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A Narrative Policy Framework and Feminist Critical Policy Analysis of the Welfare Reform Acts, and The Higher Education of Single Welfare Mothers

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Abstract

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by

Evelyn Jean Mangin

MPhil, Walden University, 2020

MSA, Central Michigan University, 2010

BS, College of Staten Island, City University of New York, 1997

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Abstract

Scholars approached poverty through welfare reform by focusing on reductions in caseloads, timing out of benefits, and who was and not deserving of a four year college degree. There is limited research regarding the power of narratives during the policy process and their influences on the language in welfare public laws. This qualitative study addressed the gap in the literature and policy analysis research by comparing and analyzing the welfare narratives and language used by policymakers and political actors from four presidential administrations: Presidents Clinton, Bush, Obama, and Trump, between 1996-2018. This study employed the narrative policy framework (NPF), a theory of the policy process, and feminist critical policy analysis (FCPA), the conceptual framework and gender lens, since single welfare mothers are the population mostly affected by welfare legislation. Official government documents and reliable data were collected from federal and state government websites, women's advocacy coalitions, and semi structured interviews with 3 single mothers who attended state institutions of higher education in NC during welfare reform and while receiving welfare benefits. The results found, the narratives used during the policy process had the power to influence the language in welfare legislation and included the social construction of single welfare mothers. Positive social change happens when policy narratives change, institutions of higher education and single welfare mothers advocate for welfare policies including four year college degrees as work and a policy tool to reduce poverty and create sustainable paths out of poverty. This research has the potential to influence policymakers' decisions regarding welfare legislation.

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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my loved ones, and my ancestors, who were my sounding boards, cheerleaders, and spiritual supporters to encourage me to be all that I can be. They were there supporting me through every step of this journey. My grandma Helena always told me as a child, achieve what you want to achieve, you are the accumulation of the ancestors, inspire yourself to be great and inspire others within our family to be great. My mother, who raised three children on her own was the best example a little girl from the harbor-village could have. Mom you are my friend, in-my Patti voice.

To my children, Rachelle, Ashley, and my grandchildren, Kaeyanna, Brianna, and Gabrielle, I lay before you the stepping-stone to your greatness. You have been there, with me, from the beginning, through the long nights and early morning, encouraging me to keep moving forward pursuing this dream; and for you I am blessed and truly grateful. Thank you.

To single mothers everywhere, I hear-you, and inspire you to keep being great and to change the narratives of your life. You, like me, are the stepping-stones for generations to come. Be great, Be phenomenal women.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Social welfare policy remains a contentious issue amongst policymakers, political actors, and those affected by their narratives and policy language. In 1996, President Clinton through bipartisan legislation "changed welfare as we know it" by enacting the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA), which included the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), a cash assistance policy for welfare recipients with dependent children (Highsmith, 2016; Trattner, 1999). For this study, all welfare legislation is referred to as the ACTs and subsequent welfare legislation. Significant welfare policies have changed what had been stable welfare policy over a long period through Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) that allowed families with low and no income to receive cash disbursement as long as federal and state means-testing requirement were met and with no time limitations to move from welfare to work (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services [USHHS], 2018). The ACTs changed these AFDC requirements by limiting the time that welfare recipients with dependent children could receive TANF cash assistance to 2 years, reduced lifetime eligibility for all welfare benefits to 5 years, devolved federal program responsibility which gave states more autonomy in developing and administering welfare to work programs, and defined what it meant to work (Cruse et al., 2018; Nichol, 2018; Phinney, 2016).

This study is important due to the limited research on the policy language in the ACTs that limited or eliminated sustainable paths out of poverty for single mothers receiving welfare benefits through 4-year degree programs; for which studies have

confirmed leads to higher literarcy, higher wages, and independence from welfare assistance (Cruse et al., 2018; Cruse et al., 2018; Green, 2016; Jimenez et al., 2016). Scholars have focused on the intent of the ACTs which were to promote responsibility, self-sufficiency, independence from government assistance, and to reduce poverty in America by moving welfare recipients from welfare to work (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities [CBPP], 2018; Cruse et al., 2018; Nichol, 2018; Phinney, 2016). Consequently, scholars have determined that the reduction in welfare caseloads were not due to the ACTs' work requirement, but instead was due to a robust economy (Phinney, 2016; Scope, 2018). Furthermore, as of 2017, there were 9.6 million single mother households of which 2.78 million were living below the federal poverty line of $24,860 for a family of four (Fontenot et al., 2018; U.S. Census Bureau, 2018), and $24,036 for a family of four living in North Carolina (NC) for which welfare benefits have been reduced or eliminated (Nichol, 2018; NC Department of Health and Human Services [NCDHHS], (2018).

Essentially, it is imperative to explore the ACTs and the narratives that constructed the ACTs since narratives had the power to influence welfare reform policy language. For example, single welfare mothers attending 4-year degree programs were penalized because the ACTs do not consider education as work and a 4-year program exceeds the 2-year welfare to work limitation. The implication of the ACTs and subsequent welfare legislation may have contributed to the reduction in single parent college students in 1995 from 649,000 that received cash assistance, to 35,000 in 2015 receiving TANF (Freeman, 2015). Single welfare mothers seeking 4-year degrees as a

sustainable path out of poverty is the population most affected by the policy rhetoric that constructed the ACTs and subsequent welfare legislation (Cruse et al., 2018; Jimenez et al., 2016). When policies, such as the ACTs, are designed with little to no input from the ones most affected by the policy language, narratives used by policymakers may construct the poor as: dependent, undeserving, Welfare Queens, having illegitimate children, encouraging generational welfare dependency, malingering, and abusing the welfare system (Gilens, 1999; Glanton, 2018; Roberts, 2014; Zucchino, 1997). Therefore, the ACTs may only include the strategies, belief systems, philosophies, and normative ideas of policymakers and political actors, which often manifest through their leadership style (Campbell, 2012). These actions by policymakers and political actors have the power to determine how the poor are perceived and treated in society, led to a broader class of the working poor, and increases of families living in poverty (CBPP, 2018; Goddard et al., 2016; Nichol, 2018; Schneider & Ingram, 1993).

This study focused on the policy narratives and language used by legislators and political actors that construct the ACTs and subsequent welfare policies, from four Presidential administration between 1996-2018, which targeted single welfare mothers. It was essential to this study to understand how politics enters policy design that includes narratives that influence policy language determining how welfare recipients, especially single welfare mothers, are perceived and treated in society. Equally important, was to understand the lived experiences of single welfare mothers who resided in NC and pursued 4-year college degrees during the implementation of the ACTs and subsequent welfare legislation. Therefore, understanding the lived experiences of these mothers may

offer insight to policymakers and political actors when constructing welfare policies and helps to inform their welfare policy decisions.

Chapter 1 includes a brief overview of the study, the background of the legislative and presidential welfare reform policies, the problem statement, the definition of key terms, the assumptions, scope and delimitations, and the limitations of the study findings. Last, Chapter 1 provides the significance of the study and concludes with a summary.

Background

It is necessary to understand the role and power of policy narratives in the policy process that determines policy language and may implicate how the poor are perceived and treated in society. This study analyzed and compared the narratives and the language in the ACTs, and subsequent welfare policies that may not consider 4-year college degree attainment by single-welfare mothers as work, limits cash assistance to 2 years, and all welfare benefits to 5 years over a lifetime (Goddard et al., 2016; Nichol, 2018; Scope, 2018). Also, the ACTs further devolved responsibility for welfare programs through block grants to the states, giving states autonomy in developing and implementing welfare to work programs (Cruse et al., 2018; Phinney, 2016) where some states increased, and others decreased the work requirement. The language in the ACTs and subsequent welfare legislation are the result of the social construction of single welfare mothers affecting their sustainable paths out of poverty through higher education.

Consequently, current research confirms that 4-year degrees through higher education equals increased literacy, higher wages, and decreases those living in poverty (Cruse et al., 2018; Green, 2016; Jimenez et al., 2016; Milli & Gault, 2018). Further, as

of 2017, 2.78 million single-mother households were living below the federal poverty threshold of $24,860 and $24,036 for a family of four living in NC (NCDHHS, 2018; Nichol, 2018) and who may continue receiving some form of government assistance (Fontenot et al., 2018; Goddard et al., 2016). These single mother households lack specific agendas for sustainable paths out of poverty other than through work, or short-term training programs leading to work that did not include livable wages and benefits.

Scholarly literature that examines welfare policy narratives and language is limited and has focused on the increases and decreases in poverty (Cruse et al., 2018; Goddard et al., 2016; Phinney, 2016), absentee fathers (Slaughter, 2018), and whether increases in employment were an outcome of welfare reform or a residual of a robust economy (Phinney, 2016; Scope, 2018). Therefore, the literature is limited in discourse when considering the power and impact of how politics enters policy narratives, and how they are interpreted through policy language in the ACTs and subsequent welfare legislation. Hence, this study was needed to compare and critically analyze the ACTs' and subsequent welfare legislation's narratives and policy language at the federal, state, and local levels of government, and how this has affected the lived experiences of single welfare mothers, who pursued 4-year degrees, as sustainable paths out of poverty through higher education.

The importance of this study reveals the benefits associated with single welfare mothers having a 4-year college degree that includes decreasing the rates of those living in poverty, increased literacy, and sustainable employment (Cruse et al., 2018; Goddard et al., 2016; Phinney, 2016; Reeves et al., 2016). Incidentally, single welfare mothers are

the population most impacted by ACTs and subsequent welfare legislation's narratives and language, and this study may initiate a review of welfare reform legislation which could include assessment of socially constructed language, what it means to work, and sustainable paths out of poverty.

Statement of the Problem

The problem addressed in this study was the language in the ACTs and subsequent welfare legislation used to address poverty in the United States. The problem specifically is the narratives used to construct welfare reform legislature requiring welfare recipient to move from welfare to work, caps cash assistance benefits to 2 years, and all benefits to 5 years over a lifetime. Additionally, there is limited research addressing the gap in the literature regarding the power and role that policy narratives have and their effects on the policy language in the ACTs, and subsequent welfare legislation from four presidential administrations: Presidents Clinton, Bush, Obama, and Trump. The ACTs do not consider 4-year degree attainment as a sustainable path out of poverty for single welfare mothers because of the time limits on benefits and mandatory work requirements. However, according to a 2018 U.S. Census Bureau report, as of 2017 there were 9.6 million single mother households, of which 2.78 million were living below the federal poverty threshold of $24,860 for a family of four and receiving some form of government assistance (Fontenot et al., 2018; NCDHHS, 2018; Nichol, 2018). Consequently, in the State of NC, as of 2017, there were 1.6 million people living in poverty, of which 678,400 were headed by single mothers living below the state poverty

threshold of $24,036 for a family of four (NCDHHS 2018; Nichol, 2018; USDHHS, 2018).

This issue is so politically salient that four presidential administrations have created policies to address poverty and the financial independence of welfare recipients through changes in eligibility requirements for government assistance programs. For example, the Clinton administration (1996) created the ACTs, to require welfare recipients to work for government assistance so that they can become self-reliant and financially independent. Next, the Bush administration enacted the Deficit Reduction Act (DRA) in 2005 to tighten fiscal control over spending on social welfare programs and the 2006 Welfare Reauthorization Act that placed stricter work requirements and reporting on states. The Obama Administration (2011) created a Presidential Memorandum (PM) that provided additional waivers for state autonomy to administer the Welfare to Work programs which led to some states reducing, others expanding, and some rejecting the work requirement (U.S. DHHS, 2012). Last, the Trump Administration issued a Presidential Directive enacting the 2018 Welfare Reform and Upward Mobility Act and the Freedom Works Bill , later referred to as the Reducing Poverty in America by Promoting Opportunity and Economic Mobility (PPOEM, 2018) to add stringent means-test requirements for states to receive federal funding for social welfare programs and included the work requirement for the SNAP-food stamp program (CBPP, 2018).

This study adds to the body of literature in policy analysis and social welfare policy by comparing and critically analyzing policy narratives and language in the ACTs, and subsequent welfare legislation, from the four presidential administrations. This

critical analysis of narratives and policy language includes comparing welfare reform and legislation, poverty, employment, self-sufficiency, single mothers, and college degrees related to financial independence using the narrative policy framework (NPF) a theory of the policy process, which is limited in the literature.

Since single welfare mothers are the population mostly affected by welfare reform and legislation, I used feminist critical policy analysis (FCPA) as the lens to examine the ACTs and subsequent welfare legislation that were created to reduce poverty, increase responsibility, create self-sufficiency, reduce government dependence, lower expenditures on social welfare programs, and to address the issue of employment and higher education for welfare recipients. Additionally, a core problem in the language in the ACTs and subsequent welfare legislation is that the ACTs do not consider 4-year degree attainment by single welfare mothers as work. Since single welfare mothers constitute the largest population living in poverty, narratives leading to the construction of the ACTs, socially constructed and penalized single welfare mothers who choose to complete 4-year college degrees and forced some single welfare mothers to leave college for low-paying jobs with little to no benefits, which kept them in poverty (Cruse et al., 2018; Goddard et al., 2016; Highsmith, 2016; Institution for Women's Policy Research [IWPR], 2018; 2020; Phinney, 2016). This population of mothers were impacted the most by the policy language in the ACTs because of the benefits associated with having a 4-year college degree, opposed to a highschool dipolma or a 2-year degree, decreasing the rates of those living in poverty, increase literacy, financial independence from welfare assistance, and sustainable employment (Goddard et al., 2016; Reeves et al., 2016).

This study explored the policy elements of the ACTs that can best support paths out of poverty for single welfare mothers through higher education leading to 4-year degrees. Scholars have focused on the increases and decreases in poverty (Reeves et al., 2016), the reduction in the number of welfare recipients, and the increases in employment, for which employment may not have been an outcome of the welfare reform legislation, instead a residual of a robust economy (Katz, 2012; Phinney, 2016; Nichol, 2018; Scope, 2018). Consequently, these outcomes may not have reduced the need for government assistance programs, making the ACTs and subsequent welfare legislation a critical policy issue.

Also, the gap in the literature does not consider the power and role that policy narratives have and their effects on the policy language in the ACTs, and subsequent welfare legislation from four presidential administrations: Presidents Clinton, Bush, Obama, and Trump. These policy designs affected the welfare policy language at NC and targeting single welfare mothers seeking 4-year college degrees as a sustainable path out of poverty. Equally important is how the policy language may have affected the lived experiences of these single welfare mothers while pursuing 4-year college degrees, especially, when a review of research literature found that higher education equals increase literacy, higher wages, and reduces the need for government assistance (Cruse et al., 2018; Green, 2016; Jimenez et al., 2016). Consequently, this study may initiate a review of the ACTs language that may include socially constructed language, what it means to work, and how the poor are perceived and treated in society.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to address the gap in the literature and add to the body of knowledge in public policy analysis by comparing and analyzing policy narratives and policy language used by policymakers and political actors. Policy narratives had the power to influence policy language during the construction of the ACTs, and subsequent welfare legislation from the four presidential administrations: Clinton, Bush, Obama, and Trump. Increasing the understanding about the role and power of policy narratives that influenced welfare reform legislation regarding poverty, employment, education, and the financial independence of welfare recipients was warranted. Also, I examined the effects that the ACTs' policy language had specifically on NC state and local welfare policies and the enrollment and unenrollment of single welfare mothers attending 4-year college degree programs at institutions of higher education in NC. NC State and local welfare policies included policy language socially constructing and targeting single mothers receiving welfare benefits. Equally important were the lived experiences of single welfare mothers who sought 4-year degrees and the meanings given to those experiences as a result of the ACTs and subsequent welfare legislation. Thereby, combining narrative policy analysis and phenomenological techniques helped to understand these experiences and helps to inform policymakers' decisions regarding welfare reform and increases this study's trustworthiness.

Although the ACTs address the main issue of employment for welfare recipients, the problem is the language in the ACTs did not consider the 4-year degree attainment by single welfare mothers as work and limits benefits to two years and all benefits to five

years over a lifetime for those seeking financial independence through higher education. Consequently, the ACTs' narratives had the power to influence policy language and include socially constructed language and what it means to work. Also, single welfare mothers who choose to complete 4-year college degrees as a sustainable path out of poverty have been penalized with a decrease and/or elimination of benefits or have been forced to leave college before completing a degree. This study adds to the body of research in public policy analysis, and provides data to policymakers addressing the need to increase their understanding of how 4-year degree attainment and the higher education of single welfare mothers can be used as a policy tool when creating narratives and policy language addressing poverty eradication and welfare legisilation. Therefore, these efforts can increase literacy, wages, and reduce dependence on welfare assistance programs.

Research Questions

This study attempted to understand and answer the following research questions:

Research Question 1 (RQ1): What are the forms, content, and constructs of policy narratives, language, and the strategies and belief systems of policymakers and political actors contained in the ACTs and subsequent welfare legislation to alleviate poverty, increase employment, create self-sufficiency, and financial independence of welfare recipients?

Research Question 2 (RQ2): How does NC state and local welfare policies address single welfare mothers seeking 4-year college degrees?

Research Question 3 (RQ3): How did the ACTs, and subsequent welfare reform legislation, affect enrollment and unenrollment of single welfare mothers seeking 4-year degrees at a state institution of higher education in NC?

Research Question 4 (RQ4): What decisions have single welfare mothers made, if any, about 4-year degree attainment since the implementation of the ACTs' 2 year limit of welfare to work requirement, 5 year lifetime limit for benefits, and how have those decision affected their lives?

Theoretical Framework of the Study

This study included the NPF, a theory of the policy process and a systematic approach to critical policy analysis when comparing policy narratives and language form, content, and context (Diem, 2014; Jones & McBeth, 2010; McBeth, et al., 2014; Shanahan et al., 2018; Smith & Larimer, 2015). Narratives are storied containing settings, characters, plots, and moral of the story themes that include the political strategies, beliefs systems, philosophies, normative ideas, and language used by policymakers and political actors to achieve their political agendas and construct public policies (Shanahan et al., 2018). These storied narratives are important in the policy process and "determine how public policies survive from one political administration to another (Shanahan et al., 2018, p.4)" and affects the lives of targeted populations.

However, policy narratives may be used to socially construct groups by having intentional or unintentional outcomes that transfer from politics to policy to society (Berry & Berry, 1999; Ertas, 2015; Sabatier, 2000; Shanahan et al., 2014; Shanahan et al., 2018). Therefore, NPF theory helps when trying to understand the power and role of

policy narratives and is necessary when critically analyzing and comparing the form, content, and context of the ACTs including, subsequent welfare reform legislation from four presidential administrations.

The ACTs and subsequent welfare legislation were constructed with little to no input from the ones most affected by the policy language which may have determined how single welfare mothers are perceived and treated in society. Additionally, employing NPF in analyzing policy narratives and language derived from the literature and legislation, "can reveal how social construction, bounded relativity, generalizable structures, and the levels of policy narratives and language enters politics and policies, and allows for a critical analysis of the data collected" (Shanahan et al., 2018, pp.178-179).

