rose resist aspects of neoliberal and paternal ideologies. Specifically, when managers acknowledge these extenuating circumstances, they undermine dominant narratives that suggest that clients are sanctioned or reach time limits because they lack the effort, skills, or competence to participate correctly in the cash assistance program. Overall, however, managers rarely question the intention or execution of sanctions and time limits.

While many managers describe these neoliberal and paternal formal accountability processes in a neutral way that does not question their effectiveness, some managers criticize the
intent and execution of sanctions and time limits. In questioning the effectiveness of these methods, managers oppose some of the neoliberal and paternal intentions of the program and assumptions about clients. For example, when asked about changes they would make to the program, one manager responded:

PM: Oh, good lord. I would probably go back to the way the program was prior to Welfare Reform. Let them get a grant, because it’s not very much money and they cannot live on it and they’ll eventually find work anyhow[...]Take away all the stipulations.

I: Which-what uh, stipulations would you take away?

PM: Well, as far as the having to work off the assistance and the meeting the participation rate-it’s just one hellish nightmare[...]

I: Alright, and um, so, would you minimize sanctions or um, I guess…

PM: Absolutely. [Deloras, white woman]

In this exchange, Deloras criticizes the existing welfare-to-work program for not providing clients with enough money to live on and describes the work participation arrangement as a “hellish nightmare.” Deloras further explains how she would “take away all the stipulations” of the welfare-to-work program and “absolutely” minimize sanctions because clients “will eventually find work anyhow.” By suggesting that clients can find work on their own, this manager implies that clients are capable social actors and that sanctions and time limits are ineffective at providing an incentive to clients. Further, by recommending that the state return to providing clients with a grant, Delores undermines neoliberalism by questioning the state’s involvement in teaching clients labor market skills and behaviors.
CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I examine how program managers draw on neoliberal and paternal ideology in their talk about the formal rules of the welfare program as well as how these rules are enforced. Specifically, I focus on how program managers talk about (1) the intake process and (2) sanctions and time limits. The intake process establishes the accountability structure for the program, while sanctions and time limits are accountability processes that enforce these criteria. Overall, these processes highlight how program managers evaluate clients as they interact with specific accountability structures. I find that program managers’ talk is diffuse with neoliberalism and that paternalism is also prevalent throughout their talk.

With the intake process, I find that program managers draw on neoliberalism to suggest that people in poverty do not apply for cash assistance because they lack the work ethic to complete the work activity. Specifically, program managers assume that people experiencing poverty do not seek assistance because they do not want to work. This is neoliberal because it illustrates how program managers fixate on clients lacking labor market skills. Furthermore, managers do not consider additional structural barriers that may interfere with people’s ability to participate in the cash assistance program. Program managers also draw on neoliberalism to talk about self-sufficiency contracts. Self-sufficiency contracts heavily emphasize participating in the required work activities, which is neoliberal because it focuses on individual accountability rather than addressing structural barriers. Program managers also draw on paternalism in their talk about the intake process. Specifically, managers paternalistically focus on altering clients’ behaviors and defining clients’ needs through the assessment and the subsequent creation of self-sufficiency contracts.
Program managers also incorporate neoliberal and paternal ideologies into how they talk about enforcing the formal rules of the program with sanctions and time limits. Managers talk about sanctions and time limits in very similar ways. They often initially describe sanctions and time limits in a procedural way that minimally draws on ideology. However, when managers transition into talking about how and why they enforce sanctions and time limits, they draw on significantly more ideology. With sanctions, program managers draw on neoliberalism to compare the work assignment to paid employment. Through this talk, program managers emphasize preparing clients for labor market participation and describe labor market logic as a justification for sanctioning (e.g., using sanctions to mirror workplace expectations). Managers draw on neoliberalism when they talk about time limits to attribute clients reaching these limits to a lack of effort. By suggesting that avoiding time limits is a matter of individual effort, program managers imply that work ethic is a primary determinant of success in the program.

Program managers also incorporate paternalism into how they talk about enforcement processes. With sanctions, they draw on paternalism to talk about how clients lack the competence to understand what it takes to participate in “real” work. Similarly, program managers draw on paternalism when talking about time limits to suggest that clients lack the competence to plan ahead and do not take the program seriously.

Sanctions and time limits are formal accountability processes that encourage clients to transform into “good workers” by explicitly punishing those who do not meet these standards by taking away their benefits. In drawing on both neoliberalism and paternalism to talk about sanctions and time limits, program managers appear to suggest that since clients do not sufficiently embody labor market skills and values, it is justified to invoke these formal accountability measures. In talking about this, managers focus on the goal of clients achieving
personal transformation (i.e., learning behavioral and work-related skills) to avoid being sanctioned or reaching time limits. Using formal accountability processes (i.e., sanctions and time limits) to achieve informal goals (i.e., worker transformation) illustrates the interconnectedness of the informal and formal accountability goals and processes. However, by making it sound like success is a matter of personal traits or skills that clients possess, managers can blame clients for their own failure. Throughout this talk, the managers’ emphasis on neoliberal values is clear through the emphasis on personal responsibility and the promotion of labor market skills and values.

Even though neoliberalism and paternalism are prevalent in how managers talk about accountability structures, there are some managers who undermine these ideologies to some extent in how they talk about intake, sanctions, and time limits. In talking about intake, there are many program managers who acknowledge that clients genuinely struggle to survive. While most managers do this by recognizing clients’ financial strain, other managers also identify structural forces (e.g., the economy) as factors contributing to clients’ experiences. Additionally, some program managers undermine neoliberal and paternalistic ideology by talking about how clients may be intentionally strategic with how they use cash assistance. By recognizing clients’ strategic use of OWF, program managers present clients as rational social actors and acknowledge that a lack of work ethic is not the sole reason that clients do not apply for cash assistance.

In talking about sanctions and time limits, some program managers undermine neoliberal ideology by questioning whether the work-focused, punitive policies of OWF benefit clients and whether the approaches to enforcing them are necessary or effective. Specifically, some program managers recommend removing sanctions and time limits because they do not believe they
benefit clients and because they are difficult to implement. Finally, program managers also undermine neoliberal and paternal ideology by acknowledging alternative (and structural) explanations for why clients may be sanctioned or reach time limits, such as high rates of unemployment and the length of time it takes to process disability applications.
CHAPTER 5

NEOLIBERALISM AND PATERNALISM: WORK ASSIGNMENT AND PARTICIPATION RATES

In this chapter, I examine how welfare-to-work program managers draw on neoliberal and paternal ideologies when they talk about two components of OWF’s formal accountability structure: (1) the required work activities and (2) measuring the effectiveness of these required activities. I find that program managers frequently draw on neoliberalism (i.e., emphasizing individual responsibility and labor market participation) and paternalism (i.e., constructing an individual or group as incompetent, childlike, and dependent) throughout their talk about the work assignment. Across the interviews, program managers consistently draw on neoliberalism and paternalism to talk about how formal work requirements help clients achieve an informal goal of personal transformation. Specifically, program managers expect that participating in work activities will transform clients by teaching them both “labor market skills” (e.g., work ethic, job-specific skills) and “life skills” associated with work (e.g., waking up on time, prioritizing personal hygiene, managing child care).

Program managers also draw on neoliberalism and paternalism when they talk about how they measure the effectiveness of the program (namely, participation rates). I find that program managers often draw on neoliberalism to emphasize the value of the work experience clients gain when they participate in the required work activities. Further, the program managers draw on paternalism to describe how they monitor clients. While managers talk about building skills as a
goal of the work assignment, the way managers talk about participation rates illustrates that the program’s performance is measured primarily in terms of clients participating in the program rather than the skills they are building.

**WORK ASSIGNMENT**

To receive cash assistance, clients are required to participate in 30 to 35 hours of work activities per week (LawWriter Ohio Laws and Rules 2015). Managers primarily talk about work activities as consisting of courses (e.g., job readiness) and/or participation at a work site. Yet, most of clients’ three-years of assistance consists of participation at a work site because clients are only eligible to receive assistance for “job readiness activities” for six weeks (LawWriter Ohio Laws and Rules 2015). The work assignment is a formal requirement and one of the main activities that clients perform to receive assistance. Managers also frequently talk about the work assignment as a way to achieve the informal goal of transforming clients into good workers (i.e., by developing pride, confidence, work ethic, work experience, dressing appropriately, following a schedule, managing child care). Thus, according to many of the managers, the goals of the work assignment extend beyond the scope of providing assistance to clients to include transforming them (clients) as workers and even more basically as people.

Neoliberalism is part of this accountability process through the focus on work ethic and making clients more marketable for paid employment. Paternalism is also part of how managers talk about the work assignment through the frequent assumptions about clients lacking basic competence. Collectively, managers draw on both neoliberalism and paternalism to talk about the work assignment in ways that further individualize poverty by constructing poverty around clients’ presumed lack of work skill/ethic and incompetence. Public discourse surrounding welfare echoes this use of neoliberalism as a means to frame poverty as a matter of personal
responsibility and transformation (Kingfisher 1996; Naples 1998; Neubeck and Cazenave 2001; Rousseau 2009).

As described above, the work assignment involves both formal and informal accountability processes. One of the main goals that managers talk about with the formal work assignment is the desire to make clients more marketable for paid employment. This goal is consistent with neoliberalism since it involves a state program promoting labor market participation and values. Thus, in talking about the work requirement, many managers echo the neoliberal sentiments that are essentially embedded in the tenets of the welfare-to-work program.

Below, I provide some examples in which program managers talk about developing clients’ marketability for paid employment. In the quote below, Tiffany, a white program manager responds to a question about the goal of clients participating in the work assignment:

Um, [the goal is] to, it’s to learn the job skills. Um, there is often times
individuals that are on the OWF program that have very limited job skills. Um, they hadn’t been at work as much or they’re maybe just uh, one type of training, they’ve only been in retail or they’ve only been in, you know, food service. So we try to provide them with multiple opportunities and, you know, different job training for, you know, to be more marketable. (Tiffany, white woman)

According to this program manager, the work assignment helps clients become more marketable by providing them with “opportunities” and “job training.” When asked about the benefits of the work assignment, Katie, another program manager, similarly describes how the work assignment helps clients become more marketable:
It’s really two-fold. It’s to help us meet the participation rate and it’s to help our clients get the skills they need to make them marketable. It can really make them competitive. (Katie, white woman)

Through both of these examples, program managers describe how teaching clients marketable job skills is a goal of the program that clients achieve through the formal work requirement. These managers, like many others throughout the data, draw on neoliberalism to emphasize how the work assignment teaches clients labor market skills. However, when managers talk about “improving clients’ marketability” as a central goal of OWF, they imply that clients need public assistance because they lack skills. While for some clients the work assignment may be the first time they enter the workforce, others have a lot of workplace experience. Yet, for both groups of clients, extenuating circumstances often create barriers to obtaining employment. Welfare-to-work programs, however, are not equipped to address many of these circumstances (Handler 2003). Furthermore, in discussing the types of work sites available to clients, managers reveal that most of the places where clients participate involve low-skill and low-wage work assignments (e.g., janitorial work, retail work, etc.). Similar to Monnat and Bunyan (2008), managers often encourage clients to take low-wage work regardless of whether these jobs help clients in the long-run.

Katie (also referenced in the previous quote), however, goes on to talk about how her county invests effort into matching the skills they teach in the work assignment with the jobs that are available in the county.

Um, but the other thing we’re asking is that those WEP sites tie to the uh, occupations that we know are in demand in our community, so, that they’re developing skills that they can use to take out and get a job. (Katie, white woman)
Katie represents a unique case in which managers try to make the work assignment better benefit clients. While there is a correspondence between the work assignment and the demand for jobs in the county, this manager still advocates for this neoliberal approach to assistance that focuses on building skills and workers rather than meeting clients’ needs. While building skills may—as Katie describes above—“really make [clients] competitive,” it does not address other barriers such as unsafe neighborhoods, drug trafficking, problems with landlords, struggles to pay bills, lack of means of transportation, and difficulty managing childcare (Perry-Burney and Jennings 2003). Additionally, if OWF primarily provides clients with experience working low-wage jobs, these clients may not have the qualifications necessary to secure living wage jobs.