NPF supports this study's purpose and was used to answer this study's research questions through FCPA, a gender lens to examine and compare policy narratives and language, since single welfare mothers are the population most likely affected by welfare legislation. The FPCA posit that there is social construction, lack intersectionality, hegemony, and the lack of problem definition of social problems that include the feminist perspectives in policy analysis and the policy process. The NPF and the FCPA helped to identify whether policy shifts are possible leading to sustainable paths out of poverty through 4-year degrees for single welfare mothers. Also, the NPF helped to determine the ACTs' effects on NC state and local welfare policies, the enrollment and unenrollment of single welfare mothers at institutions of higher education in NC, and the effects, on their lived experiences as single welfare mothers who pursued 4-year degrees as a sustainable

path out of poverty. Therefore, the tenets of the NPF compliment the general qualitative nature of this proposed study and allowed for a critical feminist policy analysis of the data, comparison and analysis of narratives and policy language, and the data collection that may not have been considered when designing the ACTs and subsequent welfare legislation.

Specific perspectives and a more thorough explanation of the ACTs, subsequent welfare reform legislation, FCPA, NPF, theoretical insights such as levels of analysis, social construction, and phenomenological techniques derived from the literature are contained in Chapter 2 of this study.

Nature of the Study

The nature of this study was a general qualitative design using narrative policy analysis and phenomenological techniques. This approach to the study allowed for the collection, analysis, comparison, and examination of how policy narratives had the power to influence policy language in the ACTs and subsequent welfare legislation from four presidential administrations: Presidents Clinton, Bush, Obama, and Trump. The effects of these welfare policy narratives and language on NC state and local welfare policies, and the lived experiences of single welfare mothers who pursued 4-year college degrees as a sustainable path out of poverty leading to self-sufficiency. Incorporating phenomenological techniques in this study allowed the me to collect deep, thick and rich data based on the lived experiences from those who were most affected by welfare reform legislation, single welfare mothers. Narrative policy analysis allowed for an examination of welfare policies through the lens of FCPA that brought a gender

perspective to the analysis of policy narratives and language; and contends that policymaking contains power structures, patriarchy, and dominance to maintain the status quo in the policymaking arena and society (Marshall, 1999; McPhail, 2003; Katz, 2013; Katz, 2019). The NPF posits that narratives are the stories that policymakers and political actors tell themselves and one another that transfer to public policies and society.

The participant pool for this study was to include 8-10 participants, however, three participants returned signed Informed Consent Forms and attended the individual online semistructured interviews. The participants were single mothers that received welfare benefits while attending 4-year degree program at state institutions of higher education in NC during the implementation of the ACTs and subsequent welfare legislation. The initial participant pool was recruited by placing ads in local newspapers in NC and from flier postings at public places in NC. Additional research participants were recruited using snowballing and then selected for the study using criterion sampling. The sample population size, although smaller than originally planned for this phenomenological study, and based on the scope and nature of this study, returned data sufficient to answer the study's research questions (Saldaña, 2016). Snowball sampling allowed for the recruitment of select populations for which initial participants provided contact information for additional participants that were difficult to locate (Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Saldana, 2016). Criteria sampling helped to match participants to the research topic and purpose using a modified researcher-developed qualitative questionnaire, qualified by three subject matter experts in specific disciplines. The questionnaires helped to determine which potential participants most closely matched the research topic.

A modified interview guide containing open-ended questions developed by Scope (2018) and certified by three subject matter experts from specific disciplines, was used during semistructured, individual, online interviews with the sample population of single mothers who received welfare benefits while attending 4-year degree programs at institutions of higher education (IHEs) in NC. The use of certified data collection instruments helped to increase the research validity and reliability.

The participant interviews were conducted using Facebook, Zoom, and Skype, online websites; after receiving signed researcher-developed permission forms and informed consents. The data from the interviews were analyzed by me using NVivo-12 Plus for initial coding, and then theme coding for thematic analysis to determine if themes and differences occurred in and across the data that progressed toward the main discourse in this study (Saldana, 2016).

Additionally, data was collected from official government and institutional websites containing archival documents and transcripts, the NC State Assembly, and state and local welfare agency websites. Data from NC state institutions of higher education containing the enrollment and unenrollment of single welfare mothers in NC was unavailable since IHEs and NC State does not track this information as required by Federal regulations (ARRA, 2009). Instead, statistical data about single mother households in NC and their degree attainment was collected from the U.S. Department of Education, Center for Statistics, and The Institute for Womens' Policy Research, a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization that conducts scholarly research on women, equality,

equity, degree access and completion, and poverty; for which both sources of data are audited for accuracy.

The policy narratives and ACTs were collected from four Presidential admnistrations between 1996-2018, then the narratives were analyzed using the NPF, a theory of the policy process, based on the costructs found in the scholarly literature. The ACTs were analyzed through the lens of the FCPA, a feminist critical analysis, based on the constructs found in the scholarly literature. Both the NPF and FCPA were applied to locate and capture themes that were discovered within and across policy narrative or language in the ACTs, and subsequent welfare legislation. Initial and secondary coding of the data was made using the Nvivo-12 Plus which complimented the study's theoretical and conceptual foundations. Using the data collection tools and analysis techniques in this study produced deep, thick, rich, and emergent data that contributes to the body of literature in public policy and policy analysis.

The outcomes of this research have the potential to inform policymakers' understanding and policy decisions about policy designs, narratives, and language used during the policy process that address welfare reform, poverty, employment, education, 4-year college access and completion of single mothers receiving welfare benefits that can lead to self-sufficiency, financial independence, and sustainable paths out of poverty. There were modified researcher developed instruments used in this study that were certified and qualified by three subject matter experts in specific disciplines relevant to public policy and policy analysis.

Definition of Terms

Bounded relativity: are the beliefs, ideologies, norms, normative behaviors, and strategies that are intentional opposed to random when designing policies that influence policy narratives and language; and are the boundaries set by narratives (Shanahan et al., 2018, p.179).

Generalizable structures: are narratives that have a structure like stories, a list of characters, interactions, heroes and villains, and plots which influence policy designs (Shanahan et al., 2018, p.179).

Political Actors: are policy entrepreneurs and nonprofit organizations that have power and influence is policy design and agenda setting (Axworthy, 2013).

Policy Narratives: are the stories used to construct policy designs and the language used in the policies at the macro, meso, and micro levels of government (Shanahan et al., 2018, p. 173).

Single Welfare mothers are women, over the age of 18, who are the head of households containing dependent children under the age of 18 years old and are receiving welfare government assistance (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018).

Social Construction: is a way in which policymakers and political actors group members of society and provide benefits to one group over another group (Berry & Berry, 1999; Schneider & Ingram, 1993; Shanahan et al., 2018, p.178). In this study social construction relates to how single welfare mothers are framed, grouped, treated, and perceived in society; and the narratives used to construct policy language used by policymakers and political actors.

The Working Poor: are members of the American society who work but still experience poverty because of their salaries fall below the federal and state poverty thresholds and are most likely to receive some form of government assistance or incentive to work (Goddard et al., 2016).

Welfare Queens: is a socially constructed derogatory theme that is used to describe female members of society that received government assistance over extended periods through fraud and misrepresentation (Gilens, 1999; Hancock, 2000; Katz, 2013; Roberts, 2014; Zucchino, 1997).

Assumptions

There were multiple assumptions for this study that were necessary when critically analyzing and comparing policy narratives and language, and the lived experiences of single mothers who received welfare benefits while attending 4-year college degree programs in NC. Assumptions help to bound and clarify the research topic and questions. The first assumption was that the modified researcher developed instruments will be sufficient in collecting the data. The next assumption was that the researcher would be able to secure participants that meet the study criteria such as the characteristics, demographics, and socioeconomic descriptions. Also assumed, is participants will respond honestly to interview questions that produce rich, thick, and deep data. Other assumptions were that the participant pool will include single, unmarried, welfare mothers over the age of 18-years old, which were the head of household with dependent children under the age of 18-years old. These mothers would have lived in NC below the federal and state poverty income thresholds and were

receiving welfare assistance while pursuing 4-year college degrees at IHEs in NC. Lastly, it was assumed that the participant pool will have access to the internet and will complete the informed consent, demographic questionnaire, and on-line 60-minute interview pertaining to the study. The assumptions in this study were necessary to critically analyze policy narratives and language and examine the effects on state and local welfare policies and single welfare mothers who sought 4-year college degrees leading to self-sufficiency and a sustainable path out of poverty.

Scope and Delimitations

The scope of this study were the research questions, the ACTs, and subsequent welfare legislation from four presidential administrations: Presidents Clinton, Bush, Obama, and Trump, between 1996-2018, specific to single mothers receiving welfare benefits. The narratives from policymakers and political actors were limited to thirty days prior to enactment of major welfare legislation. According to Sauro (2015), the final narratives contain the most succulent and relevant information. The study participants were 4-year degree seeking students at state institutions of higher education in NC during the implementation of the ACTs and subsequent welfare legislation. The effects of the language in the ACTs and subsequent welfare legislation were socially constructed to target single mothers receiving welfare benefits. Also, the effects of the ACTs and subsequent welfare legislation on NC state and local welfare policies addressing single welfare mothers seeking 4-year college degrees, and the enrollment and unenrollment of this sample population of mothers at seeking 4-year college degrees at a state institution of higher education in NC. Also explored, were the decisions that single welfare mothers

made about 4-year degree attainment since the implementation of the ACTs. The study did not explore single mothers and fathers who did not receive welfare benefits, single welfare fathers, and the working poor, who attended institutions of higher education in NC during the implementation of the ACTs and subsequent welfare legislation.

The delimitations of this study reflect location and time of the sample population of single mothers, living in NC, sought 4-year college degrees, who were receiving AFDC and or TANF while attending state institutions of higher education in NC during the implementation of the ACTs and subsequent welfare legislation. Another delimitation was the ACTs and subsequent welfare legislation from the four presidential administration between 1996-2018, NC state welfare and local welfare policies relevant to single mothers and higher education, and the enrollment and unenrollment the pertaining to the sample population of single mothers. Therefore, the findings of this study are non-transferable because of the general qualitative nature of the study that included inherent limitations such as subjectivity, interpretation, researcher's positionality and reflectivity, the sample population, and sample size.

Limitations

The limitations of this study included non-generalizability of the research findings to the total population because of the small sample size. Reaching single welfare mothers was a challenge after employing additional data collection techniques such increasing advertisements in new papers and on group websites frequently accessed by this population of mothers. Also, the COVID-19 pandemic limited the posting of fliers and advertisements in public places and the restrictions on public gatherings may have limited

participation in this study. Also, the characteristics of the participant pool that included their socioeconomic and demographic standpoints, personal biases, historical distortion of the data based on narratives, the researcher's interpretation of the data, and the researcher's biases based on political and personal interpretation of policy narratives, language, and interviews. However, researcher reflexitivity was used throughout the research study and during the interpretation of the data. Therefore, the results of this study were checked with follow-up questions, member checks, and additional documents (Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Saldaña, 2016; Scope, 2018; Yin, 2014).

Also, limitations included the collection of welfare policy narratives from thirty-days prior to enactment of ACTs. Lastly, NC does not track the enrollment and unenrollment of single welfare mothers pursuing 4 year degrees at state institutions of higher education as required by federal legislation, alternatively, data collection mechanisms were used that returned reliable and auditable data about single mother households, poverty, and degree attainment in NC. The researcher used criticality, reflexivity, collaboration, and rigor throughout the research to reduce biases and increase the trustworthiness of this study (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Thus, the employment of the NPF and FCPA were the right fit for this study and may be used to analyze other social policies.

Significance of the Study

This study was significant because there was limited research and literature that considers the influences, implications, and the power of policy narratives used by policymakers and political actors during the policy process that influenced welfare policy

language. Also, how the policy language contained in the ACTs and subsequent welfare legislation had intended and unintended outcomes affecting state and local welfare policies. NC state and local welfare policies may affect state institution of higher education enrollment and unenrollment of single mothers receiving welfare benefits, their decisions about degree attainment, and their lives. In turn, the ACTs' policy language affected single mothers receiving welfare benefits pursuing 4-year college degrees, and as a result, were targeted and sanctioned with reduction and or loss of benefits since 4-year degree programs are not considered work and the time limits placed on benefits (Cruse, et al., 2018; Fording et al, 2013; Goddard et al., 2016).

According to scholars, policy designs include the storied narratives of policymakers' and political actors' belief systems, philosophies, political strategies, ideals, and normative ideas (Shanahan et al., 2018). Therefore, policy narratives must be considered and critically analyzed to determine their effects on the language in the ACTs, subsequent welfare legislation, higher education institutional policies concerning welfare recipients, state and local welfare policies, and the lived experiences of single welfare mothers who pursued 4-year degrees.

Consequently, the ACTs intended to reduce welfare rolls (those receiving government assistance) through work. Therefore, 4-year degree completion was ignored as a sustainable path out of poverty for this population of single mothers with dependents and may have resulted in increases in the working poor and those living in poverty (Cruse et al., 2018).

This policy design, narratives, and policy language targeted single welfare mothers who attended 4-year college degree programs as a sustainable path out of poverty, which was not considered work (Cruse et al., 2018a; Cruse et al., 2018b; Goddard et al., 2016). As a consequence, the lived experiences of these single welfare mothers must be considered during the policy design and the policymaking process by allowing those affected by the policy narratives and language to construct policy tools that help to determine their behaviors and socioeconomic outcomes (Rich, 2016).

This research has the potential to aid policymakers' decisions concerning welfare policy design and decision making processes and adds to the body of knowledge in public policy, policy analysis, and society. The social change implications of this study may help to remove barriers to self-dependency and financial independence by increasing 4-year degree access and completion for single welfare mothers, improve higher education retention, result in positive benefits to society, and reduce those living in poverty. Therefore, when policymakers and political actors have data that informs their decisions, policy narratives and language may shift resulting in sustainable paths out of poverty through 4-year college degree attainment for welfare recipients.

Summary

Chapter 1 introduced the general qualitative nature of the study, the NPF theory, and FCPA that allows critical analysis and comparison of policy narratives and language which complements phenomenological techniques. Chapter 1 also discussed phenomenological techniques that allow for the understanding of the effects of welfare policy narratives and language, and the lived experiences of single mothers receiving

welfare benefits who sought 4-year college degrees. The ACTs and subsequent welfare legislation continue to be a contentious policy issue amongst policymakers, political actors, and those affected by their policy narratives and language. Chapter 1 shared the policy design process, the theoretical, and the conceptual foundations of this study. Also, tools to examine policy narratives and language, how politics may enter policy, the importance of policy narratives that have the power to influence policy language that have intentional and unintentional outcomes and are important to this study. Thus, the power of narratives has the potential to influence policy language used to socially constructs groups and how society perceives and treats these groups (Schneider & Ingram, 1993; Shanahan et al., 2018), especially single mothers receiving welfare benefits and seeking 4-year college degrees as a sustainable path out of poverty.

Chapter 2 contains a review of the literature about welfare reform, welfare legislation, policy narratives, and policy language. Also, Chapter 2 includes a review of poverty, employment, self-sufficiency, degrees, and the social construction of single welfare mothers from the literature and policy legislation that supports this research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

There is a problem with poverty in America that the ACTs and subsequent welfare legislation intended to help alleviate. The problem is the narratives in the ACTs require welfare recipient to move from welfare to work, caps cash assistance benefits to two years, and all benefits to five years over a lifetime. The policy narratives and language may have increased the poverty rates of single welfare mothers, the population most affected by the ACTs. According to a 2018 Census Bureau report, there were 9.6 million single-mother households in America, in which 2.78 million were living below the federal poverty line of $24,860 for a family of four (Fontenot et al., 2018; U.S. Census Bureau, 2018). In NC, the poverty threshold was $24,036 for a family of four in NC for which welfare benefits have been reduced or eliminated (Nichol, 2018; NCDHHS, 2018). Consequently, NC has one of the highest rates of concentrated poverty in America with 1.6 million people living in poverty of which 678,400 are headed by single mothers (Nichol, 2018; U.S. Census Bureau, 2018).

The purpose of this qualitative study was to address the gap in the literature and add to the body of knowledge in public policy analysis by comparing and analyzing policy narratives and policy language used by policymakers and political actors. Policy narratives had the power to influence policy language during the construction of the ACTs, and subsequent welfare legislation from the four presidential administrations: Clinton, Bush, Obama, and Trump. Increasing the understanding about the role and power of policy narratives that influenced welfare reform legislation regarding poverty,

employment, education, and the financial independence of welfare recipients was warranted. Also examined were the effects that the ACTs' policy language had on NC state and local welfare policies and the enrollment and unenrollment of single welfare mothers attending 4-year college degree programs at institutions of higher education in NC. NC state and local welfare policies contained socially constructed language targeting single mothers receiving welfare benefits. Equally important were the lived experiences of single welfare mothers who sought 4-year degrees and the meanings given to those experiences as a result of the ACTs and subsequent welfare legislation. Thereby, combining narrative policy analysis and phenomenological techniques helped me to understand these experiences and the findings of this study may help to inform policymakers' decisions regarding welfare reform. Furthermore, using multiple approaches to the topic of study increases this study's trustworthiness.

Although the ACTs address the main issue of employment for welfare recipients, the problem is the language in the ACTs did not consider the 4-year degree attainment by single welfare mothers as work and limits benefits to 2 years and all benefits to 5 years over a lifetime for those seeking financial independence through higher education. Consequently, the ACTs' narratives had the power to influence policy language and include socially constructed language and what it means to work. Also, single welfare mothers who choose to complete 4-year college degrees as a sustainable path out of poverty have been penalized with the decrease and or elimination of benefits or forced to leave college. This study adds to the body of research in public policy analysis, and provides data to policymakers addressing the need to increase their understanding of how

4-year degree attainment of single welfare mothers can be used as a policy tool when creating narratives and policy language addressing poverty eradication and welfare legisilation. Therefore, these efforts can increase literacy, wages, and reduce dependence on welfare assistance programs. Further, this study examined welfare policies using the NPF and through the lens of FCPA.

The NPF is a theory of the policy process that revealed how storied narratives are used in the policy process to gain support for the political agendas of policymakers, political actors, and to maintain the status quo in policymaking and society. FCPA has roots in feminist critical theory and critical discourse analysis and was used as a tool to analyze welfare policy language, and phenomenological techniques, interviews, from the perspective of those most affected by the language in the ACTs and subsequent welfare legislation, single welfare mothers. Critically analyzing and comparing the narratives and policy language in the ACTs and subsequent welfare legislation using the NPF and FCPA contributes to previous policy analysis research, identifies alternate policymaking agendas, and establishes evaluation tools for research pertaining to single mothers receiving welfare benefits and higher education. The NPF posits that narratives contain form, content, and characters working simultaneously at interacting levels of analysis to influence policy language (Shanahan et al., 2018). Scholars have used different approaches when analyzing policies during the policy process and determined that policy problems become policy issues; especially when groups form to address them (Sabatier & Jenkins, 1999; May, 1999).