Program managers also talk about how the work assignment helps clients become marketable by teaching them skills and transforming them into better workers. Managers most commonly describe “work ethic” as an important skill that clients learn from the work assignment. However, many managers also emphasize the importance of clients learning behavioral and self-presentational skills (e.g., hygiene, punctuality, behavior). Thus, in addition to drawing on neoliberalism by focusing on learning market mentality and developing a work ethic, managers also espouse paternalism by questioning clients’ behavior and self-presentation. Overall, managers’ talk about the work assignment suggests that they hold clients accountable beyond simply participating in the requirement, as the managers often express expectations for how clients should work, behave, and present themselves. For example, when asked about the benefits of the work assignment, Doris said:

They’re developing um, marketable skills. Um, hopefully, work ethic, getting up, getting dressed, getting ready on time, having, you know, being responsible for
themselves and their children. And they consider, finding some self-worth in themselves. Something to feel good about. (Doris, white woman)

Doris’ quote represents a widely-held sentiment by the managers interviewed. That is, most of the managers discuss how the formal work assignment benefits clients by teaching them a variety of “marketable skills.” However, in this talk managers draw on neoliberalism and paternalism to imply that clients initially lack both basic work and life skills. Specifically, Doris describes how the work assignment helps clients with “getting up, getting dressed, getting ready on time[…] being responsible for themselves and their children.” This is paternalistic because Doris implies that clients initially lack these skills and thus presents clients as irresponsible and incompetent. Additionally, Doris’ response reflects neoliberal ideology because she describes how the work assignment teaches clients “marketable skills.” This relates to neoliberalism because it promotes and celebrates the state teaching individuals labor market skills. Managers’ use of paternalism and neoliberalism echoes public discourse that constructs individuals experiencing poverty as incompetent and lacking the appropriate skills to rise out of poverty (Baker 2010; Rousseau 2009). By focusing on clients’ skills and behaviors, managers place the focus on the individual and what they “should” be aspiring to and doing—rather on fixing structural aspects of both poverty and the welfare program.

While most managers talk about the work assignment as transforming clients by teaching them a variety of skills, some managers openly acknowledge faults in this program requirement. For example, when an interviewer asked Kaitlyn, a white program manager, how effective they thought the program was, she responded:

I’d say somewhat effective. I just (pause) there’s still so many um, you know. Ask somebody to work so many hours a week for such a small amount of money when
they have so much on their plate already. It’s just, I mean it's effective in the fact they we’re doing what we’re told to do. We’re following the rules, but as far as in the big picture to help people it’s not effective. It’s just overwhelming most days for people and they would just opt to go off cash instead of let us kind of work with them I guess. (Kaitlyn, white woman)

In this quote, Kaitlyn criticizes the formal and informal accountability processes of the program by questioning whether it is effective regarding “the big picture to help people.” By questioning the work assignment’s effectiveness, the manager demonstrates a counter-narrative to the typical buy-in of the neoliberal, work-focused agenda of the program. Kaitlyn also implies that not participating in the work assignment is a rational response because clients “have so much on their plate already” and make “such a small amount of money.” This undermines paternalism to some extent by presenting clients as making rational decisions rather than as not participating out of ignorance of what work entails.

Since the work assignment is a required component of the program, managers often talk more about its formal accountability processes. However, there are also some informal accountability processes related to the work assignment. The primary way managers draw on informal accountability is by talking about how they “encourage clients” to change their behaviors and/or values to be more compatible with labor market values. For example, when asked about how clients benefit from the work assignment, one manager answered in some detail:

To get them used to how they need to um, behave themselves in a job. They are given more on-the-job training, more leniency because they know that they may be out-of-synch of doing this every day, doing this every day is just how it’s supposed to be. So, we work with them a little more to get them ready. To get out
there and get that job. It’s a big responsibility for them with their actions. They are in a work experience too, they are given a little more leeway. To get through certain issues, you know-like missing work, okay, I’ve only showed up two times this week. Well we’re not gonna automatically remove from that site, it’s just something we’ve got to work on. And the confidence to know they can learn a job they may not have known before. (Katherine, white woman)

This quote constitutes informal accountability because it illustrates how managers “work with” clients to try to reinforce specific values and behaviors (e.g., valuing work) that are not formally part of the requirements of the program. Katherine conveys that clients also learn these values and behaviors through “more on-the-job training,” though, suggesting that formal components of the work assignment similarly help clients learn to value work. The quote further makes it apparent that informal accountability processes play a role in upholding neoliberal and paternal ideologies. Specifically, Katherine suggests that the work assignment teaches clients labor market skills and behavior that will help them “get that job.” This is neoliberal because it advocates for the state to teach individuals labor market values and implies that labor market skills and effort are a clear-cut path to obtaining employment while ignoring the barriers clients face to realizing these goals. By suggesting that labor market skills ensure employment and mobility, this manager draws on the neoliberal assumption that the labor market provides opportunities for individuals from any social position to achieve mobility (Wiggan 2012; Connor 2010; Soss et al. 2011).

Katherine also draws on neoliberalism by talking about how working every day is “how it’s supposed to be.” This reflects neoliberalism because it ascribes moral value and obligation to work and thus emphasizes the importance of labor market participation (Soss et al. 2011). This
statement reflects paternalism, too, as the manager implies that clients do not understand that they are supposed to be working every day. Additionally, Katherine speaks paternalistically by calling for clients to “behave themselves” and describing how “it’s a big responsibility for them with their actions.” While the series of fragmented sentences makes it difficult to decipher the exact meaning of this sentence, the manager’s language presents clients as childlike by making it sound difficult for clients to take responsibility for their actions.

It is also important to consider the many ways Katherine tries to be empathetic to clients’ situations. She acknowledges that clients might have been out of work for a while and is receptive to providing leniency toward clients. However, as I point out above, rather than questioning how the welfare-to-work program helps clients, Katherine talks about teaching clients to uphold the neoliberal values of a system that is currently oppressing them. While Katherine talks about providing “a little more leeway” and “work[ing] on” things with clients, she still largely buys into the program’s neoliberal goal to make clients more marketable.

Overall, informal accountability processes are often vague, and managers do not provide precise detail on how they accomplish the goals they describe. Many managers similarly talk about how they help clients learn various work-related skills, behaviors, and values. While the quote above is vague on how managers accomplish these goals, many other instances of informal accountability were even less precise regarding how managers accomplish what they want to “encourage,” “motivate,” or “work with” clients to alter. Managers similarly draw on neoliberalism and paternalism to talk about these informal accountability processes. Many program managers appear to believe that teaching clients “work skills” and “basic skills” helps them achieve labor market success. These managers may then take it upon themselves to work with clients to develop these skills. Yet, since many of these assumptions are founded in
neoliberalism (i.e., prioritizing labor market participation) and draw on paternalistic understandings of clients, managers’ informal work with clients may then incorporate these ideologies.

**PARTICIPATION RATES AND EMPLOYMENT**

Federal and state policies mandate that counties report the percentage of clients who complete their required hours of work activities each month (i.e., participation rates). Participation rates are a point of formal accountability for both clients and counties. For clients to continue to receive benefits, they must participate in the required number of work activity hours. Clients are sanctioned when they do not complete their required hours of participation. Additionally, federal and state requirements expect counties to have 50% of all families participate in work activities each month. As such, participation rates are very relevant to program managers, who expect clients to meet rates and are also expected to reach specific rates for the state. Counties that do not meet the expected rates of participation are threatened with fiscal sanctions.

Many program managers emphasize that participation rates are the primary way that they measure the effectiveness of OWF. The fact that participation rates are used as a primary measure of program effectiveness is neoliberal, as it solely focuses on clients engaging in labor market activity. Furthermore, using participation rates as a goal of OWF implies that participating in work activities itself is the main objective of the program. While participating in work activities may help clients in some ways (e.g., gaining work experience), participation itself does not ensure employment, future income, or social mobility. The fact that federal and state policy relies on participation rates to measure program effectiveness may reflect neoliberal objectives, but program managers themselves are not responsible for this. Many managers
describe participation rates in a very procedural way. For example, when asked about how they measure program effectiveness, one manager responded:

“We measure the effectiveness in terms of essentially participation rates, in terms of how many were actually participating. Umm, so we can have umm, the umm, we can have X number of people who are receiving OWF, and then we look at how many of those people are actually meeting their participation rates. And uhh, at a pretty base level, we can see how many people were actually fully participating in participation programs...activities.” (Evan, white man)

In this quote, Evan describes participation rates as the way that his county measures program effectiveness. His description of how participation rates work is fairly procedural, focusing on how the rate is calculated. However, Evan’s description of participation rates also subtly illustrates the neoliberal ideas underlying the concept of the policy itself. Specifically, in this quote there is a clear focus on “participating,” a word used numerous times throughout this explanation. This exclusive focus on measuring program effectiveness through whether clients participate in their required work activities reflects the neoliberal emphasis on labor market participation. Evan’s explanation—as well as similar explanations given by many other managers—provides insight into the ideology underlying “participation rates” as a measure of program effectiveness.

Several program managers extend beyond purely procedural explanations of participation rates. Specifically, managers also discuss how the pressure to reach participation rates often motivates them to monitor clients’ activities and verify that clients meet their required hours of participation. By describing clients as in need of supervision to complete their assignments, these
managers draw on paternalistic representations of clients as incompetent and childlike. For instance, Rebecca explains how her county monitors clients to meet participation rates:

If we assign them so many hours we need to make sure they’re doing those hours and if they’re not, why aren’t they doing those hours? […] The, the employer er, the client is supposed to be turning in, like for us they have to turn in their attendance sheet signed off by the employer to verify that they did the hours they were supposed to. But we do keep in contact with our employers just to make sure. Like if I go out to a work site and somebody’s not doing what they’re supposed to the employer tells us that. Then we can get them in and have a talk with them, you know, maybe change their assignment to somewhere else or, you know, work with them to get them a good experience. And to make sure the employer has a good experience too because you know if the employer doesn’t have a good experience they’re not gonna want anybody else coming out there.

(Rebecca, white woman)

In this quote, Rebecca goes beyond talking about participation rates as a measure of effectiveness and explains how managers work to hold clients accountable to those rates. She describes how clients “have to turn in their attendance sheet signed off by the employer to verify that they did the hours they were supposed to.” This is paternalistic because it illustrates how the system treats clients like children by requiring attendance sheets and verification. Beyond the need for verification, Rebecca also says that managers “keep in contact with [clients’] employers just to make sure.” This suggests that managers may be skeptical of clients’ paperwork and thus verify participation with clients’ employers. Throughout this quote, Rebecca describes how managers engage in heightened monitoring of clients to meet the required participation rates for
the county. Although the manager ultimately frames this extent of monitoring as helpful to “get [clients] a good experience,” paternalism often operates by doing things for someone else’s “own good” (Jackman 1994; Soss et al. 2011). Additionally, while the quote is primarily paternalistic, it also shows the underlying neoliberal emphasis on the importance of labor market participation as a means of measuring client success in the program.

While managers may be primarily responsible for the paternalistic emphasis on monitoring clients, one manager describes phone conferences in which they received training that included directions on monitoring clients as a means to improve participation rates. Specifically, Annalee, when asked about how they measure program effectiveness, responded:

> I think ODJFS looks um, I think first focus ODJFS, or by ODJFS is at our participation rate. Are we meeting the federal rate- fifty percent for all families. Which is necessary in order to avoid sanction, fiscal sanction. Which is serious. Um, they provide training, they provide monthly uh, phone conferences that tell us how to use- they give information on how to create a successful WEP site, how to monitor, forms to use, so I- I don't know that they look to see how successful the site is, but more so that provided uh, information in setting up successful sites.

(Annalee, white woman)

In this quote, Annalee describes how her county receives “monthly [ ] phone conferences” to provide instruction on how to improve participation rates. Through this quote, it is also apparent the conferences provide instruction on “how to monitor” clients. This suggests that the paternalistic focus on monitoring clients to improve participation rates may be a strategy pushed on program managers by their superiors in the welfare bureaucracy. The heightened focus on surveillance of clients is also partially a product of the policies put into place in the 1996 welfare
reform (Handler 2003; Myles and Quadagno 2000). Yet, since only one manager mentioned this kind of instruction, it is unclear whether it is standard procedure for counties in Ohio. If it is standard procedure for the state to provide this kind of instruction on monitoring clients, then perhaps state regulation has further bearing on how managers treat clients.

Although many managers explain participation rates in procedural ways or emphasize how they monitor clients to improve participation rates, there are also several managers who are critical of using participation rates to measure program effectiveness. Managers are critical of participation rates for different reasons. Some managers question whether meeting participation rates is realistic for counties; while other managers express concern for genuinely meeting clients’ needs. Marcus, for instance, when asked about how the program measures effectiveness said:

Well, we actually have multiple things. You have the state actually has regulations state policy out there. Certain work participation rates that we have to meet uh, which are definitely challenging. Uh, Ohio has done very poorly as a state at meeting those work participation rates and there’s lots of reasons and excuses for that. Part of it is the policy itself. It makes it difficult to actually uh, reach (chuckle) the goal that the state has set for us or the federal government combination with the state. The economy has played a large part because currently with unemployment as high as it is one of the stipulations for a WEP site is that we cannot have the WEP participants in a worksite that has individuals laid off. (Marcus, white man)

In this quote, Marcus talks about how participation rates are the main goal measured by the county. He admits that Ohio “has done very poorly as a state at meeting those work participation
“rates” and goes on to suggest some reasons for that. He cites both the policy and the economy—
with high rates of unemployment—as reasons that the state struggles to meet participation rates. 
In doing so, Marcus acknowledges that structural forces can make it difficult for the state to 
succeed. While he does mention these structural forces, Marcus’ main issue with participation 
rates appears to be the difficulty for counties and the state to reach them, rather than noting what 
these structural barriers (i.e., the economy and unrealistic policy requirements) mean for clients’ 
realities and outcomes. Acknowledging structure undermines some of the (neoliberal) 
individualistic focus of participation rates by making it clear that effort alone does not guarantee 
success. However, Marcus primarily appears to question participation rates because they seem 
unreachable for the state and not because of concern that the program uses labor market 
participation as an indication of success/effectiveness.