Primarily, the inputs and outputs of policies affecting targeted groups can be found in the scholarly literature. Scholars generally agree that the narratives used during the policymaking process determine how groups are perceived and treated in society. Also, Marshall (1999;2014) and Schneider and Ingram (1993) viewed policymaking as intentional, containing socially constructive narratives written into policies that target and marginalize populations; thus, deciding who is entitled to what in society. Ingram, Schneider, and de Leon (2007) determined that policies leave cleavages allowing injustices. Crenshaw (1989;1994) stated that through intersectionality, intersecting areas of reality, such as race, gender, and class are working together to impose socially accepted injustices, especially injustices targeting African American women. May (2016) found by revisiting policy designs that policymaking occurs in two political environments, one with the public and the other without the public, where the latter can be detrimental to policy success or failure. Marshall (1999) and Shaw (2004) found that policy research is limited when considering gender margins. Especially when policy narratives and language are used to socially construct women to maintain the status quo of power and dominance and when gender and education issues are not considered during the policymaking process (Shaw, 2004). Consequently, when the policy process produces policy outcomes that do not include input from those most affected, the social outcomes can have adverse effects by limiting sustainable paths out of poverty for certain populations.

The ACTs and subsequent welfare legislation affected welfare policy language in NC and the enrollment status of single welfare mothers attending institutions of higher

education. Importantly, the lived experiences of single mothers receiving welfare benefits who sought 4-year college degrees, their decisions to continue or leave college were affected by the policy language in the ACTs and subsequent welfare legislation. Understanding the lived experiences of this population of mothers and if the policy language in the ACTs and subsequent welfare legislation may have limited or eliminated their sustainable paths out of poverty were vital to this research study.

A review of the research found themes such as poverty, social construction, welfare reform and policy, welfare states, employment, higher education, single mothers receiving, self-sufficiency, power, privilege, dominance, and standpoints. Also, found in the literature were factors that may assist in reducing poverty, such as higher education equals increase literacy, higher wages, and reduces the need for government assistance (Cruse et al., 2018; Green, 2016; Jimenez et al., 2016). However, the language in the ACTs and subsequent welfare legislation were silent on sustainable paths out of poverty through 4-year college degrees and in turn may have increased those living in concentrated poverty and created a broader class of the working poor (Cruse et al., 2018; Goddard et al., 2016; Jimenez et al., 2016). Likely, the language in the ACTs and subsequent welfare legislation are a direct consequence of the policy narratives used to construct them.

Consequently, narratives played an influential role in the social construction of single mothers receiving welfare benefits during the policy process and through policy language. These single mothers may have been framed as abusing the welfare system for their good and therefore undeserving of government assistance (Argys, et al., 2000;

Atherton, 1990; Mayer, 2008; Marshall, 1999;2014; Rich, 2016). Also, proponents of welfare legislation claim that the ACTs and subsequent welfare legislation reduced the welfare caseloads and therefore were successful and accomplished the policy intent (Argys et al., 2000; Highsmith, 2016; Scope, 2018). However, scholars argue that the reduction in the welfare caseloads was not due to the employment, instead were due to welfare recipients timing out of benefits and leaving the welfare programs that resulted in increases in concentrated poverty (Cruse et al., 2018; Goddard et al., 2016; Jimenez et al., 2016; Scope, 2018).

The increase in concentrated poverty can be seen in NC for which four cities have some of the highest concentrated poverty in the nation, and two of these cities are the poorest in the country (Nichol, 2018). Thereby, single welfare mothers living in NC may be the population most affected by the narratives and policy language in the ACTs and subsequent welfare legislation. The results of this study can provide data to policymakers and political actors and inform their decisions about sustainable paths out of poverty, increase understandings about those living in poverty, employment, higher education, and the financial independence of single welfare mothers.

Chapter 2 contains a review of the literature relevant to welfare reform, welfare legislation, policy narratives, and policy language. Also, Chapter 2 includes a review of poverty, employment, self-sufficiency, education, social construction, intersectionality, standpoints, and single welfare mothers from the literature and legislation to support this research.

Literature Review Search

The following databases were searched using the search terms to locate scholarly, peer-reviewed literature and official government documents through the Walden University online library: Political Science Complete, Sage Journals, Taylor and Francis On-line; Academic Search Complete; Education Source; Eric and Education; Social Work Abstracts; Science Direct; U.S. Department of Education, National Education Statistics Center, NC State Assembly Legislative Library, NC Justice Center, Library of Congress, Institute for Women's Policy Research, and terms were used to locate scholarly literature relevant to this proposed study: *Poverty; Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, Aid For Dependent Children; welfare to work; welfare and higher education; welfare and poverty; politics and policy; Welfare Queen; welfare and women, intersectionality; social policy and poverty; single mothers and higher education; inequality; policy change and implementation; state policy making; social safety net U.S.; welfare state; NC welfare reform; poverty and culture; Clinton and welfare; Bush and welfare; Obama and welfare; Trump and welfare; entitlement; political participation; theories of public policy; narrative analysis; narrative policy framework; structuralism; postpositive; postmodern; critical discourse analysis; intersectionality; social construction; feminist theory; critical feminist theory;* and *feminist critical policy analysis.* These articles search terms spanned from 1935-2018. Current dissertations from 2014-2019 and searches regarding social welfare for which the searches produced sources that were data mined.

The overall searches yield over 1540 studies, laws, and policies for which 152 were strictly relevant to the study's topic and purpose.

Theoretical Framework

To determine welfare eligibility, access to higher education and sustainable wages, social factors play a major role. Research contends that gender, race, and social class intersect marginalized groups; these factors may help justify behaviors by those who maintain power and dominance in society (Benison & Marshall, 2003; Crenshaw,1989; 1994; Marshall, 1999; 2004; Shaw 2004). Analyzing how policy narratives influenced the policy language in the ACTs and subsequent welfare legislation that affects single welfare mothers' sustainable paths out of poverty through higher education required a theoretical foundation that expounds the stories told by policymakers and political actors during the policymaking process. NPF is a theory of the policy process emphasizes how policymakers and political actors use the power of narratives to gain political leverage, advance their policy ideas, and determine policy language (Shanahan et al., 2018). FCPA was used in this study, as a conceptual tool, to uncover how the use of patriarchal power and parochial behaviors create political realities (Benison & Marshall, 2003; Marshall, 1999; Marshall, 2004; Shaw, 2004).

These embedded power systems and behaviors influence the narratives and policy language that work together to socially construct and marginalize single mothers receiving welfare benefits and other groups in society. Therefore, narratives become the societal norm of how groups are viewed and treated (Crenshaw, 1989; Fairclough, 1999; Marshall, 1999; Schneider & Ingram, 1993; Shaw 2004). These societal norms that are

embedded in policy language determining who is privileged, deviant, dependent, and who get what in society (Schneider & Ingram, 1993, Schneider et al., 2014).

From a review of the literature, there is limited research addressing the gap on the role and power of policy narratives and their influences on policy language in the ACTs, and subsequent welfare legislation, from four presidential administrations: Presidents Clinton, Bush, Obama, and Trump. Consequently, Cruse et al., (2018), Green (2016), and Jimenez et., al. (2016) found that higher education equals increase literacy, higher wages, reduces the need for government assistance, and lessens those living in poverty.

Narrative Policy Framework

The NPF is a theory of the policy process and originates from narrative analysis and rhetoric found in interdisciplinary studies (see Figure 1). Scholars in the field of psychology state that narratives include the subjective experiences and environments of those using them such as narratives used to incite social movements (Brock, Strange, & Green, 2002; Brock et al., 2002). Schneider and Ingram (1993) found that social construction of target populations is written into public policies. Mattila and Enz (2002) found that in marketing, narrative ideas were sold to capture markets and to increase market participation. In the healthcare industry, multistage narrative analysis and descriptive statistics were used to understand the lived experience of single welfare mothers living in poverty after TANF (Hildebrandt, 2016). In healthcare, communication narratives were used to change the behaviors of patients (Hinyard & Kreutzer, 2007; Husman, 2015). Lastly, narratives were used in the social sciences through social

constructionism of obesity that blamed the victim for self- destructive behaviors

(Husman, 2015). Therefore, the NPF was a good theoretical fit for this study.

Shanahan, et al., (2010) developed NPF to study policy narratives and rhetoric

across interdisciplinary fields to include the social sciences. The NPF's premise is that

narratives are storied renditions of policymakers' and political actors' political strategies,

philosophies, beliefs, ideals, and normative ideas (Shanahan, et al., 2018). These storied

narratives enter the policy process at different stages and at different times depending on

the policy issue and what is happening in society. Policymakers and political actors vie

for policy recognition and create policy language that has intentional and unintentional

outcomes that affect different groups in society in different ways.

Through post positivism structuralism standpoint, the NPF allows for the

interpretation of policy issues, narratives, and policy language. Structuralism is based on

Gestalt's theory and psychology principal. Gestalt theory (1912) claims that

interpretations are embedded in every structured system and begin with individuals'

hidden meanings that must be explored. Jones et al.,2010 and Shanahan et al., (2018) add

that the NPF approaches narratives from post positivism standpoints that rely on

empirical evidence opposed to normative ideas during the policy process.

During policy formulation, policy narratives and language are oratory and written,

contain form, content, and context placing this study in the social sciences through

narrative policy analysis. According to Shanahan et al., (2010) and Shanahan et al.,

(2018), the NPF makes core assumptions about the policymaking process and the

participants inside and outside of the policy arena such as social construction matters in

public policy. Narratives inform policy realities through " bounded relativity of social construction that contains the strategies, belief systems, ideologies, norms, and normative ideas of policymakers and political actors"(Shanahan et al., 2018, p.173-198). Also, narratives contain "generalizable structures containing plots, characters, and moral of the story narratives, and the model of the *homo narrans* that posits narratives depict how individuals process information, communicate, and reason"(Shanahan et al., 2018, p.179-183).

The NPF assumptions interact simultaneously at three levels of analysis: micro, meso, and macro to influence policymaking outcomes. The micro level includes the individual and the stories we tell ourselves and others, which become our realities; the meso level includes political actors, groups, and coalitions in the policy subsystem; and the macro level includes institutions and their culture (Shanahan et al., 2018). This study analyzed policy narratives relevant to the ACTs and subsequent welfare legislation at the interacting macro-meso levels of analysis that includes policymakers, political actors, and institutions to connect how narratives of policymakers and political actors had the power to influence welfare policy language. For this study, the macro level of analysis includes federal and state policymaking institutions and state institutions of higher education in NC where single mothers receiving welfare benefits attended 4-year degree programs. The meso level of analysis includes policymakers and political actors.

Scholars of NPF also claim there are characters in and outside of the policy arena influencing policy frames and outputs. These characters take on the roles of heroes, villains, and victims depending on their policy positions (Shanahan et al., 2018).

According to Shanahan et al., (2018) the hero characters have political power, resources, and policy access; and in this study include policymakers and political actors that use narratives that characterize them as the saviors. The villain or villainess is characterized as the opposition that is up to no-public good and in this study includes those that do not support welfare reform and welfare recipients. The victims are those affected by the policy issue and characterized as the ones suffering from the social problem and in this study are single mothers and taxpayers receiving welfare benefits that may be helpless and powerless in the policy process. The victims may also include state and local government agencies implementing federal welfare policies. Also, the villain may be the policy-itself, that according to policymakers and political actors is up-to no good. Approaching this study through the tenets of the NPF allows an opening for FCPA of narratives and policy language that revealed the identities and policy positions of characters inside and outside of the policy arena working simultaneously at multiple levels during the policymaking process to influence welfare policy language outputs.

Researchers have included the NPF in the analysis of narratives and rhetoric across interdisciplinary fields. NPF was used in sociology and revealed how social construction is written into policy language as a means to marginalized target populations (Schneider & Ingram, 1993; Ingram et al., 2007). Lewis (1966) used narrative analysis with social theory and blamed the poor for their standpoints in life by positing poverty is a culture containing the poor who view themselves as marginalized, powerless, helpless, and outsiders. Additionally, Lewis (1966) claimed that since poor Black Americans perceive racial discrimination as a cause of their poverty, this led to generational poverty.

However, Scope (2018) found through interviews with single mothers receiving welfare benefits, this population of women did not come from families with generational poverty nor single mother households on welfare. Lewis's (1966) claims reinforce how the social construction of single welfare mothers may have entered theory, policy, research literature, and society.

Lipsky (1969) examined policy narratives and language and connected them to the behaviors of street-level bureaucrats. These street-level bureaucrats include welfare administrators and social workers that had broad discretion in implementing welfare policies that meet their state and local needs opposed to the mandated needs of the federal government. Also, Allen (2018) found that when policies are implemented from the bottom-up there may be no clear dispositions to determine if punitive actions are the only prescriptions being applied. Morgan et al., (2009) demonstrated how narratives became the storyline for television organ donor solicitations and how narratives are used in the media to socially construct and magnify the needs of those waiting for organ donations. Additionally, narratives may be used for the collective actions of policymakers and political actors to influence voters and determines what is included in public policies and what is not during the policymaking process. For example, Ostrom, (1990) examined the collective actions of commoners and determined that narrative and official policies may not be needed when issues can be evaluated and resolved without government intervention and oversight.

Also, narratives, policy language, and public policies have an evaluative purpose that can be used ex-post to determine if policies are achieving their intended outcomes.

Roe (2014) found policy narrative evaluation created openings for interventions in the policymaking process. Therefore, the politics containing the belief system, strategies, and normative ideas of policymakers and political actors enter the policy process from the beginning and has the power to influence the policy language in the ACTs and subsequent welfare legislation.

Rochefort and Cobb (1994) determined that politics determines policy problem definition and enters the policy process from the beginning through political narratives which are oratory and written with transportability to elicit support, followers and to reform policies. For example, in the extreme case of Adolf Hitler, in 1919, was able to join political parties and shaped the realities of his war campaign and carnage through deliberative oratory narratives that became implemented policy and peoples' reality (Trattner, 1999). Also, Franklin D. Roosevelt (FDR) used oratory narratives during the Great Depression to persuade policymakers and the public to support his policy of anti-federalism to alleviate poverty in the states. FDR's narratives, through the 1935 Social Security Act (SSA), became policy for job creation to help the poor, unemployed, and the destitute (Trattner, 1999). Also, SSA's policy language described women as deserving and stay at home moms attending to their children while men worked to provide for their families.

Therefore, the NPF offers researchers a framework to analyze how social construction may be deliberative and specific to single mothers in welfare policymaking, which shapes their socio-economic positions and their place in society. Also, when policy language includes the social construction of target populations, this delineates how policy

realities of power, political strategies, philosophies, and the normative ideas of

policymakers and political actors are maintained over time (Benison & Marshall, 2003;

Schneider & Ingram 1993; Shanahan et al., 2018; Shaw, 2004). Maintaining the status

quo in policymaking and research that ignores the additional responsibilities of being

single, women, mother, poor, and welfare recipients can disadvantage women in society

(Katz, 2013; Katz, 2019, Marshal, 1997; 1999; 2004; McPhail, 2003).

Another important aspect of this study utilizing the NPF, was analyzing how

welfare policy is void of gender recognition for single mothers who represent a majority

of those living below the federal poverty threshold and the largest population receiving

welfare benefits. Thereby, welfare policies include language that maintains the status quo

of male dominance and power about who receives benefits and who does not, who is

advantaged and who is not, who receives justice and who does not, and who can receive a

4-year college degree and who may not (Crenshaw, 1989; Fairclough, 1999; Jimenez et

al., 2016; Joseph, 2018; Marshall, 1999; Shaw, 2004). Thus, including a FCPA lens as a

tool in this study helped in the analysis when examining how single welfare mothers were

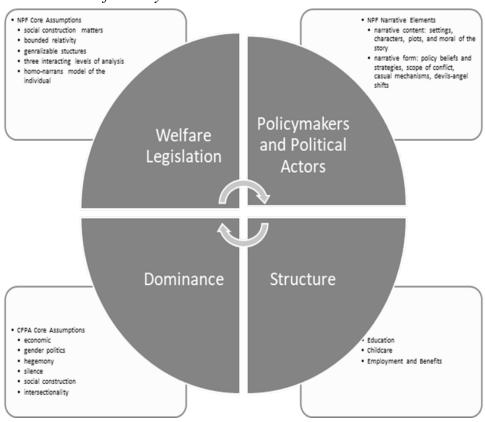targeted by welfare policy narratives and language, which keeps them in poverty.

Feminist Critical Policy Analysis

FCPA is rooted in feminist critical theory (FCT) and has tenets of critical

discourse analysis (CDA). FCT focuses on power structures that ignore gender, creates

broader inequalities, where hegemony is normalized, maintained, hidden in narratives

and public policies found in public policymaking institutions (Kromer-Nevo & Komen,

2015). The CDA holds that those with power subjugate and normalizes the abuse of

groups in society who have little to no power (Fairclough, 1989). The FCPA supports

that women are subjected to misogynistic views and behaviors that subordinate their

existences, which may be overlooked in public policy and administration research

(Marshall, 1999; Shaw, 2004). Hence, FCPA was used in this study to connect the NPF

to the politics and policy narratives used during the policy process that constructs the

language in the ACTs and subsequent welfare legislation (see Figure 1). Consequently,

policy narratives contain dominance, power, gender inequality, multiple identities,

injustices, and social construction.

Figure 1

The Gap=Single Mothers Receiving Welfare Benefits and Higher Education as a

Sustainable Path Out of Poverty

- NPF Core Assumptions
  - social construction matters
  - bounded relativity
  - genralizable stuctures
  - three interacting levels of analysis
  - homo-narrans model of the individual

- NPF Narrative Elements
  - narrative content: settings, characters, plots, and moral of the story
  - narrative form: policy beliefs and strategies, scope of conflict, casual mechanisms, devils-angel shifts

Welfare Legislation

Policymakers and Political Actors

Dominance

Structure

- CFPA Core Assumptions
  - economic
  - gender politics
  - hegemony
  - silence
  - social construction
  - intersectionality

- Education
- Childcare
- Employment and Benefits

Also, the power that policy narratives had to influence the language in the ACTs and

subsequent welfare legislation. The silence in policymaking on gender and the additional

obligations of being a single mother is often ignored by those with power and wealth to

maintain the status quo in policymaking and society (Marshall, 1999; Shaw, 2004: Katz,

2012; Crenshaw, 1989; Schneider & Ingram, 1999; 2014).