While Marcus questions participation rates because of the state’s challenges meeting 
them, other managers critique participation rates out of concern for clients. One manager, Josh 
said:

The state is all about participation rates right now. I don’t know if they’re 
measuring the effectiveness, well they do a lot as far as recidivism and if a person 
stays and gets employment, stays off-uh, that type of measurement. Right now it’s 
all about participation rates. Anybody that’s getting OWF and is a required jobs 
participant and has to be participating in that program. And you know that’s-I 
understand the issue because it’s a federal mandate, on the other hand it’s kind of 
disappointing because it uh, it does detract from our ability to many times find the 
true issues that they’re-that they may be facing. (Josh, white man)
In this quote, Josh explains that the state uses participation rates to measure effectiveness. And, again, the neoliberal emphasis of using labor market participation to signify effectiveness is visible. However, Josh goes on to say that relying on participation rates is “kind of disappointing because it uh, does detract from our ability to many times find the true issues that [...] they may be facing.” Thus, Josh explains how focusing solely on getting clients to participate in the program may obscure some of the other barriers that clients must navigate to survive and succeed. Josh, as well as several other managers, criticizes these program measures on behalf of clients. And, in doing so, takes a more structural and empathetic approach to program goals.

Overall, many managers criticize using participation rates to measure program effectiveness. Some managers question this measure out of concern for the counties or the state being able to reach this rate (e.g., Marcus), while others express greater concern over whether participation rates adequately take clients’ needs into account (e.g., Josh).

Program managers most commonly state that the welfare-to-work program uses participation rates to measure effectiveness. However, there are multiple managers that describe using rates of clients transitioning from cash assistance to paid employment to indicate program effectiveness. While most of these managers do not specify how they measure this, some of them do mention specific reports that detail the number of clients that transition from cash assistance to employment. Even if the county measures program effectiveness in terms of clients transitioning to employment, the state still requires counties to report participation rates. One of the managers, when asked about measuring program effectiveness, describes using transition from OWF to employment as an indication of success:

Uhm, well, I do know that, the-, there is the federal work participation rate uhm is one measure that they’re using. And, uhm, you know, for us internally what we
look at is are they- how many cases, how many people are going off cash assistance due to employment. For us that’s a measure of success. Obviously, we want people to leave our rolls and move out to paid employment. (Kathy, white woman)

Kathy explains that the federal measure of program effectiveness is the “work participation rate.” However, in this county, they also look at “how many people are going off cash assistance due to employment.” Thus, she explains that transitioning to employment is how they measure success. The transition to employment may be a more meaningful measure of program effectiveness than participation rates since clients are no longer relying on cash assistance. Additionally, transition to employment is an outcome, unlike participation rates (which are part of the program itself). Although employment may be a more meaningful measure, it is unclear if these reports also consider whether the employment clients attain provides a living wage. This is especially of interest, since clients often transition into low-wage and dead-end jobs that ultimately do not help them rise out of poverty (Monnat and Bunyan 2008; Myles and Quadagno 2000).

Furthermore, like participation rates, measuring employment also reinforces neoliberal ideology because it exclusively focuses on labor market participation. The problem with measuring success in terms of any kind of labor market participation is that it does not measure how the welfare program addresses structural inequalities that create poverty.

Uniquely, a few program managers describe using performance-based measures of success (e.g., learning skills) rather than participation rates. While this is an uncommon way for managers to talk about measuring program effectiveness, it is interesting because it appears to be more aligned with the narrative managers offer when they talk about how the work assignment
builds clients’ skills. For example, one of the managers talks about how they use performance-based measures of success:

So, on a monthly basis we look at: are they following the orientation that we provide? Um, at the end of orientation we want somebody to be able to show up at day one of their work site um, appropriately dressed, etcetera. We measure how quickly we’re able to place our clients, we measure um, how many individuals successfully complete the program, we measure how many individuals are able to obtain the eight workplace competencies that I talked about a little bit ago. Um, we measure the provider, um, quality of the provider worksite through satisfaction data. Um, I--I think primarily what we look at is individuals who are able to, within a 30 to 180 day time frame, achieve all the work competencies that um, were identified at the beginning of the program.” (Nora, white woman)

In this quote, Nora explains how her county uses a variety of performance measures to determine if the program is effective for clients. Some of these measures include “show[ing] up at day one of their work site um, appropriately dressed” and meeting “eight workplace competencies.”

While these measures are more aligned with the intended goals of the work assignment, they also heavily draw on paternal and neoliberal ideology. Paternalism is evident in how Nora describes measuring whether clients are appropriately dressed and showing up to the work assignment. This is paternalistic because it implies that clients are incompetent and do not know how to dress or show up on time. Neoliberalism is evident in the focus on building labor market “competencies.” Like with the work assignment, managers’ use of paternalism and neoliberalism here mirrors how public discourse represents individuals experiencing poverty as lacking the appropriate skills to rise out of poverty: competence and labor market mentality (Baker 2010;
Rousseau 2009). Yet, this was also a quote representing a fairly unique way of measuring program effectiveness.

Finally, some of the managers talk about using informal measures to determine program effectiveness. Some of these managers appear to describe informal measures because they are uncertain of how their county measures program effectiveness. However, other managers seem to use informal measures to reinterpret program effectiveness if they do not find participation rates to be a helpful or achievable measure. For example, one manager said:

Well we’re guided by, you know state and county rules and regulations and even federal guidelines. So the effectiveness I don’t know if I can answer that question I-I think w- we follow the guidelines and we take a look at our-our, um, at our rates of participation, I think we take a look at the… I don’t know if you can measure the effectiveness, if you uh, I think we try to treat every family or try to make a decision for every family who walks through our doors to- we try to make decisions to ultimately helping that family. So, if we’re rating ourselves on that we’re doing one heck of a job, if we’re rating ourselves on placement well that statistic’s going to show something else. (Tim, white man)

In this quote, Tim talks about how the county measures effectiveness in terms of “rates of participation.” But Tim says that the managers “try to make decisions to ultimately [help]... every family who walks through [their] doors.” Thus, in this quote the manager reinterprets what success and program effectiveness means. He further appears to do this in a way that is more client-oriented. He steers away from the more formal measures of program success that focus on neoliberal goals in favor of a more help-oriented approach. While Tim does express this clear intent to serve clients, the goal of making decisions to help clients is both vague and subjective.
Specifically, Tim says that he thinks they are “doing one heck of a job” in terms of making decisions that help families, but he does not detail how they are helping these families. Although there is clearly noble intent, the county may still be drawing on paternalism by determining what is helpful for families experiencing poverty.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I examine how welfare-to-work program managers draw on neoliberal and paternal ideologies when they talk about two components of OWF’s formal accountability structure: (1) the required work activities and (2) measuring the effectiveness of these required activities. Overall, program managers incorporate many of the ideological representations of clients and poverty found in public discourse (see Baker 2010; Jackman 1994; Neubeck and Cazenave 2001; Soss et al. 2011) into how they talk about these components of the program.

I find that program managers’ talk about the required work activities emphasizes the neoliberal goal of teaching clients labor market skills (e.g., work ethic). Program managers also often draw on paternalism when they talk about the work assignment by implying that clients are incompetent and unable to perform basic activities (e.g., wake up on time). Overall, through their focus on using the work assignment to teach clients skills, program managers illustrate how the welfare program targets clients’ perceived individual deficiencies as a means to alleviate poverty. Talking about this type of personal transformation as a solution to poverty is neoliberal and paternal because it assumes that clients lack the motivation, labor market skills, and competence to succeed in the workplace. Neoliberalism is also visible in how this approach conceptualizes poverty as a matter of personal responsibility. Overall, this serves to promote individualistic understandings of poverty by placing the blame and burden of overcoming poverty on the client.
Program managers also draw on neoliberalism and paternalism to talk about program effectiveness. However, the way that program managers draw on ideology to talk about program effectiveness varies from how they talk about the work assignment. Specifically, when program managers talk about measuring program effectiveness, much of the neoliberal language focuses on clients’ participation in labor market activities (e.g., the work assignment and paid employment). Thus, rather than measuring whether clients build skills through the required work activities, counties simply measure whether clients participate in their required activities. Program managers use paternalism when talking about program effectiveness primarily to talk about monitoring clients to ensure that they participate in the work assignment. Specifically, managers’ talk suggests that paternalistic representations of clients are often used as justifications for the monitoring and surveillance embedded in welfare policies. The emphasis on monitoring clients is also reflected in the 1996 welfare reform policies (Handler 2003; Myles and Quadagno 2000).

There are several program managers that are critical of the work requirement and subsequent way that OWF measures program effectiveness. While some of the criticism focuses on managers’ own frustrations, other criticism acknowledges structural barriers that shape clients’ lives and interfere with their ability to participate in the program successfully. As such, there are some managers who undermine neoliberalism by acknowledging that clients’ outcomes are not solely a product of their individual effort. There are also managers who undermine paternalism by representing clients as rational adults with real needs. Yet, throughout my analyses I find that even when managers resist ideology and problematic representations of clients at many points in the interview, all of them draw on neoliberal and paternal ideology at some point. The prevalence of these ideologies throughout program managers’ talk is likely a
combined product of its omniscience in public discourse, welfare policy itself, and managers’ own beliefs.
CHAPTER 6

MOTHERING IDEOLOGIES AND ACCOUNTABILITY

In the previous chapter, I focus on how many ideologies are involved in how managers talk about holding clients accountable in formal and informal ways. In this chapter, I similarly focus on how program managers draw on ideologies, but do so in a way that is specific to mothering ideologies. I find that program managers draw on a combination of intensive mothering, economic nurturing, controlling images, “best I can” mothering, and—to a lesser extent—othermothering to discuss expectations for how their clients should parent. Intensive mothering practices include mothers being self-sacrificing and investing time, energy, and vast resources into raising their children (Hays, 1996). Economic nurturing involves mothers demonstrating love by providing economically for their children (Keller 1994). The controlling images relevant to my findings are those that portray mothers on welfare (Rousseau 2009) as hypersexual, lazy, and responsible for the reproduction of poverty. “best I can” mothering refers to mothering practices that embody a mother’s best efforts to raise children with the resources available to her (Johnson 2014). Finally, othermothering describes when a variety of women (both kin and fictive kin) participate in raising a child—rather than solely the child’s own mother (Collins 1990).

My findings suggest that managers talk about holding clients accountable to specific mothering ideologies by framing it as either a matter of (1) meeting children’s needs or (2) emphasizing the importance of prioritizing work. In talking about meeting children’s needs,
managers talk about providing more for children, being able to afford children, making children a priority, and educating clients through parenting classes. In talking about prioritizing work, managers talk about the importance of securing child care, learning to navigate a work/family balance, and praising clients who do this well. As is apparent solely from these themes in terms of priorities, managers’ expectations often also proved to be contradictory.

Across these two themes, program managers’ talk provides insight into how these expectations connect with the accountability processes of the program. Formally, there are parenting classes, child care, and assumptions about how clients will succeed or fail in meeting the requirements of the welfare program based on their parenting ability. Informally, managers express expectations for clients’ practices that extend beyond the work requirements of the program and often make apparent that they are drawing on stereotypes of clients or using hegemonic lenses to express expectations for their parenting practices. Overall, though, program managers have strong ideas about how mothers on welfare should parent. Yet, many managers do not discuss the barriers clients have that interfere with their ability to meet managers’ expectations. Furthermore, ideas about mothering practices reproducing poverty stem from an individualistic understanding of poverty by holding that children’s socialization/upbringing reproduces their social position.

**MEETING CHILDREN’S NEEDS**

One way that program managers draw on ideology is by expressing concern over whether clients meet their children’s needs. Managers do this through how they describe typical clients on the program, questioning clients’ ability to provide for children, assuming clients reproduce poverty by failing to teach their children specific skills and values, and discouraging clients from staying home with children. In talking about meeting children’s need, program managers draw
on racialized controlling images of clients’ mothering and cast doubt on “best I can” mothering practices—suggestions that the practices of mothers on welfare are often not enough to ensure their children’s success. Additionally, managers encourage intensive mothering and economic nurturing. They emphasize intensive mothering by encouraging their clients to sacrifice on behalf of their children and by broadly encouraging child-centered practices that involve investing resources in children. Similarly, managers also talk about mothers on welfare as economic nurturers by expecting and encouraging them to care for their children by providing for them financially.