Scholars have used this approach to policy analysis to help uncover implicit

policy biases of male dominance and power maintained in the policy arena resulting in

policies that marginalize women and other disadvantaged groups (Crenshaw,1989; 1994; Douglas 2019; Katz, 2012; Shaw, 2004; Shanahan et al., 2018). Pusser and Marginson (2013) found that single welfare mothers are discouraged from achieving bachelor's degrees through the punitive actions built into policy language. Instead, policymakers and political actors reinforce work first without consideration of substantive education and who is advantaged and disadvantage through policies. Marshall (1999) and Shaw (2004) conducted extensive research related to femininity, policy formation, and implementation needed to determine how the policy process ignores women by maintaining power and dominance over policy language and change. Crenshaw's (1993) intersectionality framework states that "policymakers place women of color in positions of double discrimination and conflicting roles when deciding whether to support political agendas of race or gender issues" (p.2). Therefore, the intersections of race, gender, education, social location, poverty, motherhood, and policy may work together to oppress, marginalize, and socially construct single mothers receiving welfare benefits and seeking sustainable paths out of poverty through 4-year college degree attainment.

Analyzing the ACTs and subsequent welfare legislation, and their impacts on poverty and welfare policy in NC, and the enrollment and unenrollment of single welfare mothers using the NPF and FCPA provides a voice for these mothers, which is silent in the current policy analysis literature. Therefore, the NPF with FCPA address how policymakers and political actors may use narratives that have the power to socially construct and marginalize groups through policy language (Crenshaw, 1993; Joseph, 2018; Katz, 2012; Marshall, 1999; Schneider & Ingram, 1993; Shaw, 2004).

Consequently, the outcomes of this study can inform policymaking, political actors, and educational institutions decisions about the limitations of the ACTs and subsequent welfare legislation, that may shift or change public policies favoring 4-year degree attainment for single welfare mothers as a sustainable path out of poverty.

Review of the Literature

There is a problem with poverty in America that welfare legislation was supposed to help to alleviate; however, welfare legislation may have caused increases in concentrated poverty, a broader class of the working poor, and limited sustainable paths out of poverty for single mothers receiving welfare benefits through 4-year degree attainment. The problem is that single welfare mother household's account for 2.78 million of those living in poverty of which 678,400 of those living in poverty reside in NC (NCDHHS, 2018; U.S. Census Bureau, 2018). These single mothers have been socially constructed, thereby, limiting sustainable paths out of poverty through access and completion of 4-year degree programs; which may have contributed to their continued poverty (Ahn, 2015; Chesler & Crowfoot, 2000; Cruse et al., 2018; Joseph, 2018; Goddard, et al., 2016; Highsmith, 2016; Katz, 2012; 2013; Nichol, 2018; Phinney, 2016; Scope, 2018). Scholars agree that there are factors that can help alleviate poverty and develop paths leading to self-sufficiency.

A review of the literature revealed themes, such as poverty, employment, self-sufficiency, single mothers, and degrees. Also, social construction, welfare reform, policy language, power, privilege, dominance, intersectionality, and standpoints were additional themes across the literature. Also found in the literature were factors that may relieve

poverty, such as higher education lessens those in living in poverty and independence from government assistance programs (Goddard et al., 2016; Fairclough, 1999); which are central tenets of the ACTs and subsequent welfare legislation. The themes uncovered in the literature are essential to this study in respects to the limited research on how political narratives have the power to influence the policy language in the ACTs and subsequent welfare legislature, which targeted single welfare mothers.

The current research employed qualitative and phenomenological techniques to fill the gap in the literature by comparing and critically analyzing the policy narratives that influenced the language in the ACTs from four presidential administrations. This current study also investigated how the ACTs and subsequent welfare legislation affected state and local welfare policy in NC, NC IHEs' enrollment and unenrollment status of single mothers receiving welfare benefits residing in NC and pursuing 4-year degrees, and single welfare mothers' decisions about pursuing 4-year college degrees as a sustainable path out of poverty since the implementation of the ACTs and subsequent welfare legislation.

Since single welfare mothers is the population most affected by welfare policy narratives and language, this study used the NPF (Shanahan et al., 2018), a theory of the policy process, and FCPA (Marshall, 1999; Shaw, 2004) as a tool to examine welfare reform policies, subsequent welfare legislation, employment, education, poverty, and financial independence from government assistance.

Also important to this study were the standpoints and lived experiences of single welfare mothers and the meanings they gave to their experiences as a 4-year degree

seeking students which lead too rich and deep data that may be used by policymakers and political actors when making welfare policy decisions. Combining the NPF and FCPA was useful when constructing tools necessary to help this population of mothers when determining their future socioeconomic paths.

Policy Narratives and Language

Policy narratives and the language contained in the ACTs and subsequent legislation are intentional during the policy process. Policymakers and political actors developed and implemented their political agendas, strategies, philosophies, and normative ideas by arguing the outcomes of welfare legislation can reduce poverty through work (Goddard et al., 2016; Scope, 2018). Since the intent of welfare reform was to help single welfare mothers become self-sufficient through job training and education leading to employment, this may have led to a reduction in the welfare caseloads, but not poverty (Cruse et al., 2018; Goddard, 2016; Grogger, 2003; Green, 2016; Katz, 2012;2013;2019, Phinney, 2016; Scope, 2018). The welfare policy narratives affected NC state welfare policies' language targeting single welfare mothers and their enrollment status at an IHE in NC. Therefore, it was crucial to this study to investigate welfare legislation, policy narratives and language, along with the standpoints and decisions of single welfare mothers to continue or not to continue in 4-year degree programs as a sustainable path out of poverty.

History of Welfare

The 1935 Social Security Act

The 1935 SSA signed into law by President Franklin D. Roosevelt during the Great Depression changed policy narratives of public assistance from punitive too social responsibility. The SSA constructed women as, stay home moms who take care of their children, and supported by the AFDC legislation; while men were required to work to support their families (Gagnon, 2017; Trattner, 1999). When the economic conditions in the country improved, the narratives of stay at home moms shifted to the middle class and affluent, and socially constructed poor stay at home moms as lazy, undeserving, unmotivated, and a drain on social welfare programs. These socially constructed narratives of single welfare women with children permeated society to the point that social welfare programs were contracted, and poverty grew.

New Deal Legislation

Along with welfare legislation through the SSA, civil rights for women and minorities became a concern. The New Deal legislation was enacted by FDR and expanded by President Johnson that helped the states with reducing poverty and expanded Federal government intervention in state affairs. The New Deal legislation promised a war on poverty, and in 1964 the Economic Opportunity Act (EOA) loosened eligibility requirements for government safety-net programs that included Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP), that allowed economically stressed citizens access to welfare programs that provided food stamps, healthcare, and education up to 4-year college degrees for welfare recipients (Hardman, 1999). The impact of the

EOA resulted in a decline in poverty. However, opposition to the EOA legislation increased by targeted narratives of budget increases in social safety net programs and the eligibility requirements of welfare recipients.

The EOA increased the Federal government's intervention in state policies and was challenged by state federalist policymakers and political actors. Although the results of the EOA policy reduced poverty, because of the increased budget expenditures supported by taxation through the 1990s, opponents of welfare policies pushed for reform of welfare programs and government aid to the poor (Trattner, 1999). The campaign to reduce welfare expenditures included narratives of the social construction of welfare recipients that continued through 1994 when Congress headed by Newt Gingrich, drafted welfare reform policies that presidential candidate Bill Clinton used during his presidential campaign to gain election leverage, votes, and public support. Narratives of welfare reform and policy rhetoric helped Clinton's election success and enactment of the 1996 welfare reform (DeNitto, 2011; Trattner, 1999). The narratives lead to the punctuated equilibrium of welfare policy to satisfy the political agendas of conservative policymakers.

PRWORA and TANF

To tighten fiscal control over welfare programs, the 1996 PRWORA was enacted by the Clinton administration. Within the PRWORA, TANF, a cash assistance program, was implemented to ensure reductions in government dependency, poverty, out of wedlock births, welfare caseloads; as well as create self-sufficiency among citizens. The new welfare legislation also gave states block grants and autonomy in developing and

implementing Welfare to Work and Work First programs. However, opponents of the ACTs contend that the language used during policy design of the ACTs produced intended and unintended consequences including the social construction of single mothers receiving and how they are perceived and treated in society (Hancock, 2000; Katz 2013; Zucchino, 1997). Incidentally, welfare legislation must be reauthorized every ten years and TANF must be reauthorized every five years through legislative actions and presidential approval.

Deficit Reduction Act

The narratives of the poor and single welfare mothers continued to be used by policymakers and political actors as a catalyst for changes in welfare policies. Before the reauthorization of welfare legislation, in 2005, the Bush administration signed the Deficit Reduction Act (DRA). The DRA increased child support requirements, gave states autonomy in implementing the Medicaid program, encouraged marriage, authorized grants to the states to develop fatherhood programs, and tighten the work requirements for participation in work activities (CBPP, 2007; Parrott et al., 2011; Slaughter, 2018). These changes in welfare programs meant that single mothers receiving had to work with state agencies to locate absent fathers so that these fathers could pay child support to reduce federal and state expenditure or lose benefits. DRA (2005) also required increases in work hours for welfare recipients, from 20 hours to 40 hours, increase State accountable of maintenance of effort (MOE) toward work, and allowed absent fathers to live with their families without single mothers receiving losing benefits (CBPP, 2007;

Slaughter, 2018). The DRA (2005) was the medium used to foster the reauthorization of welfare programs under the Bush Administration.

Welfare Reauthorization Act

In 2006 the Bush Administration enacted the Welfare Reauthorization Act (WRA). The WRA policy language mirrored the languages in the PRWORA, TANF, and the 2005 DRA. The WRA policy design and language provided additional funding for programs to support working welfare recipients through tax credits and to accomplish the ACTs intent of self-sufficiency, lessen government assistance dependency, and to reduce poverty in America. Bush's tax credits gave tax incentives to employers who hired welfare recipients and working welfare parents; and the poor working parents with dependent child received the Earned Income Tax Credit (Goddard et al., 2016; Patterson, 2012; Phinney, 2016). However, the PRWORA, TANF, and WRA legislations were designed by the federal government and implemented by the states, thereby giving states more autonomy in program development to meet federal work requirements. Importantly, the policy language in the ACTs and subsequent welfare legislation affected single welfare mothers the most; especially those seeking 4-year college degrees as a sustainable path out of poverty as not meeting the MOE requirement toward work. Single mothers receiving might have been penalized with loss or reduction of benefits if they did not leave college for low-paying jobs, many with little to no benefits (Cruise et al., 2018). Also, Goddard et al., (2016) found that welfare recipients who transferred to work continued to receive some form of government assistance and became the working poor.

Executive Orders and Presidential Memorandums

In 2009, President Obama entered office during an economic crisis that led to the Great Recession with high unemployment, financial institutions of the brink of collapse, and increases in Americans unable to meet their basic needs. Congress was stacked with Republican policymakers who publicly warned that they planned to obstruct any efforts coming from the democratic executive branch of government. President Obama introduced an expansion of fiscal policy through the 2009 American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (the stimulus plan) in response to the crippling economy. The stimulus plan ended the Great Recession in July 2009 (Conley, 2013). The stimulus plans provided funding to rebuild America's infrastructure, cut taxes, increased the EITC, lessened the welfare to work requirement, extended the unemployment insurance period by 33 weeks, and allowed more citizens to qualify for government assistance benefits by changing eligibility requirements (Conley, 2013).

Included in the stimulus plan was a partnership with community colleges to train the unemployed and welfare recipients in trades leading to employment. However, the stimulus plan did not include policy language allowing 4-year college degree access and attainment by welfare recipients; therefore, the decision to include this population was left to the states. The increases in welfare spending and the enactment of the 2010 Affordable Care Act (ACA) were not welcomed by opponents of the stimulus plan and welfare policy. Because of the increased spending, Obama was the first President to spend more on social programs than on defense programs (Congressional Budget Office [CBO], 2016; Office of Budget and Management [OMB], 2015). These social policies

may have benefited single mothers receiving welfare benefits because of their availability, however, this round of welfare programs included additional policy rhetoric targeting single welfare mothers and minorities.

The Welfare Reform and Upward Mobility Act and the Freedom Works Bill

The Trump administration ran their presidential campaign on a platform of welfare reform, helping the truly needy, and constructed welfare recipients as malingers who are able bodied but do not want to work. The Trump administration and a republican stacked Congress and introduced the 2017 Welfare Reform and Upward Mobility Act (UMA) and Freedom Works Bill (FWB) to the House of Representatives and later to the Senate. Subsequently, President Trump signed an Executive Directive (ED) stating, PPOEM (2018), under mean-test programs, such as welfare, benefits are temporary, only for the truly needy, and welfare recipients that can work must work (Library of Congress, 2017; U.S. House of Representatives, 2017). The ED, which later became the PPOEM (2018), intended to promote opportunity and economic mobility. However, PPOEM reduced and eliminated funding for means-test housing, increased mandatory work-activity by welfare recipients, ban on federally funded abortions, introduced mandatory work requirements for food stamps eligibility and receipt, and a cap on spending for all welfare programs, which mostly affected single mothers receiving welfare benefits. Therefore analyzing the narratives and policy language of the UMA, FWB, and the PPOEM pertaining to single welfare mothers were essential to this research study.

Poverty

Poverty exists globally and is considered a threshold representing the unmet minimum level of income needed to survive in developed, developing, and undeveloped countries. The International Monetary Fund [IMF], (2016) warned of the increasing poverty and inequality within America. Also, according to the IMF, America has suffered from higher levels of poverty and inequality than some third world and developing countries. The IMF (2016) conducts annual reviews of countries' economic stability and found that 1 in 7 Americans live in poverty for which 40% of those living in poverty are the working poor. The report also revealed that there was an increase in the polarization of income distribution (IMF, 2016). However, in the same report the IMF stated that overall, the U.S. economy is strong and fosters low unemployment. Similar to the IMF (2016) findings, the 2018 U.S. Census Bureau found that there were 9.6 million single-mother households in America which, 2.78 million were living below the poverty line. The Federal poverty line is $24,860 for a family of four and for a family of four living in NC, the poverty line is $24,036 (Fontenot, et al., 2018; Nichol, 2018; NCDHHS, 2018; U.S. Census Bureau, 2018). Consequently, NC has one of the highest rates of concentrated poverty in the Nation with 1.6 million people living in poverty of which 678,400 are headed by single mothers (Nichol, 2018). However, the policy language contained in the ACTs and subsequent welfare legislation may not provide independence from government assistance programs.

The juxtaposition is that sustainable paths out of poverty are unnavigable or blocked due to the policy language in the ACTs and subsequent welfare legislation. The

policy language in the ACTs limited cash assistance to two-years and a five-year lifetime limit for all welfare benefits, devolution of welfare to work programs to the states, mandatory work hours, and defined what it meant to work as tools to reduce welfare caseloads (Aid to Families with Dependent Children [AFDC], 1997). The ACTs requires mandatory work under TANF, defined work activity as 20-30 hours of employment or community service per week, and defined training as vocational leading to employment (Office of Family Assistance [OFA], 1996). Also, the policy language in the ACTs and subsequent welfare language may have increased poverty in NC and limited college access and degree attainment.

Poverty in NC

Since the implementation of the ACTs, NC policymakers and political actors have reduced or eliminated welfare benefits which may have caused an increase in concentrated poverty that has not been addressed. Through poverty politics, NC ranks number 10 as one of the poorest states in America (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018). Also, NC cities have some of the highest concentrations of poverty in the Nation (Nichol, 2018). According to the NC Justice Center [NCJC], 2018, concentrated poverty is intentional and is a byproduct of policy decisions. Cities in NC account for 4 of the ten cities in America with the highest concentrations of poverty (Nichol, 2018; U.S, Census Bureau, 2018). One city in NC ranks 3rd as having the highest area of concentrated poverty in the country (Nichol, 2018; U.S. Census Bureau, 2018).

As of 2017, 1.6 million people were living in poverty in NC, for which 678,400 were single-mother households (NCDHHS, 2018; USDHHS, 2018). However, NC

policymakers and political actors insisted that punitive actions through budgets cuts will encourage those that can work to find work (NC State Assembly, 1997). The budget cuts targeted NC's poorest citizens many of whom were children living in poverty before the budget cuts. The NC Governor's tenure, and with a Republican majority State Assembly, welfare programs in NC were cut drastically making the poor targets for political aggression (Kennedy, 2018; Nichol, 2018). For example, the 2010 Affordable Care Act (ACA) was signed into law by the Obama administration that expanded Medicaid eligibility. The NC Governor and the NC state assembly rejected the new ACA which left 463,000 of NC's poorest without medical coverage although the expansion was funded by the federal government (Nichol, 2018). These poverty politics and the subsequent welfare legislation in NC may have contributed to the increase in the state's poverty.

Due to the Great Recession of 2007-2009, unemployment remained high in the Nation and particularly in NC. However, NC policymakers and political actors refused to accept the additional Federal funding as unemployment benefits ran out and may have affected single mother households the most in NC. Incidentally, single mother households account for 678,400 of the population living below the state's poverty threshold (NCDHHS, 2018; U.S. Census Bureau, 2018). Therefore, the issue of poverty and welfare are so important that the last four presidential administrations made welfare policy a priority through changes in eligibility requirements to reduce poverty and move welfare recipients into work (CBPP, 2018). To understand the politics of welfare policy, a historical perspective is warranted, as poverty and social welfare programs have affected the actions of Presidential, Congressional, and states administrations.

Welfare Policy Outcomes

The narratives, policy language, and the political strategies and agendas of policymakers and political actors that support the ACTs and subsequent welfare legislation have limited sustainable paths out of poverty through post-secondary education, sustainable employment, self-sufficiency, and independence from government assistance for single welfare mothers that does not contain their input. Policies designed without public input or lack of public participation from those most affected by the policy, may not see policies implemented as planned (May, 1991; 2016; May & Winters, 2009); especially, when policymakers and political actors intended to move welfare recipients to work and reduce poverty through employment.

Employment

Employment of welfare recipients was one of the main tenets of the ACTs and subsequent welfare legislation. However, scholars determined that welfare reform legislation produced declines in welfare caseloads but was not due to employment (Bentele & Nicoli, 2012; Scope, 2018). Instead, the reduction in welfare caseloads was due to a robust economy, welfare recipients timing out of benefits, and work in low skilled jobs with little to no benefits and this kept them in poverty where welfare recipients continued receiving government assistance. Also, reducing government expenditures on welfare program through welfare reform was to help alleviate poverty (Cruse et al., 2018; Goddard et al., 2016; Katz, 2012; Kennedy, 2017; Scope, 2018; Shaw, 2004). Policymakers claim welfare reform and legislation were successful;

however, this reform may not have helped in reducing poverty and produce sustainable employment of welfare recipients.

Measuring welfare policy success should include more factors such as financial sustainability, and more factors than the reduction in welfare caseloads and state welfare expenditures. Policymakers and political actors claimed victory for the reduction in welfare caseloads; however, research found that low-income mothers were better off than before the introduction of the ACTs (Katz, 2012). The 2007-2009 Great Recession limited economic mobility and employment opportunities; and, likely, the first impacted were single low-income mothers because of the economic downturn (Goddard et al., 2016; Katz, 2012). Consequently, the policy language in the ACTs and subsequent welfare legislation does not specify 4-year degree attainment as an allowable work activity which may have led to sustainable employment and as a path out of poverty for single welfare mothers.

The Federal government allowed states to implement welfare policy, through the 1996 PRWORA and TANF legislation, by giving states block grants and autonomy to create and implement welfare to work programs. Some states expanded welfare eligibility, programs, and time limits, while other states contracted eligibility, programs, and time limits, especially the welfare to work time limits and benefits. The outcomes of this policy strategy can be seen in NC which has large pockets of concentrated poverty that may not support the expansion of welfare policies and may have welcomed the 1996 Welfare Reform legislation and subsequent welfare policies that reduced benefits.

Employment in NC

NC has experienced economic growth; however, economic growth did not extend to those living in poverty. The population employed in NC still makes less than they did before the Great Recession (Kennedy, 2017). NC required single welfare mothers, like other welfare recipients, to participate in the Work First Program (WFP). Enrollment in the WFP was mandatory for welfare recipients to keep their welfare benefits. Most states like NC welcomed moving welfare recipients to jobs opposed to education because it was cost-effective for the state and taxpayers (Sawhill, 2001). However, legislators did not consider higher education as an allowable work activity. Instead, NC legislatures created state policies that mimic the work requirements and policy language in the ACTs and subsequent welfare legislation which does not mention 4-year degree attainment by single welfare mothers.

NC policymakers could have included higher education leading to 4-year degrees as an allowable work activity through partial state funding; however, legislators limited education to vocational training and in some cases 2-year community college degree programs leading to employment. Researchers maintain that policymakers, although the benefits of a 4-year degree include sustainable paths to employment and decreases in welfare recidivism, believed that single welfare mothers were incapable of earning college degrees (Deprez, et al., 2006; 2004; Scope, 2018). The ideologies presented such as social constructs and normative beliefs of legislators, may have shaped, and limited the type of work and education welfare recipients could engage.

Employment was an intent of the ACTs and subsequent welfare legislation that presented barriers to employment specific to single welfare mothers that NC state legislators would not accommodate. These barriers included the ability to work, childcare, transportation to and from work, hours of work, and livable wages (Highsmith, 2016). However, State policymakers and administrators were anxious to move single welfare mothers to the workforce and may not have considered barriers to work nor alternative policies for this population of welfare recipients during the policy process and implementation.

Challenges to Employment

A challenge to employment for single welfare mothers includes skills training, livable wages, medical care and expense, adequate and affordable childcare, affordable housing, and food security (Scope, 2018). However, childcare subsidies and support from state agencies allowed some single welfare mothers to work and keep some of their welfare benefits. Because of the ACTs and subsequent welfare legislation, the labor force saw increases in low skilled workers and single welfare mothers that timed-out of welfare benefits instead of highly-skilled workers with college degrees (Cruise et al., 2018; Goddard et al., 2016; Scope, 2018).

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Higher Education and Welfare Policy

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Higher education and welfare policy may sound like an oxymoron to some. However, in 1995, 650,000 welfare recipients were enrolled in post-secondary education (Price, 2005). Also, since the implementation of the ACTs, gender and social location may have been determinants in who has access to 4-year college degrees (Joseph, 2018;

Shaw, 2004; Stern, 2004). For example, Chesler and Crowfoot (2000) determined that institutional patterns of privilege and disadvantage are maintained by those with power, privilege, resources, and they decide who has access to a baccalaureate degree. Thereby, social location, socioeconomic factors, gender, race, and class have a direct relationship to the policy language in ACTs and subsequent welfare legislation.

Welfare reform and post-secondary achievement lead scholars to investigate the effects of welfare reform through quantitative analysis approaches to determine the likelihood of single welfare mothers attending college and completing degrees (Dave et al., 2012). The research found that welfare reform negatively impacted the enrollment of women in college and that some college even without a degree increased their work income (Dave et al., 2012). However, exogenous variables such gender and race inequality, social availability, and social location should be considered at the state and county levels along with market conditions to determine if these factors also affect post-secondary education access.

State culture and their policy language are major contributors to poverty and social mobility of single mothers receiving welfare benefits. Some scholars postulated that state welfare systems should be abolished allowing free markets and enterprises to empower the poor (Fast et al., 2017). State level welfare policies are important but are not the only factor determining access to higher education for the poor. Although Dave et al., (2012) and Fast et al., (2017) provided relevant data, the researchers neglected to investigate whether single welfare mothers have determined if attending college was in

their best interest. Therefore, state political culture and the status of single mothers are determinants in who has access to 4-year college degrees and who does not.

Higher Education and Welfare Policy in NC

The political culture in NC includes a long history of industries rooted in slavery (Kennedy, 2017). Under the AFDC legislation and the Big Society, that encouraged civil rights, welfare recipients were allowed to earn 4-year college degrees (Christopher, 2005). However, the PRWORA and TANF legislation do not support 4-year college degrees as a work activity. Some states fund 4-year college degree attainment for welfare recipients leading to reductions in welfare recidivism and increasing the economic sustainability of single welfare mothers. However, in NC the political culture remains the same when addressing welfare reform. Consequently, "NC cities and counties maintain some of the highest levels of concentrated poverty and illiteracy in the nation, and education was not valued due to the state's history of large agriculture and manufacturing industries"(Nichol, 2018, p.10). Although a 4-year college degree is not a guarantee of sustainable employment; however degrees may be resistant to recession and politics (Katz, 2012; Shaw, 2004). Overall, the literature supports that NC remains a conservative state that is adverse progressive social welfare policies such as 4-year college degrees as a work activity for single welfare mothers.

Republican lawmakers in NC decided to mimic the ACTs' policy regulations to address the higher education of welfare recipients. NC has adopted a middle-of-the-road approach to educational that favor technical training leading to employment (Dan-Messier, 2003; Turner, 2016). For example, NC allows higher education in combination

with work that may present barriers for single welfare mothers with small children. Also, welfare recipients are limited to twelve to forty-eight months of overall welfare assistance where 4-year degree programs do not count as MOE (Schmidt, 1998). College work study, studying, and college degree coursework are not counted as MOE and may limit post-secondary education as a sustainable path out of poverty. In response to welfare reform, IHEs in NC may have experienced decreases in enrollment in 4-year degree programs that are directly related to the Work First and the MOE requirements. State IHEs receive federal and state funding, and the decreases in welfare recipient students, particularly single mothers, may have affected their budgets and programs that assist this population of students.

Single Welfare Mothers

States have options when it comes to supporting post-secondary education for single welfare mothers, especially living in NC. Single mothers with dependent children account for 42% of those living in poverty in NC (NCDHHS, 2018). The ex-ante policy narratives of the ACTs may have socially constructed these single welfare mothers as always-dependent, lazy, and abusing the welfare system by having additional children to increase their welfare checks. Thereby, the ACTs required single welfare mothers to work for welfare benefit even when they were unskilled. Also, NC may have placed single welfare mothers in jobs that were unsustainable and kept them in poverty (Cruse et al., 2018; Goddard et al., 2016). The ACTs did not provide direct support for 4-year college degree attainment, as did the AFDC legislation, some single welfare mothers who were in college, and continued toward degree attainment despite losses in welfare

benefits (Christopher, 2005). The involvement of IHEs in the welfare policy process may help to increase single welfare mothers' participation in 4-year degree programs.

Access to 4-year degrees, the involvement of IHEs, and the participation of single welfare mothers in the policy process may influence policy narratives and outcomes. Incidentally, research confirms four year college degrees are averse to economic downturns (Carnochan et al., 2005) however may not be prescribed in current welfare legislation. Also, IHEs have power and influence in state and federal education policies, and the support services available to single welfare mothers. IHEs can help to reduce poverty and dependence on government assistance programs experientially when single welfare mothers earn 4-year college degrees, which, reducing poverty is one of the main tenets of the ACTs and subsequent welfare legislation.

Summary and Conclusion

There is a problem with poverty in America that welfare reform was to help alleviate; however, poverty remains a contentious policy issue amongst policymakers and political actors. The main tents of welfare reform were to reduce poverty, reduce expenditures on social programs, and create self-sufficiency for welfare recipients through work. However, the IMF (2016) warned the United States about its increased poverty and the widening disparity in income distribution. Also, a 2018 U.S. Census Bureau report determined that there are 9.6 million single mother households in the United States for which 2.78 million were living below the federal poverty threshold and in NC 678,400 single mother households were living in poverty (NCDHHS, 2018; U.S. Census Bureau, 2018). A review of the literature found that scholars generally agree that

poverty can be reduced through welfare legislation and that policymakers and political actors may have socially constructed single welfare mothers to achieve their political and policy agendas (Cruse et al., 2018; Goddard et al., 2016; Green, 2016; Jimenez et al., 2016; Nichol, 2018). Contrary to political rhetoric, there may be a population of single welfare mothers that do not want to rely on government assistance and use 4-year degrees as a sustainable path out of poverty.

Single welfare mothers may choose to continue in their degree program and be penalized with a loss of benefits for not meeting the work MOE of the ACTs, which were devolved to the states through block grants. Some states increased the work requirement while some decreased the requirement through state welfare policies (Green, 2016; Scope, 2018; Shaw, 2004). Additionally, there is disagreement about the reduction in welfare caseloads attributed to employment. Scholars posit that the reduction in welfare caseloads was not due to employment, instead were due to welfare recipients timing-out of benefits, leaving welfare programs, and or a robust economy (Cruse et al., 2018; Goddard et al., 2016; Jimenez et al., 2016; Scope, 2018). Research also confirmed that single welfare mothers may have loss benefits or were forced to leave college for low-paying jobs with little to no benefits that keep them in poverty (Cruse et al., 2018; Goddard et al., 2016; Phinney, 2016; Marshall, 1999; Shaw, 2004). Therefore, further research is needed to determine how narratives influence the policy language in the ACTs and welfare reform affected single welfare mothers and may have limited or eliminated their sustainable paths out of poverty.

The current research employed qualitative and phenomenological techniques to fill the gap in the literature by comparing and critically analyzing the policy narratives that influenced the language in the ACTs from four presidential administrations. This current study also investigated how the ACTs and subsequent welfare legislation affected state and local welfare policy in NC, NC IHEs' enrollment and unenrollment status of single mothers receiving welfare benefits while residing in NC and pursuing 4-year degrees, and single welfare mothers' decisions about pursuing 4-year college degrees as a sustainable path out of poverty. Since single welfare mothers are the population most affected by welfare policy narratives and language, this study used the NPF (Shanahan et al., 2018), a theory of the policy process, and FCPA (Marshall, 1999; Shaw, 2004) as a tool to examine welfare reform policies, subsequent welfare legislation, employment, education, poverty, and financial independence from government assistance.

Also important to this study were the standpoints and lived experiences of single welfare mothers and the meanings gave to their experiences as a 4-year degree seeking students which lead too rich, thick, and deep data that may be used by policymakers and political actors.in decisions regarding welfare reform policies leading to poverty reduction. Combining the NPF and FCPA was useful when constructing tools necessary to help this population of mothers when determining their future socioeconomic paths. Therefore, the results of this study may inform policy, policymakers', and political actors' decisions about welfare policies to support 4-year degree attainment by single welfare mothers as a sustainable path out of poverty. Chapter 2 was a review of literature relevant to the research topic, purpose, and scope. Chapter 3 includes the research design

and rationale for selecting the theoretical framework (see Figure 1.), FCPA as the

analytic lens, describes the methodology, and tool used to conceptualize the theoretical

framework for a critical analysis of the data. Also included in Chapter 3 is a description

of the research procedures, questionnaire instrument and basis for development, data

collection procedures and tools, and data safeguards and analysis. Issues of

trustworthiness are addressed, along with ethical procedures. Lastly, Chapter 3 conclude

with a summary of main points for the research study.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to address the gap in the literature and add to the body of knowledge in public policy analysis by comparing and analyzing policy narratives and policy language used by policymakers and political actors. Policy narratives had the power to influence policy language during the construction of the ACTs, and subsequent welfare legislation from the four presidential administrations: Clinton, Bush, Obama, and Trump. Increasing the understanding about the role and power of policy narratives that influenced welfare reform legislation regarding poverty, employment, education, and the financial independence of welfare recipients was warranted. Also examined were the effects that the ACTs' policy language had on NC state and local welfare policies and the enrollment and unenrollment of single welfare mothers attending 4-year college degree programs at institutions of higher education in NC. NC State and local welfare policies contained socially constructed language targeting single mothers receiving welfare benefits. Equally important were the lived experiences of single welfare mothers who sought 4-year degrees and the meanings given to those experiences as a result of the ACTs and subsequent welfare legislation. Thereby, combining narrative policy analysis and phenomenological techniques helped me to understand these experiences, and may help to inform policymakers' decisions regarding welfare reform, and increases this study's trustworthiness.

Although the ACTs address the main issue of employment for welfare recipients, the problem is the language in the ACTs did not consider the 4-year degree attainment by

single welfare mothers as work and limits benefits to 2 years and all benefits to 5 years over a lifetime for those seeking financial independence through higher education. Consequently, the ACTs' narratives had the power to influence policy language and include socially constructed language and what it means to work. Also, single welfare mothers who choose to complete 4-year college degrees as a sustainable path out of poverty have been penalized with the decrease and or elimination of benefits or forced to leave college. This study adds to the body of research in public policy analysis, and provides data to policymakers addressing the need to increase their understanding of how 4-year degree attainment of single welfare mothers can be used as a policy tool when creating narratives and policy language addressing poverty eradication and welfare legislation. Therefore, these efforts can increase literacy, wages, and reduce dependence on welfare assistance programs.

This general qualitative research study employed narrative policy analysis and phenomenological techniques to examine and analyze welfare policy legislation from four presidential administrations: Clinton, Bush, Obama, and Trump. Understanding the power that policy narratives had to influence the language in the ACTs and subsequent welfare legislation, and the lived experiences of single welfare mothers who sought 4-year degrees during welfare policy implementation, helps to inform welfare policy decisions and possibly change the narratives related to single welfare mothers by encouraging sustainable paths out of poverty through 4-year degree access and attainment.

Chapter 3 contains the research methodology for the study and includes the research design and rationale, research tradition and rationale, the role of the researcher, data analysis plan, policy narrative selection logic, participant selection logic, instrumentation and data collection tools, interview protocol, and the policy narrative analysis protocol. Also, Chapter 3 contains the study's content validity and issues of trustworthiness, research protocol including procedures for recruitment of participants, and data collection. Ethical procedures are also addressed. Chapter 3 concludes with a summary of the main points of the chapter and a transition to Chapter 4.

Research Design and Rationale

The research questions of this study are as follows:

RQ1: What are the forms, content, and constructs of policy narratives, language, and the strategies and belief systems of policymakers and political actors contained in the ACTs and subsequent welfare legislation to alleviate poverty, increase employment, create self-sufficiency, and financial independence of welfare recipients?

RQ2: How does NC state and local welfare policies address single welfare mothers seeking 4-year college degrees?

RQ3: How did the ACTs, and subsequent welfare legislation, affect enrollment and unenrollment of single welfare mothers seeking 4-year degrees at a state institution of higher education in NC?

RQ4: What decisions have single welfare mothers made, if any, about 4-year degree attainment since the implementation of the ACTs' 2 year limit of welfare to work

requirement, 5 year lifetime limit of benefits, and how have those decisions affected their lives?

General Qualitative

To answer the research questions in this study, I used a general qualitative research approach employing techniques from two research designs. According to Patton (2016), Ravitch and Carl (2016), and Shanahan et al., (2018) qualitative research allows for the examination of stories to capture the subjective perspectives and experiences of people at multiple levels and in various contexts. The rationale for choosing a general qualitative approach for this research was to allow me to collect, compare, and examine the narratives of policymakers and political actors used during the policymaking process that included social construction of single welfare mothers, and to understand the lived experiences of those most affected by welfare legislation, single welfare mothers.

Phenomenological techniques revealed the lived experiences, meanings given to those experiences, and the decisions of single welfare mothers who sought 4-year college degrees while receiving welfare assistance. Narrative policy analysis of welfare policy narratives and language allowed for challenging the status quo and revealed the underlying power structures, dominance, patriarchy, social construction, and hegemony in public policymaking (Katz, 2013; 2019; Marshall 1997;1999; Shaw, 2004). These policymakers and political actors dominate structures in welfare policymaking and have socially constructed and targeted single welfare mothers by limiting or eliminating sustainable paths out of poverty through 4-year degree access and attainment.

Research Rationale

In order to capture phenomenon, such as sudden changes in welfare legislation

and policy, and the affects that these public policies had on state and local governments,

NC state IHEs' enrollment and unenrollment of single welfare mothers, and single

welfare mothers' decisions, a general qualitative approach to this study was warranted.

This research design and tradition rationale revealed the policy inputs, narratives and

language used during the policymaking process, and the outputs such as public policies

affecting marginalized populations which are limited in the literature. Narratives contain

the political strategies, philosophies, ideals, and normative ideas of those with political

power. Narrative policy analysis revealed how the politics of policymakers and political

actors, who maintain power and dominance in the political and policy arenas, enters

policies affecting women (Marshall, 1999; Schneider, et al, 2014). Phenomenological

techniques allowed for an in-depth examination of the subjective voices and experiences

of single welfare mothers who are the population most affected by welfare legislation that

are silenced during the policymaking process. Combining narrative policy analysis and

phenomenological techniques in this research study helped to triangulate the data and

adds validity to the research findings.

<div align="center">

Role of the Researcher

</div>

The researcher was the primary instrument for data collection and interpretation

in this research study and ensured professionalism and integrity throughout the research

process (Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Rubin & Rubin, 2012; Yin, 2014). I observed and

analyzed the policy narratives and policy language of policymakers related to the ACTs

and subsequent welfare legislation using the NPF as the theoretical foundation, and captured the lived experiences of single welfare mothers, and welfare policy language through the lens of FCPA with an open mind, since I possess heighten knowledge on the research topic. The researcher's responsibility in data collection, narrative policy analysis, and the use of phenomenological techniques included approaching the data without bias by remaining objective and cognizant of any potential conflicts. This approach to the data and the research participants allowed for transferability and confirmability of the research findings. The highest levels of ethical standards (considering my positionality, social location, criticality, binary identities, and the primary interpreter of the data), increased the trustworthiness of this study.