One of the ways that program managers create an emphasis on meeting children’s needs is by drawing on controlling images of mothers on welfare. These controlling images are often apparent in how program managers describe “typical welfare clients.” While some managers describe demographic characteristics of typical clients (e.g., “she’s like maybe you know, between the ages of 19 and 30, she, with 2.5 kids, single parent household.” [Katie, white woman]), several other managers describe typical clients in a way that evokes various characteristics of controlling images of “welfare queens” and “welfare mothers.” In these descriptions of clients, program managers hold clients accountable to specific (often raced/gendered/classed) stereotypes of how they believe clients mother. As such, the managers would often follow-up with expectations or suggestions on how to correct these behaviors. For example, one manager, when asked to describe a typical client, initially describes clients’ education and work experience and then goes on to say: Um, uh, if you are female, most of them have uh, had uh, multiple children with uh, multiple fathers. Uh, and uh, you know, kind of forfeit their education and or so on, and they’re now trying to figure out a way to make that work. So on, ‘cause they barely have been living hand to
mouth, and getting by for more than just their bare, basic needs are. Some of them don’t believe they can, you know, have more than just your basic needs met, so… [Thomas, white man] Thomas’ quote represents informal accountability because he expresses expectations for how clients can and should live and mother. Thomas draws on the controlling image of the welfare queen by talking about clients as hypersexual (i.e. having children with multiple fathers) and careless. Notably, however, welfare recipients have an average of 1.8 children and fewer than 8% of families have more than 3 children (US Department of Health and Human Services 2012). Thus, this manager holds mothers on welfare accountable to stereotypical mothering practices; rather than evaluating their real mothering practices.

Thomas also suggests that “best I can” mothering is not enough. He implies that having children is a poor life choice because it results in mothers “forfeit[ing] their education” and barely being able to meet “basic needs.” Thomas suggests that having a child and forfeiting education is something that can negatively impact ability to work and then subsequently meet children’s needs. Yet, his understanding of what constitutes “‘best I can’” practices seems heavily shaped by stereotypes about welfare recipients rather than based on the real mothering practices of clients.

Thomas encourages practices related to intensive mothering and economic nurturing. Thomas draws on intensive mothering by emphasizing the importance of having more resources that allow clients to “have more than just [their] basic needs met.” He focuses on clients improving their material conditions to better provide for children. As such, this manager relates mothering expectations to the resource-centered parenting ambitions that are part of economic nurturing and intensive mothering. While intensive mothering does focus on resources, economic nurturing is more applicable because of the emphasis on mothers working outside of the home to
provide for their children. Thomas also focuses on self-sacrifice by talking about how mothers
give up education and then need to do more to ensure that children’s basic needs are met. The
emphasis on meeting needs also relates to economic nurturing because it involves mothers
providing love and nurturing by providing resources for their children. Overall, Thomas, like
many other managers expresses gender, race and class-based expectations for having and raising
families (Baca Zinn 2000; Stack 1974). That is, he compares the family structure of mothers on
welfare against the idealized nuclear family that has been a model for white, middle-class
Americans.

While many managers broadly mention that typical clients are primarily single mothers,
many other managers also draw on value-judgments in their descriptions of typical clients.
Through these value-judgments, program managers imply that mothers on welfare do not do
enough to appropriately raise their children or are personally responsible for experiencing
poverty. Additionally, program managers sometimes draw on racialized controlling images of
clients to describe typical clients. In many of these descriptions of clients, managers present
clients’ efforts as insufficient because they do not extend beyond meeting their family’s basic
needs. In doing so, managers express an expectation for resource-centered approaches to
parenting that are connected to intensive mothering. Additionally, managers dismiss or seek to
modify “best I can” approaches to mothering by considering clients’ efforts insufficient.

While many managers offer demographic descriptions of clients and/or talk about typical
clients in ways that portray them as personally responsible for their own situations, some
managers acknowledge additional factors that shape clients’ lives. For instance, Elena describes
typical clients:
OWF is not something you’re gonna make a living on. I mean that’s obvious. Um, so the people that are on OWF, you know, are, they’re in desperate need. Um, you know, nobody wants to, to have to live on OWF, it’s just not a lot to live on. But, at this point in time, and I’m going to say a lot of our, the individuals that come in, are coming in and getting on the OWF because they have no other choice. And the other thing is, is that that most of them obviously are single parents. And it also makes it more difficult. You know if kids are with mom, and mom’s the only income and she loses her job, then what other choice do you have than assistance. [Elena, white woman]

In this quote, Elena describes clients in a way that places a greater emphasis on the situational constraints that they face. Specifically, she describes welfare recipients as “in desperate need.” She also acknowledges that “nobody wants to, to have to live on OWF, it’s just not a lot to live on.” Beyond providing more situational context than many other managers, Elena also connects these contexts to the resources and mothering practices available to mothers on welfare. After stating that most clients are single parents, Elena describes a situation in which a single mom “loses her job” and follows with “what other choice do you have than assistance?” By framing assistance as a logical choice for single mothers who lose their jobs, Elena encourages “best I can” mothering. Establishing that many clients are single mothers also illustrates the significance of single mothers as economic nurturers. As the sole breadwinners in their families, these mothers’ ability to generate income is paramount for having the means to care for children. Elena promotes cash assistance as a resource for clients to support their children. She also has a more realistic impression of clients’ experiences and does not
suggest that clients should somehow attain many more resources to provide better for their children. As such, Elena differs from many of the previous managers by not emphasizing intensive mothering practices.

As is apparent in the previous quotes pertaining to managers’ descriptions of typical clients, program managers often criticize clients’ mothering by questioning clients’ ability to meet the needs of their children. This extends beyond their descriptions of typical clients into how managers discuss clients in other aspects of the program. For example, when asked about what makes clients more likely to reach time limits, Will responds:

Oh, um[pause] let’s see, uh, now, uh,uh, really? Um, not using uh,uhm oh, god, I wanna say this politely. Um, not using family planning. So they continue to have children when they should not have children, I guess. You know, they, it’s by different person each time. So Um, every time they have another kid, even if they are working, they’re not going to be able to afford the 4 kids they have. [Will, white man]

Will connects expectations for mothering practices to the formal process of running out of time on the program. He also extends informal expectations to specific decisions about having children—such as being able to afford certain things for children. Will thus suggests that these informal decisions around parenting (e.g., “family planning”) affect if and how clients interact with formal accountability structures in the welfare program. It also implies that clients’ decisions around reproduction are a reason that clients remain in poverty. In reality, welfare programs have historically systematically complicated social mobility for people experiencing poverty by not allowing people to accumulate resources (Stack 1974).
Will draws on controlling images of welfare queens/mothers to talk about clients’ mothering. He does this by implying that clients are careless by “not using family planning” and that clients have many children “when they should not have children.” He also suggests that clients are promiscuous by saying that clients have children “by a different person each time.” In addition to connecting clients’ mothering to controlling images, Will also places some doubt on “best I can” mothering practices by questioning the decisions clients make surrounding having and raising children. Yet, there are race and class differences in beliefs about having and raising children. Specifically, Stack (1974) finds that young Black mothers are encouraged to have children and children are a meaningful part of life regardless of material circumstances (Stack 1974). Again, Will seems to evaluate clients’ mothering based on stereotypes and controlling images rather than the real practices of mothers on welfare.

Will encourages intensive mothering practices by talking about the importance of investing resources in children. He expresses concern that mothers on welfare “are not going to be able to afford the 4 kids they have.” As such, Will expects clients to be able to afford a certain standard of living for children. Intensive mothering is also visible in the connection to self-sacrifice because Will implies an expectation for clients to be able to have a certain number of resources to sacrifice for children to be a good mother. Similarly, economic nurturing is visible in how Will encourages mothers to care for their children and meet their children’s needs via resources. This manager even talks about how clients should not have children if they are unable to economically nurture their children in a particular way.

One manager also provides a sharper criticism of clients’ mothering practices that was less common throughout the data, but still illustrates the common way in which managers
question clients’ mothering practices. In this quote, Ericka, when asked about program changes that would improve self-sufficiency, responds:

> Nobody sees, a lot of these clients, have not been…um, showing what their priorities need to be in life, especially if they have children. You know, children should be their number one priority and any income or money that they have, they should be spending to take care of their children, not the town fair. So, and I think with the way they’ve changed rules, on a lot of these programs and they’ve taken them where they’ve [inaudible shuffling papers] may be our big downfall of our country, because we do not make anybody be any way responsible for their children […] To me they’re making changes to the worse for the worse. They’re not teaching people to be self-sufficient, they’re not teaching them to be financially responsible, they’re not teaching them to be good parents because that’s another thing that I see. You know they will come in and apply and they have all these children and they have no income, they can barely pay their rent, their utilities, um, you know they’re just so unhappy and you can tell by the way they treat their children. [Ericka, white woman]

Ericka expresses several informal expectations surrounding clients’ parenting practices. She voices frustration that the 1996 welfare reform included changes and the program is “not teaching [clients] to be good parents.” This is interesting in terms of accountability. Ericka is critical of the fact that the program “[does] not make anybody be any way responsible for their children.” She suggests that the program should play a formal role in teaching clients how to parent and hold clients accountable to certain expectations surrounding parenting practices by teaching them how to be “good parents.”
Ericka draws on controlling images to talk about clients as irresponsible, which is evident in her concern over clients spending money on “the town fair” rather than “tak[ing] care of their children” and how she questions whether clients are “responsible for their children.” These connect to the controlling image of the welfare queen who is presented as financially irresponsible and careless. Ericka also appears to discourage “best I can” parenting practices as she implies that if clients are left to their own devices they will treat their children poorly because “[clients] are just so unhappy.”

Like many other managers, Ericka promotes intensive mothering and economic nurturing practices. She promotes intensive mothering practices by saying that “children should be [clients’] number one priority and any income or money that they have, they should be spending to take care of their children.” This relates to intensive mothering because of the focus on being child-centered, promoting self-sacrifice, and investing resources in children. Ericka similarly promotes economic nurturing by suggesting that clients being “financially irresponsible” and lacking material resources is evidence of poor parenting. This connection illustrates the relationship implied between financial responsibility and ability to parent.

Program managers are also critical of clients’ ability to meet their children’s needs by implying that clients lack the skills necessary to help their children succeed. In much of this talk, managers focus on generational poverty, often suggesting that clients’ upbringing and the way in which they bring up their own children reproduces poverty. In this line of thought, clients are presented as lacking the skills and capital to help their children succeed and rise out of poverty. Throughout the interviews, program managers frequently associate mothering practices with the reproduction of poverty. For instance, when asked about generational poverty in the county, Rose responds:
It is generational and I don’t know how we- I can tell you now when I see these peop--kids having kids, that the workers I have here will see them as kids and their kids twenty years from now. It, it doesn’t end, it, it is generational, and a lot of it is the problem of the parents that I had on in the 70’s and early 80’s, didn’t have the want to care, or care. And it, and it’s not a neglect, it’s not, it’s just that they are satisfied with what they have, and that may not be moving their kids to a college education, to a better house, to a better car, to whatever we think is necessary. Uh, I, and I’m not sure, like I say, um you can’t make a, a judgment call on where they’re, you know, should they stress and worry about what a better life is considered. I, I don’t know […] You can’t judge them. It’s their right to decide if they want their child to be a doctor or they want their child to just work at a manufacturing job or a labor job. That’s, that’s really up to them. Or if they want them to work at all. I, I don’t know. […] Does it, does it ever, the cycle break? Mmm, once in a while. Once in a while. But I think too that the education system uh, fails in a lot of ways because- and then if the parent’s not there to encourage and push the kids to education, you’re not gonna change it. [Rose, white woman]

The accountability processes evident in this quote are primarily informal. Specifically, Rose discusses a variety of informal expectations for clients’ mothering practices. While Rose discourages “judging” clients, she also implies that parenting practices are heavily connected to success within the program as well as the type of career their child will grow up to have. As such, Rose holds clients accountable for their children’s outcomes. Rose brings up formal
accountability by talking about how if clients do not embody certain parenting practices, their kids will be on cash assistance “twenty years from now.”

In this quote, Rose draws on the controlling image of the welfare queen to describe poverty as generational. She describes them as “kids having kids” and implies that poverty “is the problem of the parents” who don’t “have the want to care.” This constitutes a controlling image because it portrays mothers on welfare as lazy and not wanting to care for children. Rose further says that breaking the cycle of poverty “is really up to [clients],” which blames clients—and specifically their parenting practices—for reproducing poverty. In drawing on the controlling image of the welfare queen to describe welfare clients, Rose questions whether clients’ parenting practices sufficiently meet their children’s needs. Unlike many other managers, however, Rose acknowledges that “it’s not [ ] neglect […] it’s just that they’re satisfied with what they have.” As such, Rose differentiates between meeting children’s needs and “wanting more” or “providing more” for children. Rose says, “you can’t judge them” for their parenting practices, but then goes on to say, “it’s their right to decide if they want their child to be a doctor or they want their child to just work at a manufacturing job or a labor job.” While Rose talks about not wanting to judge clients, she still implies that clients’ parenting practices can prevent children from achieving social mobility. Overall, Rose implies that “best I can” practices are sufficient—so long as mothers accept responsibility for keeping their children in poverty. Furthermore, she suggests that under this model of parenting, clients’ children do not learn to value material things; and if they don’t learn those values, then it is assumed that they will similarly lack ambition.

Like many other managers, Rose emphasizes the importance of resource-intensive approaches to mothering. In doing so, she promotes intensive mothering and economic nurturing.
Rose talks about how clients are “satisfied with what they have, and that may not be moving their kids to a college education, to a better house, to a better car, to whatever we think is necessary.” There is a visible implication that investing more resources in children is supposed to produce more successful children. By placing this focus on resources, Rose highlights the importance of resource-intensive approaches to parenting as a way to prevent the reproduction of poverty. Rose also implies that clients ultimately lack the self-sacrifice to meet the criteria of intensive mothering. This is apparent in how she discusses education, saying “if the parent’s not there to encourage and push the kids to education, you’re not gonna change [the cycle].” There is a clear demand for parents to actively shape their children’s futures through resources—or at least through “desiring” resources.