The increased trustworthiness in this study helped to obtain a deeper understanding of participants' experiences and the intent of policymakers and political actors. Also, the research participants provided subjective data during the iterative research process that required me to be open and sensitive to evidence whether or not I agree with the evidence collected and helped to eliminate any perceived deficit orientations (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The narratives used to construct the policy language in the ACTs and subsequent welfare legislation contained the political strategies, philosophies, ideals, and normative ideas of policymakers and political actors which may be contrary to my belief systems. However, by employing researcher reflexivity helped with these differences and to reduced researcher bias.

A chief concern in qualitative research is researcher bias. Therefore, there were no expressed nor implied personal or professional relationships between the researcher,

policymakers, political actors, IHEs, and research participants. Also, there were neither implied nor expressed power differentials and or conflicts of interest with research participants, IHEs, and government institutions that inhibited the researcher as the primary tool in this study. This approach to the study increased the criticality of the study findings and fostered emergent non-bias research although I have heightened knowledge of the research topic.

The topic of this study was of interest to me, as I was a single mother who utilized government assistance programs while attending a 4-year degree program during the implementation of the 1996 ACTs. These experiences allowed me to gain heighten knowledge about government assistance programs while attending a 4-year degree program as a single mother. My interest in this topic is heightened due to my experiences. However, I managed any biases due to these experiences through researcher reflexivity. Researcher reflexivity included tracking my relationship to the data. Also, the paradigm that people own their lived experiences and are the ones that can best explain their worlds and their standpoints (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Also, researcher reflexivity is fluid and connects to how we view the world, ourselves in the world, and our relationship to the research (Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Researcher reflexivity was an ongoing process throughout the research study that allowed me to assess my identity, positionality, social location, and subjectivities relevant to the research topic, which helped to increase the study's rigor and validity (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Methodology

Data Analysis Plan

Data analysis in this research study followed a general qualitative research tradition of narrative policy analysis and phenomenology. The boundaries for this study included the final narratives from 30-days prior to the enactment of the ACTs and subsequent welfare legislation from the four presidential administrations that changed what had been stable welfare policy over long periods. This research study employed Initial Coding (IC) as the first cycle coding. IC was used to code policy narrative transcripts, welfare policy language, and participants' interview data. Second cycle coding included theme coding and narrative policy framework coding. IC allowed me to organize and reduce the data into distinct parts for analysis and then determine if there were similarities and differences (Saldana, 2016). Through theme coding I checked for recurring themes that arise within and across the data; and the narrative policy framework coding was used to capture the data's corpus of rhetoric and conflict, discourse, agreements, and the core categories that were contained in the research code book derived from the scholarly literature, and that developed from the data in welfare policy narratives and language (Saldana, 2016).

According to Sauro (2015), analyzing final narratives usually are most relevant and produce the richest information and data needed to answer research questions. The narrative policy framework allowed for multiple levels of narratives and policy language, working simultaneously, over four presidential administrations: Clinton, Bush, Obama, and Trump. Therefore, this study included analysis through the NPF at the macro-meso

levels. The narrative policy analysis of welfare legislation at the macro level included

institutional levels of analysis that examined policymaking culture, and the meso level of

analysis that examined policymakers' and political actors' narratives addressing poverty

and welfare reform that contained the political beliefs, normative ideas, hegemony,

philosophies, ideals, and social construction of single mothers receiving welfare benefits.

These normative ideas included the social construction of single welfare mothers who

sought 4-year college degrees as a sustainable path out of poverty.

Phenomenological techniques allowed for the analysis of the social location and

standpoints, and the lived experiences of single welfare mothers who sought 4-year

college degrees at state IHEs in NC. The lived experiences of single welfare mother also

included being forced to leave 4-year degree programs for jobs paying less than the living

wage and with little to no benefits; which kept them in poverty (Goddard et al., 2016;

Jimenez et al., 2016).

Narrative policy analysis complemented this study's theoretical foundation and

allowed for the examination of policymakers' and political actors' narratives and policy

language during the welfare policymaking process. Welfare reform occurred in 1996

through the passage of the PRWORA and TANF. The researcher selected welfare

legislation by using the Clinton administration (1996) as a starting point for the collection

of policymakers' and political actors' policy narratives through the Presidential Directive

authorizing the enactment of the PPOEM (2018) during the Trump administration as an

endpoint. The logic for selecting this range of policy narratives and language for analysis

was based on the significant changes in welfare legislation, which lead me to my research

topic and combining narrative policy analysis with phenomenological techniques. Thereby, selecting a general qualitative research design that included narrative policy analysis helped in examining welfare policy narratives and language and their effects on the lived experiences of single welfare mothers who sought 4-year college degrees, NC IHEs, and state and local welfare policies in NC, during the four presidential administrations. This approach to the study helped to triangulate the data, increased the study's rigor, criticality, trustworthiness, and the validity of the research findings (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Also, the rationale for selecting welfare narratives and policy language of policymakers and political actors relevant to the ACTs and subsequent welfare legislation between 1996-2018, was based on the premise that welfare legislation changed from entitlement to a work-fare system for limited time benefits (USDHHS, 1996) which may have increased poverty and a broader class of the working poor. These approaches to poverty postulate that welfare policy reform intended to reduce poverty through the employment and training of welfare recipients so that they can become independent of government assistance programs. Therefore, the narrative policy analysis in this study began with the enactment of the 1996 ACTs during the Clinton administration and implementation through the proposed welfare legislation and PPOEM (2018) issued by the Trump administration. These ACTs, subsequent welfare legislation, and PPOEM have limited sustainable paths out of poverty through 4-year degree attainment by single welfare mothers.

Consequently, the analysis of narratives and policy language contained in the ACTs and subsequent welfare legislation are limited to 30-days prior to enactment and returned data that was sufficient to answer the study's research questions. According to Sauro (2015), the final narratives are the most important and contain the accumulation of policy debates. Hence, the transcripts of the policy narratives of policymakers and political actors were analyzed opposed to interviews, since politicians' and political actors' experiences may be biased because of their political positions, affiliations, and policy agendas (Sauro, 2015; Shanahan et al., 2018). However, interviewing those who were most affected by welfare legislation, single welfare mothers, provided data that can help to inform policymakers' and political actors' policy narratives and policy decisions.

Phenomenological techniques allowed for participant interviews that contained subjective data, silenced, or hidden during the policymaking process. Thus, the policy narratives of policymakers' and political actors' concerning single welfare mothers living below the federal poverty income threshold, their employment, self-sufficiency, and independence from welfare assistance programs, as described in welfare legislation, was the focus of the narrative policy analysis. Consequently, the rationale for selecting welfare reform legislation and the population of welfare recipients is based on a 2018 Census Bureau report that indicates that single mothers and their children are the largest populations living in poverty and requiring government assistance.

Participant Selection

The rationale for selecting the population of single mothers for this study was based on government and non-government reports, and scholarly literature that indicated

that single mothers and their children are the largest population living in poverty and requiring government assistance. Participant selection in this study was voluntary and participants were identified, contacted, and recruited by placing articles in local newspapers in NC, posting fliers at public places, Facebook accounts, and social media web pages containing support groups for single mothers. The Facebook webpage described the study criteria, attributes, and the population desired. Participants were asked to contact the researcher at a Facebook page, Zoom meeting page, and or a temporary telephone line set-up specifically for this research study. Participants' privacy was protected during this study, in the study's finding, and reporting by issuing non-sequential numbers to identify and protect the confidentiality of participants and their personal information.

The participant pool was to consist of 8-10 participants who were single welfare mothers that attended 4-year degree programs at state institutions of higher education in NC during the implementation of the ACTs and subsequent welfare legislation (1996-2018). Ravitch and Carl (2016) and Saldana (2018) state that to reach data saturation sufficient to provide themes within and across the data, the selection of 8-10 participants in qualitative research is sufficient or when saturation is reached. Incidentally, only three women were recruited into the study because this population of women were difficult to locate with the data collection instruments used in this study. Additional recruiting mechanisms were initiated to increase recruitment such as snowballing, placing additional advertisements in local newspapers, and the posting of IRB approved recruitment fliers in additional public locations; however, these additional recruitment

techniques did not produce additional participants. The three women recruited into the study were single mothers and receiving welfare benefits while attending a 4-year degree program in NC. Single welfare mothers are the population who were most affected by the narratives and policy language in welfare legislation and have experience with welfare and higher education, their selection was based on socio-economic and demographic data.

The data consist of: (a) gender, (b) marital status during policy implementation and now, (c) age during policy implementation and now, (d) head of household status with dependent child/children, (e) education level, (f) welfare and work status, (g) residency in NC, and (h) enrollment in 4-year degree programs at state IHEs in NC during the implementation of the ACTs and subsequent welfare legislation (see Appendix B). Once recruited into the study, snowballing was used to recruit additional participants in NC.

NC has some of the highest levels of concentrated poverty in the nation (Nolan, 2018; U.S. Census Bureau, 2018). Thus, participants were single, mothers, 18-years old or older, head of household with dependent child/children under the age of 18 years old and were receiving welfare benefits while attending a 4-year degree program in NC (see Appendix B). Including participant experiences in this study contributed rich, deep, thick, and subjective data from individual and their unique experiences. Participant experiences provided data that was needed to answer the study's research questions and provide information to policymakers and political actors that may have been missing, silenced, or ignored when constructing the ACTs and subsequent welfare legislation.

Participants entered the study through informed adult consent. Engaging participants in an unbiased manner and providing member-checks in the interpretation of the data during the research process helped with the confirmability of data collected and increased the research validity. Selecting participants that have lived experiences with welfare assistance and higher education narrows this study's justification of the participant pool selection and is relevant to the research topic and purpose. Recruiting participants through snowballing allowed for additional participant contacts from those already included in the study. Snowballing allowed initial study participants to provide contact information for the selection of additional participants that share in the study's topic (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The justification for selecting this sampling strategy was based on the premise that the participant pool was challenging to locate due to time, place, the research topic, and the current COVID-19 Pandemic; however, this study did not allow for participant replacements and saturation.

Instrumentation

General qualitative studies command research instruments that help answer the research questions from several data collection sources, methods, and methodological techniques. According to Patterson (2012), combining narrative (policy) analysis and phenomenological techniques in one research study can have positive outcomes for meaning making and can help to fill the gap in the literature and advance theories. This research study employed Initial Coding (IC) as the first cycle coding. IC was used as the first cycle coding for policy narratives and language and participants interviews to organize the data. Second cycle coding, through the use of Nvivo 12-Plus included theme

coding of participant interviews and NPF coding for policy narratives and language. Saldana (2016) through IC, the data was reduced into distinct parts for analysis, and then determining the similarities and differences. Second cycle coding included theme coding. Theme coding allowed for recurring themes, similarities, and differences that arise within and across the data, and NPF coding captured the data's narrative thrust that progressed toward the themes (constructs) found in the scholarly literature and contained in the research code book which were the corpus of significant conflict in welfare reform policies.

This approach to data coding complemented the theoretical foundations of this study when analyzing policy narratives that had the power to influence the language in the ACTs and FCPA captured the language contained in the ACTs and subsequent welfare legislation from four presidential administrations: Clinton, Bush, Obama, and Trump, and the participant transcripts from semistructured online interviews. Also, after receiving researcher permission, a modified researcher developed questionnaire that was qualified by three subject matter experts was administered to participants based on criteria sampling to closely match participants to the research topic and criteria (Scope, 2018); and a modified researcher developed interview guide that was, qualified by three subject matter experts, was used when conducting semistructured interviews (Scope, 2018). There were no additional research questions that emerge during the interviewing process that were included in the interview guide, and the reflective and analytic memos developed by this researcher.

Permission to participate in interviews included signed informed adult consent forms from research participants, a signed permission to modified a researcher developed Demographic Questionnaire and Interview Protocol (Guide) used in *Perceptions Among African American Women Welfare Recipients Advocating For Welfare Reform* (Scope, 2018), qualified by three subject matter experts, that assisted with participant recruitment and semistructured online interviews (see Appendix A, Appendix B, and Appendix C) and information regarding Community Resources.

Audio-recordings from participant interviews were transcribed by me. The interview transcriptions, participant audio recordings, and the researcher's analytic memos were separated from any personal identifying information and safeguarded using a fireproof safe that requires a key and code for entry. Welfare policy narrative transcripts and policy documents were selected from official government websites such as the Library of Congress, Congress.Gov, Whitehouse.Gov., the NC State Assembly and official NC government agencies. Also, U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, that is monitored for accuracy. The higher education data pertaining to the enrollment and unenrollment of single welfare mothers are not tracked by NC IHEs nor NC State as mandated by Federal policy. Therefore, data regarding degree attainment of single mothers in NC and poverty was collected from the IWPR, a non-partisan, non-profit organization that conducts scholarly research on women and poverty, educational attainment, equity, and equality; and is monitored for accuracy. The transcripts, policy documents, and single mother education data were downloaded to the researcher's computer and an external drive for analysis. Researcher's field notes,

reflections, and analytic memos were recorded in the researcher's journal to include

descriptive data such as people using non-sequential numbers, place, and phenomenon

(Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Saldana, 2016).

Patterns of interactions between the interviewees and the researcher, values and

belief systems, researchers' additional questions outside of the research questions, and

other information that developed about the research study was safeguarded in the

researcher's fireproof, passcode, and key entry safe. Data derived from this research

study should returned data sufficient to answer this study's research questions and will be

kept for a minimum of five-years and then destroyed. Concurrently, participants were

made aware of the study's procedures, data safeguards, and how the research will be

disseminated.

Data Planning

The interviews included responsive interviewing. Rubin and Rubin (2012) assert

that in qualitative research the researcher must develop a relationship with the

interviewees that builds trust and allows for rich and deep data to emerge. Therefore, a

modified researcher developed questionnaire (see Appendix B), and interview guide (see

Appendix C) containing open-ended questions developed by Scope (2018) used *in*

"Perceptions Among African American Women Welfare Recipients in Advocating for

Welfare Reform, qualified by three subject matter experts, was used to recruit potential

study participants, and record emergent data during the interviews containing open-ended

questions. Since interviews were semistructured and conducted online, developing a close

relationship with participants was a challenge; however, researchers confirm that the

advances in technology produce similar outcomes during data collection when communication occurs online versus in face-to-face (Gibbs, Friese, & Mangabeira, 2002; Meyer, Gruppe, & Franz, 2002). Thereby, technology changes the settings, and brings the researcher closer to the qualitative data (Gibbs et al., 2002; Meyer et al., 2002). Also, online interviews add feasibility and access to the data and study (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Permissions and research disclosure documents in this study were transmitted electronically for electronic signatures from the researcher (s) and research participants using Adobe Signature. The participant interviews were audio-recorded, and participant identities and personal information protected using non-sequential numbers developed by the researcher.

Since single welfare mothers were the population most affected by welfare legislation and policy outputs, the interviews were conducted from a feminist and critical perspective. Feminist and critical perspectives allowed women to *talk back,* which is political especially when they are silenced and or ignored in society (hooks, 1989; 2000; Lorde, 1984). This general qualitative study includes the feminist and critical perspectives which are consistent with interpretive constructionism that posits reality is the meaning that people attribute to a phenomenon that creates the lens for which they interpret the world and their place in it (Gestalt Theory, 1912). This approach to qualitative interviewing was needed to draw out the lived experiences of single welfare mothers, who may have been socially constructed in order to maintain the status-quo of dominance, patriarchy, and hegemony in welfare policymaking and society (Crenshaw, 1989; Katz, 2012; Marshall, 1999; 2004; McPhail, 2003; Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

Also, the data collection and interview protocol in this study included the main research questions, follow-up questions for clarity, probes to check for accuracy, and for the development of rich, thick, and deep data (Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Furthermore, this study included a modified researcher developed questionnaire to recruit participants, an interview guide containing the research questions and additional questions related to the research topic, that are qualified by three subject matter experts. Also, I collected and examine official archived congressional and presidential transcripts, welfare legislation transcripts, public policy documents, and educational statistical data related to single mothers, welfare reform, and poverty from official government websites, and reliable non-partisan, non-profit organization websites that are audited for accuracy. The narrative transcripts, policy documents, and interview data worked together to aid in answering the study's research questions and uncovered emergent data that was useful in this study.

Therefore, legislative, and presidential documents for one month prior to enactment of the ACTs and subsequent welfare legislation transcripts and the enacted welfare policies were collected to answer the research questions (Sauro, 2015; Shanahan et al., 2018). Narrative policy analysis involves connecting the data to theory, such as the NPF in this study which posits that narratives contain form, content, and characters working simultaneously at interacting levels of analysis to influence policy language (Shanahan et al., 2018) and the roles that characters play in discourse of policymaking to achieve their policy agendas that may limit or eliminate sustainable paths out of poverty. The FCPA postulates that women are silenced and or ignored in the policymaking

process such as in problem definition, policy language, context, hold multiple identities, and are traditionally powerless. Therefore, the policy language of policymakers can be oral and or written and are powerful in the policymaking process especially when they contain the social construction of marginalized groups in society such as single welfare mothers. Collectively, the participant interviews, narrative policy analysis, and instrumentation helped to increase the research validity and credibility.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Content validity was established through the increased trustworthiness of research through data collection and the instrumentation. Using data collection instruments that are qualified by three subject matter experts increases content validity and addresses issues of trustworthiness. Also, to ensure the quality of the researcher's interpretations of the data, member-checks were used to verify content and meaning of the lived experiences of participants (Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Storied narratives of policymakers and political actors during the policymaking process came from official government websites that are audited for accuracy. The meanings that single welfare mothers gave to their lived experiences helped to establish content validity and trustworthiness in this study. According to Guba (1981), establishing validity in research includes credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Credibility

Credibility in qualitative research is the establishment of internal validity where there is inseparability of methods and findings (Ravitch & Carl, 2012). Therefore, triangulation of the data is essential and included member-checking, checking

descriptions and meanings, peer-views, and debriefing (Ravitch & Carl, 2012). Building research validity helped with establishing transferability of research findings.

Transferability

Narratives have transferability that can be applied to other segments of society (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The findings in this study that contains thick descriptions of the data and analysis that may be applied to other social policies for positive social change while maintaining their content specific richness and by establishing dependability in the research design (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Dependability

This study created dependability (reliability) by collecting reliable and stable data from official and organizational government websites and from participant interviews. The study's design helped to answer the research questions using official government archival documents containing the transcripts of policymakers and political actors relevant to the ACTs and subsequent welfare legislation, a modified questionnaire and an interview guide originally developed by Scope (2018) and certified by three subject matter experts, and triangulation of the study's data collection methods. Dependability of the proposed research data lead to confirmability by establishing trustworthiness of the qualitative data collected.

Confirmability

Confirmability (objectivity) in qualitative research deals with the trustworthiness of qualitative data (Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Qualitative research does not attempt to establish objectivity, instead seeks to establish confirmability by

continuously checking the researcher's interpretation of the data collected. These checks occurred through member checking by asking participants about the researcher's interpretation of the data. The narratives of policymakers, political actors, and the research participants are subjective (Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Shanahan et al., 2018). Therefore, to establish confirmability in this general qualitative research study, I was the primary tool and established researcher reflexivity during the research process (Lofland, Snow & Anderson, 2006; Porter, 2010).