While managers primarily express informal expectations for how clients should parent, three managers talk about how their county offers formal parenting classes for parents. In Ohio Works First, parenting classes are listed as an acceptable alternative activity for welfare-to-work (Colbert and Kasich 2012). Although only three managers talk about these courses, many counties across Ohio offer parenting classes. One of the managers, Marla, brought up parenting classes when talking about clients becoming self-sufficient:

While we're trying to work, we're working with individuals, and so when we're, we're, we're working with these individuals’ needs, its gonna take some people longer than 36 months to become self-sufficient. Uh, and so, if, if they need to be in counseling, and getting on medication, and doing that sort of thing, to help them, before they can even think about working, or become-, you know, getting a job, or, or being a, a father, or mother, you know if they need to go to parenting classes, or you know- whatever the case might be. [white woman]
In this quote, Marla talks about how becoming self-sufficient extends beyond working and how things like “being a, a father or mother” are also important to helping individuals. Relatedly, Marla describes how this county offers parenting classes and suggests that these classes might be something that clients “need to go to” to be a father or mother. Parenting classes may constitute formal accountability, as they may be assigned as an “alternative activity” that clients are required to complete to receive benefits.

Marla draws on the controlling image of the welfare queen to imply that clients lack competency around parenting. This pertains to controlling images because welfare queens are constructed as having many children and being too selfish and careless to raise them “appropriately.” Furthermore, by talking about the need for mothers on welfare to attend parenting classes, Marla implies that the mothering practices of many clients are insufficient. While it is not clear whether Marla believes this is a prevalent problem among clients, she does imply that clients may have issues with knowing how to parent—which suggests that the “best I can” is not always good enough.

Furthermore, focusing on teaching clients parenting practices individualizes clients’ problems and suggests that clients’ practices are to blame for their lack of resources. These approaches to addressing poverty often obscure the structural forces at play (e.g., the economy, high rates of unemployment, and the power of the elite).

Marla’s discussion of parenting classes also relates to intensive mothering. Specifically, by talking about the need for some clients to learn how to parent, she focuses on parents learning to be self-sacrificing and invest time and energy into becoming better parents. Additionally, the content of the courses themselves may reflect this dominant mothering ideology. For instance, one such class description offered:
a community-based worker who will work with low-income, at-risk families with at least one minor child. These individuals will work in the family’s home environment and model healthy family behaviors such as good parenting. They will focus on helping families to build trust, teaching them how to manage conflict, and will suggest constructive ways to make “family” a priority (Ohio Job and Family Services 2001:3).

The focus on prioritizing family in this course description reflects the values of intensive mothering. As people receiving OWF, clients’ parenting is often subject to a level of scrutiny and surveillance that most other people do not face.

Overall, there are many ways that program managers question clients’ ability to meet their children’s needs. In much of this talk, managers imply that clients could improve their children’s lives and achieve social mobility by embodying specific mothering practices and abandoning others. Managers generally promote intensive mothering and economic nurturing by emphasizing the importance of resources in meeting children’s needs. They also often promote intensive mothering by encouraging mothers on welfare to sacrifice to provide for their children. Yet, managers also often draw on controlling images of mothers on welfare to discourage mothering practices associated with “best I can” mothering. In doing so, managers are critical of the mothering practices in which mothers on welfare do have the resources to engage.

**PRIORITIZING WORK**

As seen in the previous section, program managers talk a lot about if and how they believe clients meet the needs of their children. While managers have a lot to say about meeting children’s needs, they also often focus more extensively on the importance of clients prioritizing work. Program managers talk about ways in which they formally (i.e., through the requirements
of the program) and informally (i.e., through social pressure) encourage clients to parent based on gendered, raced, and classed expectations that include the expectation for clients to work outside of the home. This is done through both informal encouragement and requirements that are built into the cash assistance program. Specifically, I find that program managers encourage clients to embody work-centered parenting practices through talking about child care services, focusing on teaching clients about work/life balance expectations, and praising clients when they embody specific mothering practices.

One way in which OWF promotes work-centered parenting practices is by providing clients with access to subsidized child care through the county. Many program managers talk about how their county offers child care. However, providing this resource is also often accompanied by an expectation for clients to use the child care service so they can attend the work requirement. Many program managers simply mention that child care is a service that they provide. For example, one manager said:

We offer childcare services in house to enable them to participate in these other programs including ours. …We help them overcome any of the barriers that would prevent them from becoming employed. [Samantha, white woman]

In this quote, the program manager states that they “offer childcare services in house” and goes on to say that this “enable[s] [clients] to participate in these other programs including ours.” Like many other managers, Samantha talks about offering child care as a resource that helps mothers participate in the work requirement. Ideally, intensive mothering practices involve mothers staying at home to focus on raising their children. As such, managers’ expectation for clients to work outside of the home does not fully encourage intensive mothering. Additionally, Samantha implies that children are a “barrier that would prevent [clients] from becoming employed.” By
implying that children are a barrier to be managed, Samantha, like many other managers, places a greater focus on the work requirements of OWF than on child-centered mothering practices (i.e., intensive mothering). However, expectations to work outside of the home are consistent with economic nurturing, since mothers presumably work outside of the home to provide for their children. Yet, it is also notable that the manager doesn’t specifically discuss how working outside the home would ultimately benefit children.

While childcare may be offered as a resource, transportation is not always a resource to which clients have access. This can complicate clients’ ability to use child care and subsequently undermine managers’ expectations for clients to be able to secure childcare. One manager spoke to this, saying:

Um, in our county the biggest challenges would be, the barriers would be like transportation. It would all be related to transportation such as no transportation, um, money like gas money, and probably child care issues. Not that there’s not child care available but people have issues with using child care that is available…or they probably have transportation issues getting to the childcare… There’s always openings for child care some place but um, in this county it seems like they don’t want to use them. They want to use um, they always tell us they have their own providers that they want to use but it’s not reliable. [Leslie, white woman]

Leslie provides insight into formal and informal accountability processes in this quote. Many managers indicate that subsidized or publicly funded childcare is available in their county. The Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (Ohio Department of Education & Ohio Department of Job and Family Services) allows families to search for publicly funded child care.
Informally, Leslie expresses the expectation that clients use child care by mentioning that it “is available” and describing how “there’s always openings for child care.” In addition to applying pressure to secure child care, managers invoke informal accountability to encourage clients to use certain providers. Specifically, Leslie describes how when clients choose providers they are “not reliable.” Thus, clients are discouraged from using providers other than the ones offered by the county.

Leslie generally discourages “best I can” parenting practices, othermothering, and intensive mothering. She does this by questioning the reliability of the child care providers that clients choose, saying that clients “always tell us they have their own providers that they want to use, but it’s not reliable.” This discourages “best I can” mothering practices by implying that mothers on welfare do not choose reliable child care providers on their own. While Leslie does not specifically mention kin-based care—as constitutes othermothering—the implication is that any child care provider outside of those offered by the county is not reliable. Intensive mothering is also not really being encouraged here because Leslie focuses more on reliable child care than providers that clients consider good for their children. Also, the push for mothers to secure child care to work outside of the home illustrates a lack of focus more child-centered practices associated with intensive mothering.

Though Leslie discourages several mothering ideologies, what she says is not inconsistent with the economic nurturing mothering ideology. As with Samantha (the manager in the previous quote), Leslie focuses on securing child care to ensure that clients can attend the required work activities of the cash assistance program. Thus, securing child care is part of mothers working outside of the home to provide for their children. Again, however, the manager
does not explicitly connect work outside of the home to providing for children—which is notable since this is a key component of economic nurturing.

There are a couple of program managers that are more open to the prospect of clients drawing on informal networks as a means of child care while they attend the work assignment. For instance, James says:

We don’t have a daycare issue in our county and if they don’t want public daycare they have kinship, they have relatives that will take their children for the day.

[James, white man]

In terms of accountability, James makes it clear that the county offers “public daycare,” which makes child care a part of the formal accountability structure of the program. However, he does not openly encourage or discourage its use—making there less informal social pressure from the managers for clients to adopt a particular form of child care. However, there is still the expectation expressed for clients to secure child care to work outside of the home.

While most managers either ignored the prospect of othermothering or discouraged clients from drawing on “unreliable” informal networks, James suggests that drawing on these networks is a feasible option for clients. He specifically says “if [clients] don’t want public daycare they have kinship,” and advocates for clients to use informal networks for child care. In promoting clients making their own choices around child care, James reflects “best I can” parenting practices. While he encourages parents to make their own decisions about the type of child care provider they use, he still expects clients to secure child care (presumably to work). As such, there is a limit to the extent of discretion and “best I can” practices that James promotes.

James’ quote is also consistent with the economic nurturer mothering ideology because—like other managers—he talks about securing child care as a means to clients working outside of
the home. Again, it is notable that managers do not discuss how work outside of the home benefits children in most of these quotes that focus on child care. Instead, they primarily focus on clients’ ability to work. The connection between the content of James’ quote and intensive mothering is nebulous. James expresses greater openness than many other managers to family members being involved in care. Involving relatives in child care, rather than placing children with unknown care providers, appears child-centered. At the same time, according to intensive mothering the burdens of motherhood are really reserved for mom alone (Hays 1996; Stack 1974). Mothers who often rely on others for child care are often viewed more negatively in reference to intensive mothering standards (Stack 1974). Additionally, clients secure child care so they can work outside of the home. Which, again, is inconsistent with the ideal standards of intensive mothering (i.e., being a stay-at-home mom).

Another way that program managers encourage clients to prioritize work is by talking about teaching clients how to navigate the “work” and “family” demands in their lives to create balance. Annalee, for instance, says:

My goal is for them to get some [pause] depending on the consumer, but overall, it's for them to learn some good job readiness skills. Really just [pause] getting up, get their kids to daycare, or school, getting to the sites, building those job readiness skills so that when they are hired they've already learned how to deal with things like what happens when Johnny's sick today and he can't go to school, what happens when I miss the bus. [Annalee, white woman]

Annalee invokes informal accountability in this quote because she explains how teaching clients to develop a particular balance between work and parenting practices is her goal. Annalee’s quote also connects to formal accountability, as striking this balance involves clients adjusting
their parenting practices in a way that best facilitates attending the formal work requirements of OWF.

Annalee draws on controlling images/stereotypes of clients by implying that clients lack the motivation and skills to balance the demands of work and family life. She does this by suggesting that clients need to learn how to “get[ ] up, get their kids to day care, or school, getting to the sites…”. By indicating that clients lack the knowledge and skills to balance the demands of work and family, Annalee draws on controlling images of clients as lazy and incompetent (i.e., the welfare queen). This is a flawed image because historically poor mothers and mothers of color have had to navigate work and family demands, while white, middle class women did not because of their lack of access to the workplace (Collins 1990; Rousseau 2009). Annalee also discourages “best I can” practices when she implies that clients struggle to “get their kids to daycare, or school” and do not know “how to deal with things like what happens when Johnny’s sick today and he can’t go to school.” Annalee connects this with formal accountability by suggesting that these are skills that clients can learn through the required work activities of the program. However, by pushing for clients to learn these things, Annalee suggests that clients do not know how to balance work and family on their own. Yet, Annalee, like many other managers, does not consider clients’ lack of needed resources (e.g., transportation, access to alternative child care, etc.) to create this kind of balance.

As with many other managers, this quote from Annalee illustrates how managers’ emphasis on the work requirements of OWF often takes priority over encouraging intensive mothering practices. Annalee focuses less on child-centered approaches to parenting and instead concentrates on placing children in schools and day cares, and figuring out contingency plans for child care in case a child falls ill. Again, this emphasis on securing child care so that clients can
work outside the home is consistent with economic nurturing. Managers encourage clients to prioritize work and to learn how to manage any competing demands (e.g., child care interruptions) to do so. Overall, managers’ discussions of child care and “balance” focus more extensively on managing any potential family spillover into the workplace. This demonstrates how managers generally consider children and parenting responsibilities as secondary to work. As such, many of the mothering ideologies are less prominent throughout this talk. The economic nurturing mothering ideology is most consistent with this model of parenting, though managers often do not explicitly connect work outside the home with benefits to children.

The work requirements themselves include some room for family interruption. This is visible in how many of the managers describe how having a sick child is considered “good cause.” “Good cause” refers to activities that are considered valid excuses for clients to call in and not attend the work site for that day. While having a sick child is often considered a valid (if appropriately documented) reason for not attending the work site, there are limitations to this accommodation. Most managers only briefly mention that having a sick child constitutes good cause. The broad impression from many managers is that if clients try to use a sick child as “good cause” too frequently, then they are using their barriers as “excuses” to get out of work. A few managers specifically address these expectations. For instance, one manager said:

Say you missed, your kid was out for three days cause they’re sick and they didn’t go to the doctor, say you didn’t go to the doctor cause they may have a cold, got kicked out of daycare, whatever. They have nothing to verify that, just their word. And sometimes, you know, if it seems legitimate, the worker will take it-sometimes not ask for a verification. if it’s a pattern […] reporting attendance
that way. It’s not blatant things that they can’t verify. They have to verify everything. [Katie, white woman]

In this quote, Katie describes components of the formal accountability process for OWF. She explains that caseworkers “have to verify everything” that clients do or claim to do. Katie not only emphasizes the importance of verifying clients’ activities, but also explains how managers may not sanction clients “if it seems legitimate.” Overall, though, the quote suggests that there is a limitation to how much clients can miss work to care for their sick children. As such, clients’ decisions to stay home with children or inability to document their child’s illnesses may result in them receiving sanctions and having their benefits taken away. In this way, the cash assistance program holds clients accountable to working outside of the home and prioritizing managing family spillover into the workplace. Thus, the formal accountability structure also shapes the parenting practices that clients are expected to engage in. In terms of informal accountability, program managers often talk about encouraging clients to parent a particular way. If managers do not think that clients’ excuses “seem[ ] legitimate” they can apply sanctions. As such, the need for documentation and ability to implement sanctions impacts the way that clients parent because they must make decisions about how to handle children when they are sick.

In this quote, Katie’s description of the rules for missing work for a sick child suggests that the cash assistance program does not allow for “best I can” practices. Clients are expected to provide verification for missing work for a sick child even if clients “didn’t go to the doctor cause they may have a cold,” which leaves them with “nothing to verify that, just their word.” Because caseworkers can sanction clients if they do not deem their excuse “legitimate,” clients’ choices surrounding parenting are constrained—especially when it comes to sick children. If clients stay home with their children, they may be at risk of being sanctioned. This illustrates
how mothers on welfare are under additional surveillance that requires them to provide justification and verification for their decisions concerning parenting and work. Program managers place greater emphasis on following rules of the program (i.e., providing verification) than providing parents with the resources they need to care for sick children. Katie also demonstrates a perceptible lack of trust of clients. This is visible in the need for documentation and verification for clients to receive “good cause” and miss work without penalty.

Katie’s description of the program rules suggests that they promote some components of intensive mothering. Clients being able to miss some work to care for their children reflects child-centeredness. However, the fact that there are limits to the amount of time that clients can take to do this is less child-centered. As Katie mentions, “if it becomes a pattern” then caseworkers are less likely to accept a sick child as a “legitimate” reason for missing the work assignment. As such, Katie implies that child-centered practices are acceptable if there is a valid reason for not working—such as when a child is sick and “[gets] kicked out of daycare.” However, the fact that clients are literally punished if they do not follow these guidelines provides insight into how work attendance is prioritized over parenting practices. Katie’s quote, like the others in this section, is again consistent with the economic nurturing mothering ideology. Specifically, Katie emphasizes attending the work requirement. However, in this case, there is a clear instance in which staying at home with a sick child appears to be the more “nurturing” option. Like other managers in this section, Katie does not explicitly connect the work outside of the home to nurturing children.

Program managers also discuss clients’ mothering in the process of praising clients’ success with work goals. While managers do not always criticize clients’ mothering practices,
the praise they offer primarily focuses on how clients achieve work goals *despite* their parenting demands. For instance, one manager recalls the success story of one of her clients:

> Oh sure. Like I said, that little girl in December. She said that was, I remember it was December because I remember she came in and told us ‘it’s the best Christmas present I could ever get’, that she obtained enough employment to take her off her cash assistance and she can still go to school, and they pretty much guarantee her a job and I know we were down there for a meeting or something the other day and she was in the receptionist uh, area in the office and she told us, she says ‘I’ve not missed one day’. I think she was hired like the first, December first I think was her first official day. She said ‘I’ve not missed one day, one hour, one minute.’ And we, you know, we just praised her, we said, you know, it’s terrific, we’re so glad for you. And she has three small children that, there’s, none of them’s in school, so I think that’s a success story. [Carrie, white woman]

In this quote, Carrie describes how the client finds work as a receptionist and has “not missed one day, one hour, one minute” of work. The praise that Carrie offers to this client focuses on the clients’ success in obtaining and keeping employment. Carrie connects this success to parenting by describing how this former client “has three small children that, there’s none of them’s in school.” In this statement, Carrie implies that it is especially impressive that her client is employed and has not missed any work because she has young children that are not yet in school and thus require child care. As such, Carrie not only praises her clients’ work ethic, but also praises her ability to prioritize work despite these competing demands of children. While praise constitutes informal accountability, Carrie connects receiving her praise with the formal accountability structure by praising a client who achieved the primary formal goal of the
Through this quote, Carrie promotes various components of “best I can”, intensive mothering, and economic nurturing mothering ideologies. In terms of “best I can” parenting, the praise that Carrie offers this successful client illustrates that they believe this quality of “parenting” is sufficient. Notably, Carrie, like other program managers, is more likely to praise clients for achieving work-related successes despite having children than to praise clients’ actual mothering practices. Since there are very particular criteria under which program managers would offer praise, there is an overall dismissal of “best I can” as a suitable approach to parenting.

While overall this quote is not a good exemplar of intensive mothering, the focus on self-sacrifice to accrue resources for children—by working tirelessly and “not miss[ing] one day” of work—is consistent with both intensive mothering and economic nurturing. However, the fact that the manager encourages work-centered—rather than child-centered—practices contradicts the expectations of intensive mothering. Carrie’s quote is also consistent with economic nurturing because of the focus on work outside of the home being perceived as the best course of action for the family. In this client’s case, she was able to leave cash assistance and secure a job and is now considered “self-sufficient,” which suggests an ability to adequately provide for one’s family. However, similarly to many other managers, Carrie does not directly explain how work outside of the home is a way to nurture and provide for children.

There are also a few managers who further reinforce the need for clients to work by discouraging clients from staying home with their children. For example, Geraldine said:
We have a lot of people come in, they want to apply for cash, first when they hear they have to go to a work site, they say forget about it. You know I want to be with my kids. We do offer daycare here. Um, they just, you know don’t want to bother. [Geraldine, white woman]

Through this quote, the conflict between the demands of the formal work assignment and parenting are visible in how Geraldine talks about how clients must choose between “go[ing] to a work site” and “be[ing] with [their] kids.” She goes on to mention that the county offers child care, but clients “don’t want to bother.” In terms of informal accountability, Geraldine’s quote reflects the expectation for clients to embody parenting practices that enable them to work outside of the home and fulfill the work requirement of the program (i.e., delegating child care).

Geraldine also draws on controlling images of clients as lazy and unmotivated by suggesting that mothers on welfare “want to be with [their] kids” because they “don’t want to bother” with securing child care. Geraldine does not discuss alternative explanations for why a mother might want to be a stay-at-home mom. Thus, while staying at home to raise children may be framed as a meaningful choice for some mothers (i.e., white, middle class mothers), mothers lacking race and/or class privilege often face greater criticism and surveillance for their mothering choices (Rousseau 2009). Along these lines, Geraldine discourages “best I can” parenting by suggesting that mothers on welfare choosing to stay home and take care of their children is not a suitable choice. Again, managers primarily focus on encouraging clients to prioritize work-related practices and focus less on clients’ parenting practices.

Similarly, Geraldine discourages some practices of intensive mothering by framing it as unacceptable for clients to want to stay home with their children. She does this by attributing clients’ desire to be stay-at-home mothers to “not want[ing] to bother” with securing child care.
By making this decision more about a lack of desire to work than a decision to care for children, Geraldine overlooks the possibility of clients enacting more child-centered practices. Geraldine’s talk is consistent with the emphasis on work found in the economic nurturing mothering ideology. Specifically, by framing the desire to stay home with kids as a matter of lack of effort, Geraldine implies an expectation for mothers on welfare to work outside of the home—which she connects to the formal requirement to complete OWF’s work assignment.

Since working outside of the home is a central component to economic nurturing, there is some support for this mothering ideology. Geraldine, like many other managers, does not explicitly connect work outside the home to providing benefits to children really don’t go so far to make the connection to this being done for children. While many of formal and informal expectations described in quotes relating to “prioritizing work” are consistent with economic nurturing because of the focus on working outside the home, it is also apparent that managers often do not emphasize the “nurturing” component of this ideology. As such, managers focus on encouraging clients to work outside of the home and secure child care. Managers sometimes discuss family-related benefits of clients participating in the work activities, but this often focuses on clients learning to navigate the family spillover into the workplace.

**CONCLUSION**

Welfare-to-work program managers talk about clients’ mothering through a focus on (1) meeting children’s needs and (2) prioritizing work. In talking about meeting children’s needs, managers discuss providing more for children, being able to afford children, making children a priority, and educating clients through parenting classes. In talking about prioritizing work, managers emphasize the importance of securing child care, learning to navigate work/family balance, and praising clients who do this well.
Across these quotes, program managers use both formal and informal accountability to hold clients accountable to particular mothering ideologies. They often draw on the controlling image of the welfare queen to imply that clients are hypersexual, promiscuous, lazy, and selfish. Managers seem to draw on these controlling images of clients to discourage “best I can” mothering practices. They do this by casting doubt on clients’ ability to teach their children skills and make competent choices on their children’s behalf. However, these evaluations seem to be primarily based on stereotypes about clients’ mothering practices rather than a reflection of reality. Yet, managers would praise the mothering of clients who were meeting the work goals and becoming “self-sufficient.”

Program managers minimally discuss othermothering, as most managers encourage clients to rely on formal sources of child care. When managers do talk about clients using informal forms of child care, they report concern with the reliability of informal networks, including both family members and friends. While a few managers believe that kin are a useful resource for child care, for most others the concerns about the reliability of these networks outweigh their usefulness. Overall, managers’ concern with clients attending the work assignments of OWF places greater importance on reliable child care than care provided by kin.

Managers often encourage clients to adopt elements of intensive mothering. Namely, program managers frequently expect their clients to make sacrifices on behalf of their children and to focus on investing resources in them. Yet, managers do not fully endorse intensive mothering because of the expectation for clients to work outside of the home. Working outside of the home is not consistent with the ideal of intensive mothering, which would have mothers stay at home to better invest time and energy in their children.
Program managers consistently promote economic nurturing as a mothering ideology. Economic nurturing simultaneously allows managers to express concern for children and promote clients participating in the work requirements of OWF. Overall, the mothering ideologies managers encourage for clients (i.e., economic nurturing and intensive mothering) are intricately connected to meeting the goals of OWF. While managers talk about meeting children’s needs at some points, the focus on prioritizing work makes it seem as though some of these concerns are superficial and a product of stereotypical images of clients.

In connection with formal accountability, managers often draw on economic nurturing to promote clients meeting program requirements. Specifically, economic nurturing emphasizes deliberately working outside of the home to provide resources for children. As such, economic nurturing is consistent with the need for clients to participate in a formal work requirement. Formal accountability is also visible in how managers talk about child care. Child care is formally offered through the county and managers often talk about it as necessary for clients to be able to attend the required work activities. Parenting classes may also be part of the formal accountability structure, since in some situations clients may be required to take them to fulfill their work assignments. While the content of these courses may vary significantly, they generally presume that clients lack the skills to raise their children appropriately.

In connection with informal accountability, it is apparent that manager’s parenting expectations for clients extend beyond meeting goals of the program. This is visible in how program managers frame work as a means of providing for children and talk about seeing resources as love. Managers’ informal expectations are also apparent in how they talk about teaching clients skills such as navigating “balancing” family and work demands. The sentiment that poor mothers and mothers of color need to be taught this balance dismisses the fact that
these groups of women historically have more experience than middle class white women in navigating the demands of family and work.
CHAPTER 7

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Across my three analyses, my findings examine the relationship between accountability structures and ideology in the cash assistance welfare program in Ohio. Some important points of discussion that emerge from these findings include the relationship between formal and informal accountability, ideology and stereotypes in public discourse, and individual versus structural explanations of poverty. Beyond these topics, I also address the implications of my findings in the following chapter.

To contextualize both my findings and this discussion, I will review the position of the program managers. Program managers’ actions are constrained by the bureaucratic organization in which they work. Like workers in other service bureaucracies, welfare officials navigate contradictory and vague goals, often while lacking resources (Bardach and Lesser 1996; Brodkin 2008; Hoshino 1973; Lipsky 1980; Soss et al. 2011). Program managers are middle-managers who are held accountable to state-wide performance measures (i.e., participation rates). The combined pressure of reconciling contradictory policy goals and meeting performance measures often leads managers in service bureaucracies to find the rules “restrictive and negative” (Meyers et al. 2001; Pearson 2007:741). Similarly, I find that the managers in these interviews discuss their frustration with trying to meet participation rates. Recent welfare reforms also involve greater surveillance of clients and contribute to managers feeling underpaid and overworked (Allard 2007; Handler 2003:233). Although program managers have less interaction with clients
than caseworkers do, they influence how welfare is implemented by supervising caseworkers and translating welfare policy goals into organizational goals (Jewell and Glaser 2006; May and Winter 2007; Riccucci 2005; Riccucci et al. 2004; Pearson 2007).