Researcher Reflexivity

Researcher reflexivity included checking researcher biases, positionality, interpretation of the data, and research findings (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Since I have personal knowledge and experience with the research topic, my knowledge constructs effects how I see the research and how I engage in the research. However, researcher reflexivity allowed me to check my bias, positionality, the interpretation of the data collected, and the ethical standards embedded into this study.

Data Collection

After receiving Walden's Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved application on November 14, 2019, approval number: 11-14-2019-0475241, I collected all data relevant to this research study. The data collection included the official government archival transcripts containing the narrative and policy language about the ACTs and subsequent welfare legislation over one week from official government websites such as the Library of Congress, U.S. Senate, U.S. House of Representatives, and the Whitehouse. Data was also collected from the State of NC government, NCDHHS, NC

State Assembly Legislative Library websites containing data about welfare reform, single welfare mothers, and 4-year degree attainment over one week. The legislative and presidential documents from one month prior to enactment of the ACTs and subsequent welfare legislation transcripts and the enacted welfare policies were collected from official government websites until data saturation was met to answer the research questions (Sauro, 2015; Shanahan et al., 2018).

Narrative policy analysis included connecting the data to NPF and FCPA in this study which posits that narratives contain form, content, and characters working simultaneously at interacting levels of analysis to influence policy language (Shanahan et al., 2018) and to examine the roles that characters play in discourse of policymaking to achieve their policy agendas that limited or eliminate sustainable paths out of poverty for single welfare mothers. These narratives oral transcripts and written and are important in the policymaking process especially when they contain the social construction of marginalized groups in society. Also, the researcher collected and examined data, over one week, publicly available data from the U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, and the IWPR relative to single welfare mothers in NC, poverty, and higher education.

The first document that participants reviewed was the Informed Consent. The Informed Consent form was sent online through a secured Adobe Docu-Sign and the participants returned the signed consent. Online, semistructured participant interviews occurred over two weeks using a modified researcher developed questionnaire, after receiving Research permission and that was qualified by three subject matter experts after

receiving researcher permission (see Appendices B, C, D) , and follow-up questions

taken from field notes for probing and clarification of responses and the duration of each

interview were 40- 60 minutes. Since the data collection techniques did not return the 8-

10 participants for this study, I increased the data collection methods. The data collection

included trying to reach additional participants using snowballing, posting additional

recruitment fliers in public places, posting the recruitment flier on websites and groups,

and advertising in a local newspaper. Unfortunately, the increase data collections did not

return additional participants into the study and increased the data collection by one-

week.

Once the semistructured online interviews were completed the interviews ended

with participants exiting the study by researcher debriefing. The debriefing included

allowing the participants to review my interpretation of their lived experiences and the

meanings that they assigned to these experiences. Debriefing included how the data

would be safeguarded, such as separating personal identifiable information from the

participants, stored on a passcode entry computer, and documents and transcripts being

locked in a fireproof safe with passcode and key entry maintained by the researcher; also,

the destruction of the data, documents, and transcripts in five-years. Follow-up

interviews were not needed for further clarification and confirmation of data interpreted

by this researcher. The participants were reminded of the study's topic, purpose, and how

the research will be disseminated.

There were no known adverse effects, sudden trauma, and or difficulties from

participating in this research study. However, additional resources and information on

how to access websites for resources and services that may be needed because of participation in this research study was discussed and distributed. There were no discrepant cases in this study, however, discrepant cases could contribute to the research topic and add to current theories.

Summary

Chapter 3 introduced the research design and rationale, which supports the study's qualitative and general qualitative design. The general qualitative design in this study will include narrative analysis and phenomenological techniques. The narrative analysis allows for the examination of policy narratives used to influence the policy language from four presidential administrations: Clinton, Bush, Obama, and Trump; since single welfare mothers are the population most likely affects by welfare legislation. Also, including phenomenological techniques in this study allows for the collection of rich, thick, and deep data through responsive interviews that allow single welfare mothers to talk back.

The role of the researcher included checking researcher bias through researcher reflexivity, member-checks, and the researcher-participant relationship. The methodology of this proposed research study includes: the narrative selection that is bounded by the ACTs and subsequent welfare legislation, participant selection that includes the potential participant pool of single welfare mothers who are the population most likely affected by the narratives and policy language in the ACTs, subsequent welfare legislation, and their lived experiences as 4-year degree-seeking students.

The interview process, and the narrative selection describes which welfare policy narratives and language were analyzed. Also included was how data saturation, themes, and coding of the data were addressed. Content validity and issues of trustworthiness in the data collection, procedures for recruitment of participants, the timing of data collection and interpretation, data analysis, and how discrepant cases will be handled were discussed. Lastly, issues of data and personal information safeguards, how participants will exit the study, and any possible adverse effects for participation in the study were addressed.

The research method, designs, and methodology in Chapter 3 returned sufficient data to answers the study's research questions and to fill the gap in the literature about the power of policy narratives and their influence on policy language. Also, the effects narratives and policy language on state and local welfare policies, the degree attainment of single mothers at NC, and the lived experiences of single welfare mothers who sought 4-year degrees during the enactment and implementation of the ACTs and subsequent welfare legislation. Single welfare mothers voices have been silenced because of power structures, dominance, and the absence of gender and the responsibilities of motherhood in the policymaking arena. However, single welfare mothers' experiences with welfare and higher education informs policymakers' decisions about welfare legislation that could lead to sustainable paths out of poverty through 4-year degree attainment. Chapter 4 includes the research results, a description of the research methods used, and a presentation of the research findings.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to address the gap in the literature and add to the body of knowledge in public policy analysis by comparing and analyzing policy narratives and policy language used by policymakers and political actors. Policy narratives had the power to influence policy language during the construction of the ACTs, and subsequent welfare legislation from the four presidential administrations: Clinton, Bush, Obama, and Trump. Increasing the understanding about the role and power of policy narratives that influenced welfare reform legislation regarding poverty, employment, education, and the financial independence of welfare recipients was warranted. Also examined were the effects that the ACTs' policy language had on NC state and local welfare policies and the degree attainment of single welfare mothers who attended 4-year college degree programs at institutions of higher education in NC. NC state and local welfare policies contained socially constructed language targeting single mothers receiving welfare benefits. Equally important were the lived experiences of single welfare mothers who sought 4-year degrees and the meanings given to those experiences as a result of the ACTs and subsequent welfare legislation. Thereby, combining narrative policy analysis and phenomenological techniques helped to understand these experiences and helps to inform policymakers' decisions regarding welfare reform and increases this study's trustworthiness.

Although the ACTs address the main issue of employment for welfare recipients, the problem is the language in the ACTs did not consider the 4-year degree attainment by

single welfare mothers as work and limits benefits to 2 years and all benefits to 5 years over a lifetime for those seeking financial independence through higher education. Consequently, the ACTs' narratives had the power to influence policy language and include socially constructed language and what it means to work. Also, single welfare mothers who choose to complete 4-year college degrees as a sustainable path out of poverty have been penalized with the decrease and or elimination of benefits or forced to leave college for work. This study adds to the body of research in public policy analysis, and provides data to policymakers addressing the need to increase their understanding of how 4-year degree attainment of single welfare mothers can be used as a policy tool when creating narratives and policy language addressing poverty eradication and welfare legisilation. Therefore, these efforts can increase literacy, wages, and reduce dependence on welfare assistance programs.

The study sought to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: What are the forms, content, and constructs of policy narratives, language, and the strategies and belief systems of policymakers and political actors contained in the ACTs and subsequent welfare legislation to alleviate poverty, increase employment, create self-sufficiency and financial independence of welfare recipients?

RQ2: How does NC state and local welfare policies address single welfare mothers seeking 4-year college degrees?

RQ3: How did the ACTs, and subsequent welfare reform legislation, affect enrollment and unenrollment of single welfare mothers seeking 4-year degrees at a state institution of higher education in NC?

RQ4: What decisions have single mothers made, if any, about 4-year degree attainment since the implementation of the ACTs' 2 year limit of welfare to work requirement, 5 year lifetime limit for benefits, and how have those decisions affected their lives?

This chapter includes the settings, demographics, data collection, data analysis, evidence of trustworthiness, results, summary, and a transition to Chapter 5.

Setting

The setting for the narrative policy analysis included 287 federal welfare documents from four presidential administrations between 1996-2018, and 81 NC related welfare policy documents. The policy documents were retrieved from reliable government websites that are audited for accuracy. Also, data regarding poverty and the degree attainment of single parents in NC were collected and analyzed from the 2018 American Survey, US Department of Education, National Statistics Education Center, US Census Bureau, Government Accounting Office, and the Institute for Women's Policy Research. Semistructured on-line interviews were conducted via a secured Zoom link with three single welfare mothers who attended 4-year degree programs at IHEs in NC between 1996-2018. There were no personal or organizational conditions that influenced participants or their experiences at the time of this study that may influenced the interpretation of the study results.

After receiving researcher permission, a modified researcher developed questionnaire that was qualified by three subject matter experts was administered to participants based on criteria sampling to closely match participants to the research topic

and criteria (Scope, 2018). Additionally, a modified researcher developed interview guide that was qualified by three subject matter experts, was used when conducting semistructured online interviews (Scope, 2018). There were no additional research questions that emerged during the interviewing process that were included in the interview guide, and the reflective and analytic memos developed by me. Adopting to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, this research sought online interviews with study participants. Because many public facilities were closed during the pandemic, posting of fliers in public spaces became restrictive and in some cases not allowed. Many public entities in NC were closed due to the pandemic and this could have contributed to the small population in this study. Also, when interviewing research participants online and without video does not allow for the interpretation of physical cues that could be used in this study. Instead, probing questions were used to gain a better understanding of the stories told by participants and for clarity in interpreting the findings.

Demographics

The demographics for the narrative policy analysis included welfare documents from congressional, administrative agencies, presidential directives, orders and memorandums, and public welfare laws between 1996-2018 pertaining to poverty, employment, self-sufficiency, single mothers, and higher education (college degrees) and are displayed in Table 1.

Table 1

Federal Welfare Policy Narratives and ACTs Demographics

Presidents and Terms in Office	Number of Narratives/Legislative Bills, Committee Reports, Agency Demonstration Projects	Number of ACTs, Presidential directives, Orders, Memorandums
Clinton	34	2
1993-2001		
Bush	44	16
2001-2009		
Obama	107	6
2009-2017		
Trump	73	5
2017-2018		
Sub-Total	258	29

Similarly, the demographics of NC state and local welfare policy documents between 1996 and 2018 included Welfare to Work, AFDC, Work First, and TANF and are displayed in Table 2

Table 2

NC State and Local Welfare Legislations ACTs Demographic

President in Office	Terms in Office	NC Work First Plans and DSS Administrative Letters	Research Scope FY1996-2018 Number of Work First Plans out of scope for this research study	Welfare to Work/*NC State Self-Sufficiency Plans
Clinton	January 20,1993- January 20, 2001	1	0	0
Bush	January 20, 2001- January 20, 2009	21	0	0
Obama	January 20, 2009- January 20, 2017	44	0	0
Trump	January 20, 2017- December 20, 2018	15	0	0
Sub-Total		81	0	0
Total		81		

Note. NC State Self-Sufficiency Plans were not available for this research study because of the personal nature of the individual recipient plan information.

There were additional policy narrative constructs that became apparent during the research, such as childcare, marriage, abstinence, and abusing welfare. However, these constructs were not analyzed separately in this study. The demographics for semistructured online interviews included three single mothers who were welfare recipients in NC and attending 4-year degree programs at public IHEs between 1996-2018. All participants were between the ages of 20-55, and female at birth. Participants were assigned random non-sequential numbers to protect their privacy. Participant

P5939920 had 3 children while attending school and earned a Bachelor of Nursing

Degree, P2479920 had 4 children while attending school and earned a Master of Social

Work Degree, Participant P2891020 had one child while attending school and earned

college credits but no degree. Participants current ages, number of dependents while on

welfare and attending a 4-year degree program, highest level of education, years received

welfare, and type of welfare received are displayed in Table 3.

Table 3

Participant Demographics

Participant Self-Identifying Information	Participant ID: P5939920	Participant ID: P2479920	Participant ID: P2891020
Gender			
-Female	Female	Female	Female
-Male			
-Transgender			
-Other			
Age Now	43	55	20
18-27 years of age	38-47	48-57	18-27
28-23 years of age			
38-47 years of age			
48-57 years of age			
58-67 years of age			
Number of dependents while on welfare	3	4	1
Highest Level of Education			
High School	Bachelor's	Graduate/Masters	Some College
Associates Degree			
Bachelor's Degree			
Grad/Professional Degree			
Years Received Welfare	8	11	2
Type Welfare Received	AFDC, Food Stamps, Medicaid, Childcare, Housing	AFDC, TANF, SNAP, Medicaid, Childcare, Housing	TANF, SNAP, Medicaid, Childcare

The study participants' demographics met the study criteria for participation in this study. No unusual circumstances were surrounding the study participation criteria.

Participants were assigned nonsequential numbers to protect their identities and increase confidentiality in the study. One woman in the study received a Master of Science degree in social work, identified as African American, age 55, a female at birth, with four living children. She received welfare benefits while attending a 4-year NC IHE. One woman received a Bachelor of Science degree in Nursing, identifies as an African American, and other nationality, age 43, a female at birth, has three children, attended a 4-year NC IHE while receiving welfare benefits. Another participant identified as an African, age 20, female at birth, who came to live in NC when she was 18-months old with her parents and became a citizen. She has one child, attended a 4-year NC IHE while receiving welfare benefits, and earned college credits toward a business of administration degree, but no degree.

Data Collection

Data was not collected until Walden's IRB approved the application. IRB approval was received on November 14, 2019, approval number 11-14-2019-0475241. Once approval was obtained, data collection began.

Narrative Policy Analysis

There were 287 Federal and 81 NC State welfare narrative policy documents and ACTs collected over two weeks from online federal, state, local, and administrative agencies' official government websites audited for accuracy. Higher education statistics

on single mothers and higher education in NC were collected over one week from the

2018 American Community Survey, US Department of Education, National Statistics

Education Center, U.S. Census Bureau, U.S. Government Accounting Office, and the

Institute for Women's Policy Research.

Participant Interviews

Participant interviews lasted between 40-60-minutes, data was collected over

three weeks, and no follow-up interviews were needed. Initially, eight to ten participants

were to be recruited into the study or until saturation. However, after multiple attempts to

reach this population were not successful with the recruitment methods described in the

study, only three participants agreed to participate in the study through informed consent.

For example, there were an additional six potential participants who agreed to return the

completed Informed Adult Consent and or Demographic Questionnaire. However,

numerous attempts to contact these potential participants failed. I then employed

additional data collection methods in this study, such as setting-up Facebook and Craigs

Lists, recruitment fliers were post on welfare online peer support groups, and additional

advertisements in newspapers, to reach additional participants. This new cycle of

recruitment tools did not increase participation in this study which may be contributed to

the COVID-19 pandemic, restrictions on social gatherings, and the closing of some

public facilities. Typically with qualitative data, generalization of the interview findings

is not possible because of the subjective nature of lived experiences and in this study

because of the small participation. However, once transcripts were transcribed and

coded, similar themes occurred within and across the data in response to the interview questions.

Each participant was interviewed once, and there were no follow-up interviews. Data was recorded using a secured Zoom account. Each participant was given the option if they wanted to turn off the video. All participants turned off the video and only used audio during the online interviews. There were no unusual circumstances encountered in this study.

Data Analysis

Policy Narratives and ACTs

I used a deductive process to code the data. The data coding cycles for narrative policy analysis included first cycle coding to organize the data and to move from themes (constructs) contained in the research codebook to policy narratives and language. Second cycle coding included NPF coding of policy narratives and language. Policy narratives and language derived from IC and then NPF were then compared to the language in the ACTs. The ACTs were then analyzed through a gender lens using FCPA. NC state and local welfare policies included first cycle coding to organize the data for comparison to the policy language in the final ACTs.

Participant Interviews

There were three participants in this study who were assigned random non-sequential numbers to protect their identities. Any personally identifiable information was deleted from the interview transcripts. I used an inductive process to code participant interview transcripts. The data coding cycle included first cycle coding to organize the

data, and then theme coding for similarities and differences that became apparent within and across the participant interview transcripts data.

Narrative Policy Analysis Data Coding

First Cycle Coding

The first cycle coding of welfare narratives and policies included initial coding to organize the data into nodes using Nvivo 12-Plus software based on the themes (constructs) from the scholarly literature recorded in the research codebook.

Initial Coding

The policy narrative data were based on policymakers and political actors' narratives from 30 days before enacting the ACTs and subsequent welfare legislation and were organized by the Presidential administration. This included extracting legislative language from the US House of Representative and the Senate welfare policy bills, congressional reports, Presidential directive, orders and memorandums, federal administrative agencies' reports, public laws, and state and local welfare policies from 1996-2018 relevant to welfare legislation, single mothers, and higher education.

NPF Coding

The constructs (from the codebook) were applied within and across policy narratives and language documents using Nvivo 12-Plus. These constructs included poverty and synonyms low-income and poor; college and synonyms higher education; degrees and synonyms college degree; single mothers and synonyms unwed; self-sufficient and synonyms independent; and work and synonyms employment and jobs. Additional themes that became evident when applying the initial constructs included

childcare, marriage, abstinence, and abusing welfare. Additional nodes were created using Nvivo 12-Plus, however, were not analyzed in this study.

Next, NPF coding was used to move deductively from the constructs to policy narratives and language, and then to the coded units for NPF and FCPA analysis. NPF coding is interpretive; therefore, policy narratives and language were continuously reviewed by the researcher to reduce any biases attributed to the research topic. The NPF coding was not independently verified by a second party in this study and is limited to the researcher's interpretation of the data.

The process of searching for contextual information included applying the NPF to the welfare policy documents and reporting the legislative outcomes that produced 278 policy documents relevant to the research topic and is the primary analysis. The contextual data served as the setting of the story, a list of policy narratives and policy languages, and a summary of the final legislation that acts as the moral of the story was constructed for each policy document by theme, Presidential administration, and then by the policy document.

The NPF framing of the policy narratives that influenced the policy language in the ACTs and subsequent welfare legislation, with a plot and characters, were generated from the primary analysis. The results are presented in the results section of this chapter. NPF coding was applied to 258 welfare policy narrative documents that lead to the 29 welfare public laws (ACTs). An example of the NPF worksheet used in this study is found in Appendix D.