**ACCOUNTABILITY: FORMAL AND INFORMAL**

A notable trend across my findings is the relationship between formal and informal accountability goals and processes. Organizations design and implement accountability structures to produce results, teach skills, and alleviate fear of blame being directed at the organizations themselves (Bardach and Lesser 1996; Miller 1983). In Ohio’s cash assistance program, managers’ talk focuses on how formal and informal accountability processes work in tandem to promote labor market ideals and work participation. Program managers’ emphasis on work is consistent with the overall concept of welfare as a program intended to transition clients into the workforce (see Handler 2003; Iversen 2000; Quadagno and Street 2005). Informal (and ideological) assumptions that clients enter the program lacking work ethic, work skills, and basic life skills are met with formal requirements for clients to work and an accountability structure that ends clients’ benefits when they fail to meet work requirements (Handler 2003; Neubeck and Cazenave 2001).

Accountability structures generally illustrate societal and organizational values (Ranson 2003). In the case of cash assistance, “work” is what is valued, which is reflected in the neoliberal ideology in welfare policies (Soss et al. 2011). Neoliberalism is visible in the accountability structure via the focus on individual effort and work ethic. Clients are held personally responsible for their outcomes and expected to complete individual performance measures to retain their benefits (Neubeck and Cazenave 2001; Soss et al. 2011). This emphasis on individual performance connects to labor market values since clients are expected to
participate in the work requirement. The prevalence of neoliberalism and the formal requirements (i.e., required work activities) demonstrate the cash assistance program’s emphasis on “getting clients to work”.

Program managers would often initially describe the formal requirements of cash assistance and their enforcement in a seemingly straightforward and non-ideological way. Yet, when managers transition into talking about how and why they implement these accountability processes, they draw on significantly more ideology. With sanctions, program managers draw on neoliberalism to compare the work assignment to paid employment. Through this talk, program managers emphasize preparing clients for labor market participation and describe labor market logic as a justification for sanctioning (i.e., using sanctions to mirror workplace expectations). Managers’ emphasis on labor market values reflects the underlying assumption that clients lack the work ethic to participate in the labor force (Handler 2003; Soss et al. 2011). Assumptions such as these are significant because they can influence the accountability standards we develop for a population (Broadbent and Laughlin 2003; Miller 1983). For instance, Miller (1983:149) finds that social workers would identify “clients’ debased moral character” to explain why they anticipated clients being uncooperative. Through talk about sanctions and time limits, managers suggest that punitive accountability structures will provide incentive (characteristic of formal accountability; Bardach and Lesser 1996; Roberts 2001) for clients to learn these skills.

Program managers’ talk also indicates that there is a lack of alignment between formal program goals and the way they are measured. Program managers describe how the required work activities should help clients learn skills and transition them to work. However, this “goal” is measured via participation rates (i.e. the number of hours clients participate in work activities). Thus, clients are deemed successful for attending the work requirement rather than learning skills
and transitioning to work. Not only are the goals and requirements of welfare mismatched, but the program is underfunded and lacks the resources to support transitioning clients to employment (Handler 2003; Lipsky 1980; Myles and Quadagno 2000). While some counties measure other outcomes (including transition into paid employment), the state still measures counties’ success in terms of participation rates. Although there is some disjuncture in terms of the expressed goals of the program (transition to paid employment) and how they are measured (participation rates), both promote labor market participation and neoliberal ideals.

There is some overlap with formal and informal accountability in terms of the goals that program managers express. The primary informal accountability goal that managers describe is clients transforming into "good workers" by developing work ethic, and learning "soft skills" associated with workplace success. Program managers emphasize these goals when they talk about the formal work requirement—suggesting that clients learn these skills through the required work activities. The formal accountability structure promotes labor market participation through required work activities; while the informal accountability that managers use idealizes the welfare program by describing it as something that can transform clients into workers, while simultaneously assuming they are incompetent and unmotivated. Still, both formal and informal accountability processes contribute to neoliberal and work-centered project.

The cash assistance accountability structure extends beyond expectations about work to focus on expectations for clients’ mothering. Since clients must have a child to be eligible for cash assistance, mothering status is salient. Program managers’ talk indicates that expectations for clients’ mothering are threaded through informal and formal accountability processes. Much of managers’ talk about their clients’ mothering is tied to informal expectations of mothering—as well as stereotypes of how clients mother. Program managers draw on constructions of "good"
and “bad” mothering, which involves comparison to hegemonic mothering (Arendell 1999, 2000; Gross et al. 2014; Hays 1996), but also the specific expectations for poor mothers (Bloch and Taylor 2014; Kennelly 1999; Keller 1994; Taylor 2011). The ways program managers hold clients accountable to particular mothering expectations is visible in how program managers talk about how clients should navigate the balance between family and work: prioritizing work. Managers unilaterally promote work participation and the formal accountability structure and its emphasis on work echo this.

Program managers also talk about how mothers on welfare should provide “more” for their children. While managers are often not specific about what these things are, there is a frequent expectation that mothers on welfare should be doing more for their children. This relates to resource-intensive mothering ideologies such as intensive mothering and economic nurturing (Hays 1996; Keller 1994). Many of the mothering expectations program managers express reflect informal expectations. However, some of managers’ expectations surrounding clients’ mothering are grounded in the formal accountability structure. A few examples of the formal grounding of these expectations include providing county-funded child care to foster work participation, and limitations on good cause that make it difficult for mothers to stay home with their (sick) children. These examples illustrate the interplay between formal and informal accountability regarding expectations for clients’ mothering. There are concrete, formal consequences for not following a model of mothering that involves consistent work outside the home and thus requires placing children at child care.

Overall managers’ talk of formal and informal accountability processes come together to emphasize that clients should prioritize work. Even with mothering, program managers promote economic “nurturing,” which necessitates work outside of the home. There are some
contradictions in how the accountability processes work, since informal (individual transformation) and formal (participation) goals do not always align precisely. Both of these goals prioritize work, which is visible in the program requirements and their enforcement (formal accountability) and in the expectations espoused by program managers (informal accountability). My findings also indicate that managers heavily draw on ideology in connection with accountability. Not only are formal and informal accountability processes mutually reinforcing, but they are also often laden with ideologies such as neoliberalism, paternalism, and mothering ideology. The presence of these ideologies in the accountability processes makes it so that particular practices and values are being encouraged and others discouraged. In the next section, I continue the discussion of ideology in the context of these accountability processes.

**IDEOLOGY AND STEREOTYPES IN PUBLIC DISCOURSE**

Program managers talk about clients in a way that reflects sentiments and stereotypes found in public discourse. The stereotypes of welfare clients found in public discourse are connected to ideologies, such as neoliberalism, paternalism, and racism (Gilens 1999; Misra et al. 2003; Soss et al. 2011). Public discourse often represents clients as welfare queens: immoral, promiscuous, exploitative of state resources, irresponsible (especially with money), and lazy (Collins 1990; Neubeck and Cazenave 2001; Rousseau 2009). Public discourse also represents poverty as a matter of individual failure, often specifically citing family structure and a lack of work ethic as reasons that people experience poverty (Kingfisher 1996; Naples 1998; Neubeck and Cazenave 2001; Rousseau 2009). My findings suggest that program managers incorporate these stereotypes of clients and poverty into how they talk about the program. In doing so, they also reinforce existing ideologies surrounding welfare, including neoliberalism, paternalism, racism, and specific mothering ideologies.
Neoliberalism and Paternalism

Throughout my three findings chapters, I find that program managers draw on neoliberalism to construct clients as lazy, lacking work ethic, and unwilling to accept personal responsibility for their futures. Program managers use this assumption that clients are lazy to explain why they do not apply for OWF, as justification for requiring clients to complete a requirement, and as rationale for sanctions and time limits. As described above, the assumption that clients lack work ethic aligns with stereotypes of welfare recipients that are prominent in public discourse (Kingfisher 1996; Neubeck and Cazenave 2001).

Program managers draw on paternalism to construct clients as incompetent, child-like, and in-need of guidance to succeed. Managers would use clients’ incompetence to talk about the importance of surveillance, requiring verification of activities, and using the work requirements of the cash assistance program to teach clients basic skills (e.g., getting up on time, dressing appropriately, etc.). Dominating groups have historically used stereotypes and controlling images to label a vulnerable population as in-need of assistance and subsequently used policies to regulate the lives of those in the vulnerable population (Jackman 1994; Rousseau 2009). The vulnerable group’s need for resources allows for those in power to exert control over their lives (Jackman 1994; Rousseau 2009). Welfare in particular has historically been used to control the lives of Black women (Rousseau 2009).

Program managers also incorporate neoliberalism and paternalism into how they talk about clients’ mothering. They do this by describing clients via the controlling image of the welfare queen: incompetent at mothering (paternalism) and lacking the skills associated with neoliberalism (e.g., work ethic, motivation). Thus, the public perceives mothers on welfare as a drain on state resources. To counteract the perceived deficiencies of the welfare queen, program
managers promote economic nurturing—a mothering ideology that focuses on mothers working outside of the home to care for their children (Keller 1994).

While managers frequently relied on neoliberal and paternal ideologies, there are also instances in which some of them would undermine these ideologies. In talking about sanctions and time limits, some program managers undermine neoliberal ideology by questioning whether the work-focused, punitive policies of OWF benefit clients and whether the approaches to enforcing them are necessary or effective. Specifically, some program managers recommend removing sanctions and time limits because they do not believe they benefit clients and because they are difficult to implement. In these cases, managers acknowledge how the work assignment, sanctions, and time limits are cumbersome for clients and provide very little pay-off. These cases undermine neoliberalism by suggesting that it is acceptable for clients to receive a benefit without participating in a work requirement. Additionally, suggesting that sanctions and time limits are unnecessary undermines the paternalistic emphasis on surveillance. This is significant because it is one of the central ways that power is used in the welfare bureaucracy to regulate clients’ lives (Rousseau 2009). This may be reflective of critiques of accountability structures and how they tend to individualize problems (Roberts 2001). Also, how they can be used by more powerful social actors to assert authority and control over less powerful actors (Miller 1983).

There are also program managers who undermine neoliberal and paternalistic ideology by talking about how clients may be strategic with how they use cash assistance. By recognizing clients’ strategic use of OWF, program managers present clients as rational social actors and acknowledge that a lack of work ethic (neoliberal assumption) and/or incompetence (paternalistic assumption) are not the primary reasons that clients do not apply for cash
assistance. Throughout my analyses I find that even when managers resist ideology and problematic representations of clients at many points in the interview, all of them draw on neoliberal and paternal ideology at some point. For most managers, even, the interviews were heavily laden with these ideologies. The prevalence of neoliberalism and paternalism throughout program managers’ talk is likely a combined product of its omniscience in public discourse, welfare policy itself, and managers’ own beliefs.

**Mothering Ideologies**

Managers express conflicting sentiments regarding mothering ideology, which is visible in how managers talk about clients meeting children’s needs versus prioritizing work. In terms of meeting children’s needs, managers talk about expecting clients to sacrifice and invest resources in children. These expectations reflect ideals of intensive mothering (e.g., self-sacrifice, child-centered practices, investment in children), which is the hegemonic mothering ideology in the United States (Arendell 1999, 2000; Hays 1996). However, managers also extensively discuss their expectations for clients to work, which is less child-centered as it involves placing children in child care. This conflict represents a “no-win situation” that women and mothers often face in negotiating the demands of work and mothering (Hays 1996). Economic nurturing, however, frames work outside the home in a more child-centered way (Keller 1994). Specifically, economic nurturering presents work outside of the home as a way to accumulate resources that can be used to nurture children. As such, it superficially resolves the “no-win situation” by implying that work and family needs are aligned and can be met via work. However, program managers often neglect to talk about how this work-centered “balance” benefits children. In doing so, these managers neglect to note how the long hours and low-wages of welfare and other low-wage job can be costly to mothers and children (Edin and Lein 1996). The emphasis on the “work”
component of economic nurturing is especially interesting since this mothering ideology was the product of magazines targeting middle class mothers as a way to frame “work” as compatible with mothering (rather than the other way around; Keller 1994).

Due to the controlling image of the “welfare mother,” people are often critical when mothers experiencing poverty want to stay home with their children (Chavkin 1999; Collins 1990; Rousseau 2009). While managers rarely comment explicitly on clients staying home with their children, throughout their talk there was a clear expectation for clients to work outside of the home. The few managers that did bring up the notion of clients being stay-at-home parents often compared clients to other workers, noting how it is common for parents (even those of other class backgrounds) to need to work outside of the home rather than stay home with their children. This reflects the economic insecurity in the US that has created a need for dual-income households (Damaske 2011). Public discourse further constructs poor women, especially poor Black women, who wish to stay home with their children as parasites who drain resources from the state (Chavkin 1999; Rousseau 2009). Additionally, the work requirement of the cash assistance policy essentially prevents mothers on welfare from staying home by mandating they participate in work activities (Chavkin 1999; Gross et al. 2014; Taylor et al. 2016). Since mothers on welfare rely on state resources to survive, staying home to care for children is rarely seen as a valid choice because they are expected to serve as a role model of good work ethic and provide for their children by acquiring more resources (Arendell 1999; Hays 2003). The emphasis on mothers providing material resources for their children reflects intensive mothering practices (Hays 1996) and “concerted cultivation” (Lareau 2003), two related mothering ideologies that promote investing extensive resources into raising children. Furthermore, the high expectations for mothers to provide a variety of resources for their children reflects the emphasis
on materialism and capitalism (Rothman 2000). While women in general often face criticism regardless of their mothering choices (the mommy wars; Crowley 2015), for mothers on welfare, the mommy wars are compounded by racialized controlling images that cast further doubt on their mothering practices (Collins 1990; Rousseau 2009). In the next section, I further deconstruct how managers covertly draw on racism when they stereotype their clients with the controlling image of the “welfare queen.”

**Racism**

Another ideology that program managers draw on is racism. Managers rarely explicitly discuss “race” as it pertains to poverty, welfare, and their clients. However, my analyses suggest that managers adopt colorblind language to convey prejudice in a more covert way. Colorblind racism refers to the trend for racism to persist through practices that are “subtle, institutional, and apparently nonracial” but ultimately contribute to the reproduction of racial inequality (Bonilla-Silva 2010:3). I find that program managers incorporate colorblind racism into their talk by using controlling images of welfare queens to stereotype clients’ mothering practices. Program managers draw on the racialized controlling image of the welfare queen by describing clients as hypersexual, lazy, having children with multiple fathers, and spending (state) money in inappropriate ways. Significantly, many of these controlling images are not supported by statistics of typical welfare client demographics (Handler 2003). That is, the average welfare recipient is a white woman in her mid-30s with an average of fewer than 2 children (Handler 2003).

Racialized controlling images can be used to justify policies and practices designed to control Black families (Rousseau 2009). Program managers use these controlling images of clients to call for clients to adopt work-centered mothering practices. In some cases, managers
also use the controlling image of the welfare queen to blame clients for interacting with formal accountability structures (e.g., sanctions, time limits) or as an explanation for why clients are poor. Like racism, neoliberalism and paternalism are often used to blame individuals for their outcomes, while factors contributing to structural inequalities are ignored. Racism, neoliberalism, and paternalism appear to work in tandem to promote individualism, meritocracy, and regulation of vulnerable populations (Jackman 1994; Rousseau 2009; Soss et al. 2011). While managers’ use of the controlling image of the “welfare queen” is visible through analysis, it is difficult to fully disentangle class- and race-based stereotypes and controlling images. Specifically, both Black and poor people have historically been stereotyped as being lazy and lacking work ethic (Neubeck and Cazenave 2001; Rousseau 2009). Thus, it is certainly possible that program managers are also drawing on racism when they reproduce the stereotypes about people who experience poverty that are found in public discourse. In the next section, I further discuss managers’ variation between individual and structural explanations for poverty.

**EXPLANATIONS OF POVERTY**

Public discourse in the United States often represents poverty as a problem of individual failure that can be resolved by changing behavior surrounding work ethic and family structure (Kingfisher 1996; Naples 1998; Neubeck and Cazenave 2001; Rousseau 2009). I find that program managers incorporate a seemingly contradictory blend of both individual and structural/situational explanations for clients’ circumstances and behavior. Managers often rely on individual explanations (e.g., clients’ behavior and lack of work ethic) to explain why clients are poor and/or do not meet the goals of the program. However, in some instances managers also note how situational constraints and/or structural barriers make it difficult for clients to succeed in the program and rise out of poverty.
Individual Explanations

Since individualism is a central and prominent ideology in the US (Johnson 2008; Soss et al. 2011), it is not surprising that managers would adopt individual explanations for clients’ circumstances. Individualistic explanations for poverty are also visible in the prevalence of neoliberalism and the rhetoric of “personal responsibility” in public discourse (Soss et al. 2011; Neubeck and Cazenave 2001). Given the centrality of individualism and belief in meritocracy in America, it is common for social actors to view individuals as responsible for their own outcomes and overlook structural explanations for phenomena (Johnson 2008).

Many managers rely on individual explanations for why clients receive sanctions, reach time limits, cannot find work, and cannot become self-sufficient. According to most managers, clients experience poverty, receive sanctions, reach time limits, and do not have a job because they lack work ethic, competency, and/or behavioral skills. As Handler (2003) notes, one of the assumptions of current welfare policy is that clients lack the motivation to participate in the labor market. The work assignment is viewed as a way for clients to learn valued skills and become better workers (Handler 2003). By attributing success to clients’ personal skills and efforts, managers can blame clients for their own failure.

Managers’ individualistic explanations for achievement similarly apply to how they discuss clients’ mothering. Managers often focus on the flaws in clients’ mothering practices—especially when it comes to the resources they provide for their children. This isn’t uncommon, as mothering practices in general are often contentious and subject to public critique (Crowley 2015). Managers suggest that clients’ mothering practices warrant correction and that this will help clients achieve social mobility. By implying that mothering practices can make or break one’s economic status, program managers contribute to individualizing poverty. That is, the
blame and burden are both placed on mothers when we focus on mothering practices as a potential cause and solution to poverty. While it is common for mothers to be blamed for their children’s outcomes (Arendell 1999; Ladd-Taylor 2004; Risley-Curtiss and Heffernan 2003), this takes on additional weight when that “outcome” is poverty. Mothers on welfare are often denied the social and economic support to meet hegemonic mothering standards and yet are held responsible for their children’s life circumstances (Arendell 1999; Hays 2003; Ladd-Taylor 2004; Risley-Curtiss and Heffernan 2003). While program managers themselves are only one group of social actors that contribute to this problem, it is important to recognize how this kind of ideological buy-in has consequences for mothers on welfare.

Individual explanations for clients’ circumstances ignore barriers that welfare clients encounter, such as lack of education and job experience, transportation, poor living conditions (e.g., unsafe neighborhoods), lacking self-efficacy, and feeling undermined by the way the program operates (Perry-Burney and Jennings 2003). The welfare program also lacks the resources to transition clients to living-wage employment and thus substitutes receiving benefits for working low-wage, dead-end jobs (Myles and Quadagno 2000). With the welfare reform and reauthorization, the cash assistance program has become more about surveillance and regulation of clients, which has left many social service agencies lacking the infrastructure and resources to help clients transition into the workforce (Allard 2007; Handler 2003).

Situational and Structural Explanations

Most managers selectively acknowledge alternative explanations to the individualistic narrative by sometimes mentioning how situational constraints and/or structural forces impact clients’ lives. Like previous research (Pearson 2007; Watkins-Hayes 2009), I find that some managers are critical of the complexity of the program and the difficulties and barriers clients
encounter trying to navigate its requirements. In talking about the intake process, many program managers describe how their clients genuinely struggle to survive. While most managers do this by recognizing clients’ financial strain, other managers also identify structural forces (e.g., the economy) as factors contributing to clients’ circumstances. By connecting structural forces to clients’ experiences, these managers undermine the emphasis on personal responsibility and meritocracy that is central to neoliberal ideology (Soss et al. 2011).

Program managers also acknowledge alternative (and structural) explanations, such as high unemployment rates and the lengthy disability application process, for clients’ circumstances and interactions with formal accountability structures. When managers recognize how structural forces affect clients’ lives, they undermine some of the neoliberal values that emphasize the significance of individual effort and personal responsibility (Soss et al. 2011). A few managers similarly acknowledged structural barriers that shape clients’ lives and interfere with their ability to participate in the required work activities successfully. Program managers would more often invoke structural explanations for phenomena when they talk about difficulties meeting participation rates. This is likely because the pressure to meet participation rates affects program managers as well. Specifically, managers would bring up structural forces, along with criticisms of welfare policies, to account for failing to meet the state’s expectation for participation rates.

Program managers would also occasionally acknowledge situational constraints and structural barriers that interfere with clients’ ability to mother. Transportation to child care is the primary point at which managers would describe barriers to mothering. Specifically, several managers describe how lack of transportation in the county affects clients’ ability to secure child care. Yet, even while identifying this barrier, many managers imply that it is clients’
responsibility to resolve this dilemma. There are also some managers who recognize the constraints on resources for mothers on welfare. In noting these constraints, managers would often relay more realistic expectations for clients’ mothering practices that did not impose middle-class standards on them.

**IMPLICATIONS**

My findings have both theoretical and practical implications. In terms of theory, my analysis contributes to an interesting intersection of literatures in inequality (race, class, and gender), discourse, ideology, organizational accountability, public policy, and mothering. My work supports the findings of other scholars in terms of finding the continued relevance of the ideologies of neoliberalism, paternalism, racism, and work-based mothering ideology to welfare (Soss et al. 2011; Neubeck and Cazenave 2001; Jackman 1994; Rousseau 2009; Keller 1994; Taylor 2011). Specifically, my findings illustrate how welfare officials use ideologies in a way that perpetuates race, gender, and class prejudices through neoliberalism, paternalism, and controlling images of the welfare mother. Furthermore, I illustrate that managers often connect these ideologies to the formal rules of the program, which reflects the racialized history of welfare policies themselves.

The qualitative nature of my analysis and findings also illustrate how managers incorporate these ideologies into how they discuss accountability structures. Notably, managers frame neoliberal values as positive goals for anyone to strive toward. This reflects the neoliberal, labor-market focused climate in the US (Soss et al. 2011). With paternalism, managers often rely on implicit assumptions of clients’ incompetence to frame intervention and invasive services as benevolent (similar to Jackman 1994). For colorblind racism, managers invoke the racialized controlling image of the welfare queen, often covertly, by describing clients as hypersexual,
dependent, unhygienic, and lacking work ethic. In connection with accountability, managers often used failure to meet neoliberal ideals, and paternalistic and racialized conceptions of clients to understand why clients succeed and fail in the program. Furthermore, managers also use these criteria to differentiate “ideal” and “non-ideal” clients.

My findings also have practical implications in terms of considering how managers’ use of ideologies may affect welfare implementation. Again, program managers are in a uniquely situated role wherein they must contend with superiors and unclear policy goals, have some discretion over organizational goals and culture, and have much less interaction with clients than frontline workers (Bardach and Lesser 1996; Brodkin 2008; Hoshino 1973; Lipsky 1980; Soss et al. 2011). Ultimately, managers draw on ideologies that are prominent in public discourse when they talk about the cash assistance program and clients’ performances. It is significant that they draw on public perceptions of clients because research indicates that these controlling images are based on myths and stereotypes and not the reality of who welfare clients are (Gilens 1999; Handler 2003; Rousseau 2009). These controlling images found in public discourse are heavily racialized and further stigmatize poverty and welfare. Managers perpetuating discourse embedded with racialized controlling images can also have practical implications (Gilens 1999; Neubeck and Cazenave 2001). Discourse on poverty influences how policies are created and viewed and thus has repercussions for maintaining or resisting inequality (Gilens 1999). Additionally, policies and discourses often frame people experiencing poverty and their needs in a way that may not be accurate or helpful to fixing the problem (Sykes 1988).

While it is problematic that program managers draw on ideological discourse and controlling images of clients, it is largely reflective of the existing climate, the training they receive, and the way welfare policies themselves have evolved (Gilens 1999; Neubeck and
Cazenave 2001). Neoliberalism, paternalism, and racism are pervasive in public discourse surrounding welfare—so it is not surprising that program managers are susceptible to it. Yet, this has practical implications in terms of managers’ training. Specifically, training managers to have greater awareness of the variety of structural forces and constraints that shapes clients’ lives might lessen their reliance on ideologies and controlling images in understanding and explaining their clients’ actions. My findings illustrate that managers rarely question neoliberalism, framing it as a positive set of values. While achievement and work are valuable in our society, in the case of people experiencing poverty it is important to understand that their economic circumstances are not solely a product of individual effort. While a larger welfare reform that provides more generous benefits is more ideal for improving the conditions of people in poverty; improving the education of welfare officials marks a small step within the existing infrastructure that may reduce these officials’ reliance on problematic ideologies and controlling images of their clients.

**LIMITATIONS**

There are some limitations to my analysis. While the interviews I use provide a lot of detail regarding many aspects of program managers’ jobs, the cash assistance program, and opinions about clients; they do not include information regarding managers’ length of employment as welfare officials or the training process they go through. Having information about managers’ experience and training could help provide insight into the values and perspectives they are socialized into through their careers. Thus, this information would provide a sense of how much the workplace culture influences managers’ understandings of clients and the cash assistance program. These analyses would likely also be strengthened if the interviews included questions that directly asked managers about their clients’ mothering practices. Yet, it is
also telling that many program managers spoke at-length about the mothering of their clients without being explicitly asked to discuss this topic.

Another limitation of this research is that the scope of the data only allows me to analyze how managers talk about accountability processes. While talk is important, it would be interesting to see if managers follow through on enforcing the accountability processes that they describe. For example, these data illustrate that program managers talk about encouraging clients to mother in particular ways. However, I am unable to demonstrate if program managers actually have these conversations with clients. Thus, having observational data would reveal whether program managers enforce accountability in a way that is consistent with how they describe doing so. Observational data would further provide more precise information regarding the variety of tasks that program managers routinely perform as well as the discretion that they have in implementing the cash assistance program.
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