NPF Data Analysis

NPF assumptions included social construction, bounded relativity, generalizable structural elements, multiple levels of analysis, and homo narrans model. An NPF worksheet was created for each node/construct over four Presidential administrations containing the plot, which organizes action for a political agenda (moral of the story), characters, settings, belief systems, strategies, competing narratives, and levels of unit analysis. Policy documents relating to congressional actions, presidential memorandums and orders, and public laws based on the setting (presidential administrations) of the policy action were selected for each themed (construct) node. The construct nodes were queried using Nvivo 12-Plus against each policy document. The constructs nodes' queries were copied and recorded to the NPF worksheets (O'Leary et al., 2017) under NPF Text Coding. The policy narrative sentences about the constructs were extracted and copied to the Narrative Form section of the NPF worksheet.

Next, characters were identified from the policy documents such as hero, villain, and victim based on their role in the policy plot or moral of the story. Policy Narrative Content structure was established and recorded based on the belief systems of policymakers that became apparent through their narratives (i.e., sets of values or beliefs of policymakers and political actors, and how they controlled the policy process through welfare legislation narratives). Lastly, competing narratives were recorded against the plot or moral of the policy narratives and or policy language, recorded in the NPF worksheets, and analyzed based on the NPF assumptions.

FCPA Data Analysis

I analyzed the ACTs policy language through the lens of FPCA, a gender lens to determine if the ACTs contain the FCPA assumptions: policy language that includes social construction, lack of intersectionality, hegemony, patriarchy, status quo, and the absence of problem definition input from marginalized populations that transferred to society. The findings include social construction of single welfare mothers and their children. The intersectionality of being poor, women, mother, and single were not considered in the majority of the policy language.

Hegemony was apparent through the ACTs language and patriarchy played a role in determining what society should look like and who is entitled to what. The status quo of policymaking and societal norms through welfare policy were evident in the ACTs' language and were absent of problem definition from the standpoints of single welfare mothers pursuing 4-year college degrees as a path out of poverty. FCPA explicates that women's voices are silenced to control the policy process and policy outputs.

Participant Data Collection

Locating single mothers who received welfare benefits while attending 4-year degree programs at a 4-year IHE in NC between 1996-2018 was difficult and challenging. I placed advertisements for the study in local newspapers, handed out and posted IRB approved fliers in public places, posted filers on social media accounts like Facebook and Instagram, and used snowballing when I engaged initial participants over two weeks. Eight women that met the study's criteria agreed to participate in the study and gave me their telephone numbers for initial contact. However, only three women

signed and returned the Informed Adult Consent through a secured online Adobe Doc account set-up for this study. Repeated calls to the other five women who verbally agreed to be in the study went unanswered. I increased data collection by placing additional advertisements in newspapers, posting IRB approved fliers on support group websites frequented by this population of women. However, these extended data collection techniques did not increase participation in this study. The three participants did not request additional information about the study. However, I offered further explanations and let them know that the study was voluntary and that they can leave the study at any time and for any reason without being stigmatized.

NC State and Local Welfare Data Analysis

I collected 81 policy documents, over one week, from NC state and local welfare policies from official government websites of the NC General Assembly and Administrative Agencies whose websites are monitored for accuracy. The documents were relevant to single mothers receiving welfare benefits containing legislative and state actions in the AFDC, Work First, Welfare to Work, and TANF welfare programs.

Data Analysis

I analyzed and compared NC state and local welfare policies relevant to AFDC, Work First, Welfare to Work, and TANF legislation and compared the policy language to the final language in the welfare reform ACTs from four Presidential administrations: Clinton, Bush, Obama, and Trump relevant to single mothers and higher education. I also analyzed these policies documents to determine if NC welfare legislation contained language relevant to single welfare mothers and 4-year degree access and attainment.

Work First

The Work First plan required every able-bodies person receiving welfare benefits and SNAP to participate in work for at least 20 hours per week if you were a single parent with a child under six-years-old; no participation in work if you are a single parent with a child 12-months or younger; and a maximum of 40 weeks with a minimum of 30 hours per week if you have children over 6-years of age. The Work First plan included work preparation, a two-year limit on technical training, 4-year college degrees if you were entering a high-demand field in the local area and or State. Childcare vouchers were created under welfare policies so that childcare recipients received high-quality childcare, and measures and to reduce barriers to work. There was no mention of 4-year degree attainment for single mothers who did not want to enter high demand local and or state professions.

Welfare to Work

Welfare to Work is the umbrella program for Work First. The main policy that requires the State to develop innovative plans, remove barriers to work, collect child support payments and pass through those payments to welfare recipients as a path to self-sufficiency as stated in the ACTs. The state was required to locate absent fathers and prepare them for the workforce. Single mothers receiving welfare were required to locate absent fathers and allow the state to establish paternity in order to receive welfare benefits. Abortion using Medicaid was abolished unless the pregnancy resulted from rape or endangered the mother's life. NC also adopted the drug testing policies of welfare recipients as in the ACTs that also extended to college students.

Like the federal welfare ACTs' policy language, welfare recipients and the state were required to participate in allowable mandatory participation in jobs, job searches, and limited training that results in employment. Mentions of education in state welfare policies also focused on the children of welfare recipients, their college preparation, access, and success.

TANF

NC adopted the same welfare reform policies found in the Federal ACTs by abolishing AFDC and initiating the requirements under TANF, a cash assistance program and SNAP, a food assistance program, with TANF having a maximum benefit term of two-year, and for both programs in which the focus is to work for benefits to become self-sufficient.

NC Higher Education Data Collection

Following the IRB protocol, I collected statistical data about the higher education of single mother students from official government websites audited for accuracy and a non-profit organization. The data collected included the 2018 American Community Survey, U.S. Department of Education, National Education Statics Center, U.S. Census Bureau, U.S. Government Accounting Office, and the IWPR, a non-profit, non-partisan organization that conducts scholarly research about single mothers, higher education, equity and equality, and poverty, since NC State and NC State IHEs do not track the enrollment and unenrollment of single mothers receiving welfare assistance in their state as mandated under the ACTs (ARRA,2009).

NC Higher Education Data Analysis

I analyzed statistical higher education data regarding single parent students from the 2018 American Community Survey, US Department of Education, National Education Statics Center, US Census Bureau, U.S. Government Accounting Office, and the IWPR since NC State and State IHEs do not track the enrollment and unenrollment of single mother student who received welfare benefits. The data determined that when college degrees are attained by single parents poverty decreases, which poverty alleviation/eradication is a main tenet of the ACTs.

Summary of Data Collection and Analysis

The data collection tools used in this study provided the path for an in-depth analysis of policy narratives through the NPF, which allowed for analysis of the ACTs through the lens of the FCPA. The phenomenological techniques included with single welfare mothers who attended 4-year degree programs in NC between 1996-2018. The semistructured online interviews allowed for in-depth analysis that revealed the lived experiences and standpoints of single welfare mothers and how the legislative actions of the federal government and the state affected their lives and their decisions about pursuing college degrees.

Triangulation of the data was established through deductive and inductive data collection and analysis and a review of statistical data in this study. This research approach included narrative policy analysis based on themes found in the literature, participant interviews based on lived experiences, and educational statistical data from

reliable government and non-partisan organization websites that are audited regularly for accuracy. This approach to the data increases the research credibility.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Evidence of trustworthiness was established in this study by retrieving reliable and stable data that created credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability for data collection and data analysis methods used in this study. A second party in this study did not independently verify the methods used to establish the construct coding; therefore, data coding is limited to the researcher's interpretation of the data collected, coded, compared, and analyzed. However, the process used to search for contextual information, applying the NPF, and FCPA to analyze the content, form, and constructs of welfare policy language contained in welfare policy documents, and to report the legislative outcomes from the four presidential administrations can be replicated based on the methods used in this study. The methods used to code the participant interviews were established by prior scholarly researchers engaged in qualitative research using phenomenological techniques replicated in this study. To increase the study's credibility, there were iterative and recursive readings of the policy documents and participant transcripts. There were no inter-coding peer reviews in this study. The findings are based on the researcher's interpretations of the data and data analysis.

Credibility

Credibility in this study was established by internal validity, where the methods used to identify, collect, analyze, and triangulate the data complements the research findings. One adjustment was needed to increase the credibility of the research study

when data was collected from alternative sources. Since NC and NC IHEs do not track the enrollment and unenrollment of single welfare mothers attend 4-year degree programs while receiving welfare benefit, the researcher used data from alternative sources that included official government websites and from the IWPR, a non-partisan, non-profit organization that tracks college access and completion of single parents in the United States. Both sources provided data that is audited regularly for completeness and correctness to increase the credibility of this research study.

Transferability

The finding of this research study can be applied to other social policies affecting similar populations in this study. There were adjustments made in this research that would affect implementation or adjustments to transferability. Those adjustments included the data collected from the small number of research participants, however, the data collected was thick and deep and represented the lived experiences and standpoints of single welfare mothers. Generalization is not possible when phenomenological techniques are used such as individual semistructured interviews which are subjective and non-generalizable. However, the data collection, coding processes, and data analysis can be applied to other social policies affecting similar populations and geographical locations.

Dependability

The study included obtaining reliable and stable data from reliable sources that are audited for accuracy. There were two adjustments made in this study however the changes do not change the consistency strategies used in this study. The adjustments

included recipients' self-sufficiency plans (plans) were not available for review because of the sensitive and personal nature of the plans. Data from NC IHEs regarding single mother students who received welfare benefits while attending 4-year college degree programs were not available because NC state and IHEs do not track this data. Lastly, the number of participants was reduced because this population of mothers was difficult to locate. Therefore, the study included three participants that matched the study's criteria and produced rich, deep, and thick data about their lived experiences and decisions about 4-year degree access and attainment.

Confirmability

Qualitative research is limited in objectivity. Therefore, I continuously checked the interpretation and subjectivity of the data through researcher reflexivity, field notes, and member checks for clarity from participant interviews. Official government and nonprofit, nonpartisan websites were checked for data sources and are independently audited for accuracy. Policy narrative documents and ACTs were generated across official government websites that are audited for accuracy. Statistical data was confirmed by retrieving data from several official government websites and applied to this study.

Results

Results from this study were organized by the research question, constructs from the literature, and then by Presidential administration. The results of this study answered the study's research questions. The results of the research have been truncated to make them easier to read and follow from the policy narratives' and the ACTs' language. The NPF coding of narratives and policy language was summarized in worksheets. The

effects of the policy narratives on the ACTs were analyzed using the assumptions of the

NPF and the ACTs were analyzed through the lens of the FCPA. State and local welfare

policies addressing single welfare mothers and higher education were compared to the

final language in the ACTs. The results of the participant interviews are organized by the

research question, initial and then theme coding. Participant interviews were recorded

and transcribed by the researcher. Interview summaries were developed to make sense

and meaning of the data. Lastly, the higher education data is organized by the research

question, poverty nationally and then in NC, degree attainment of single parent mothers

who students were seeking 4-year college degrees in NC. Alternative measures were used

in data collection since NC State and IHEs do not track single mothers who attended 4-

year degree programs while receiving welfare benefits.

Determining the power and effects of policy narratives and their influence on the

policy language found in the ACTs were the primary analysis. Narrative statements were

recorded in the NPF worksheets developed for each narrative construct that emerged

from the literature. Answering the study research questions included analyzing the ACTs'

policy language from 30 days before enacting of the 1996 PRWORA and subsequent

welfare legislation. The narratives were in the forms of legislative bills, congressional

reports, congressional committee reports, congressional studies, presidential

memorandums, directives, and orders, and administrative agency reports. Once narratives

were analyzed using the assumptions of the NPF, the ACTs were analyzed to determine

the influence that narratives had on the policy language. The NPF worksheets helped to

organize the data and as a tool to determine the research findings. An example of the NPF

worksheet can be found in Appendix D. The NPF worksheets contain the themes (constructs), the narrative form includes the levels of analysis, characters, space and time, plots (moral of the story), narrative content includes competing/narratives, and the strategies and belief systems of policymakers and political actors during the policy process.

Once the NPF coding worksheets were completed, the narratives were compared to the policy language found in the ACTs. The ACTs' policy language was analyzed through the lens of FCPA. This gender lens helped answer the study's research questions from a critical feminist perspective.

The following are the results of this analysis by the research question, theme/construct, and then Presidential administration (Clinton, Bush, Obama, & Trump). The study sought to answer several research questions. The first research question was: What are the forms, content, and constructs of policy narratives, language, and the strategies and belief systems of policymakers and political actors contained in the ACTs and subsequent welfare legislation to alleviate poverty, increase employment, create self-sufficiency, and financial independence of welfare recipients?

RQ1 Results

The results of research question one were that the narratives and policy language in the ACTs included policy narrative forms: the setting of the four presidential administrations between 1998-2018, the characters were identified by their actions in the plot and were either hero, villain, or victim, in some cases the villain was the welfare policy, the plot contained the stories of policymakers, political actors, and presidents that

organized the actions of these characters, and the policy solution, which is the moral of the story included in final narratives about poverty, employment, self-sufficiency, single mothers, and college degrees, are the actions of policymakers, political actors, and presidents used to influence the policy narrative content and the final policy language in the ACTs and subsequent welfare legislation. Therefore, the policy narrative content includes the belief systems of policymakers, political actors and presidents based on the assumption of the NPF. The NPF assumptions used in the narrative policy language and competing narratives that influenced the ACTs about poverty, employment, self-sufficiency, single mothers, and college degrees included social construction, bounded relativity, multiple levels of analysis, generalizable structural elements, and the homo-narrans model of the individual.

The policy narratives' and competing narratives' content included the assumptions of the FCPA, which include the strategies used to manipulate the policy process and advance the agenda of policymakers, political actors, and presidents. They contained problem definition, social construction, hegemony, patriarchy, status quo, lack of intersectionality, and dominance of welfare recipients, mainly single welfare mothers. The policy constructs of policymakers, political actors, and presidents were to alleviate poverty, increase employment, create self-sufficiency, and the literature constructs included poverty, employment, self-sufficiency, single mothers, and college degrees. The literature constructs were used to analyze policy narratives through the assumptions of the NPF, and the ACT's policy language was analyzed through the lens of the FCPA. The results of this analysis follow below by construct, poverty, employment, self-

sufficiency, single mothers, and college degree, and then presidential administration. Further details of the results for the constructs are found in Appendix E.

Clinton Poverty Construct

The poverty narratives from the Clinton administrations revealed themselves through policy narrative form and contain stories told by characters who are the policymakers and political actors, and the presidents between 1996-2001. These stories contain plots that organize political actions such as more welfare recipients off of welfare and into work. The policy intent was to reduce poverty through mandatory work and time limits on benefits, which became the moral of the story. The policy narrative content included the belief systems containing the set of values and beliefs of the characters in the narrative stories. These characters were cast as the policymakers as heroes, the welfare recipients as villains, and the victims as the taxpayers and the states. The belief systems contained hegemony, how things should be, patriarchy, those in society that set the standards of how things should be, bounded relativity, beliefs and ideas that are not random but stable over time, the narratives have generalizable structural elements that are specific and identifiable. The homo-Narran model of the individuals, the characters think and speak in story form. Also contained in the policy narratives are the strategies to manipulate and control the policy process through problem definition of the poor, social construction of single mothers to influence taxpayer participation in welfare reform, and absence of intersectionality. The poverty policy constructs included narratives such as limiting welfare benefits, reducing unintended pregnancies, teach marriage, and provide training for work. The competing narrative included stories of welfare recipients being

trapped in a system of dependency that creates single-parent households; the children suffer and grow-up to commit crimes; most teen-pregnancies are by men over the age of 25. These narratives influenced The ACT's policy language that included reduce welfare dependency through employment, place time limits on benefits, teach abstinence, and teach responsible parenting.

Bush Poverty Construct

The poverty narratives from the Bush administrations revealed themselves through policy narrative form and contain stories told by characters who are the policymakers, political actors, and the presidents between 2001-2009. These stories contain plots that organize political actions such children on welfare in single-mother households grow up to commit crimes, increase child support collections and payments. States must create healthy marriages. The policy solution and the moral of the story included alleviating poverty by increasing child support payments to welfare mothers to increase self-sufficiency and lessen poverty, allow the mothers and fathers of children on welfare to marry, allow higher education for the poor, and include Earned Income Tax and Child Expense Credit as incentives to work and benefits, which became the moral of the story. The policy narrative content includes the belief systems containing the set of values and beliefs of the characters in the narrative stories. The characters were the heroes: policymakers, villains: single mothers receiving welfare benefits, and the victim: children on welfare. The policy content: include bounded relativity, narratives that have generalizable structural elements that are specific and identifiable, and the homo-Narran model of the individuals, the characters think and speak in story form.

Strategies to manipulate and control the policy process included hegemony, patriarchy, problem definition, social construction of single mothers receiving welfare benefits and their children, and the absence of the intersectionality. The poverty policy constructs included narratives to alleviate poverty, increase child support payments, and create self-sufficiency for unwed mothers. The competing narrative included time limits on welfare benefits is like putting a time limit on being poor. These policy narratives influenced the ACT's policy language that included no penalty for marriage, hold fathers accountable for child support payments, create self-sufficiency through child support payments to welfare recipients and not the states.

Obama Poverty Construct

The poverty narratives thrust from the Obama administrations revealed themselves through policy narrative form and contain stories told by the policymakers, political actors, and the presidents between 2009-2017. These stories contain plots that organize political actions such create jobs for the unemployed, change welfare eligibility to allow more citizens to obtain benefits, and increase the time for unemployment benefits. The policy intent became the policy solution and the moral of the story that includes reduce poverty by increasing job preparation and availability, provide funding for childcare, reduce unintended pregnancies, and increase self-sufficiency.

The policy narrative content includes the belief systems containing the set of values and beliefs of the characters in the narrative stories. These characters were cast as the federal government as heroes, welfare recipients as villains compared to the unemployed, and the states as the victims. Also, the policy narrative content includes

bounded relativity, beliefs and ideas that are not random but stable over time, narratives that have generalizable structural elements that are specific and identifiable, and the homo-Narran model of the individuals, the characters think and speak in story form.

Strategies to manipulate and control the policy process included: hegemony, patriarchy, problem definition, social construction of single mothers and their children, and the absence of the intersectionality. The poverty policy constructs included narratives to alleviate poverty, create jobs, provide child support. These policy narratives influenced The ACT's policy language that includes increase Medicaid waivers for the unemployed, allow training at community colleges for jobs, increase state funding from the federal government.

Trump Poverty Construct

The poverty narratives thrust from the Trump administrations revealed themselves through policy narrative form and contain stories told by the policymakers, political actors, and the president between 2017-2018. These stories contain plots that organize political actions such as reduce welfare rolls by pushing able bodies into work. The policy intent includes reduce welfare rolls or lose state funding and became the moral of the story. The policy narrative content includes: the belief systems the characters in the narrative stories. These characters were the president as the hero, welfare recipients as villains, and taxpayers and the Constitution as the victims. The policy content also includes bounded relativity, narratives that have generalizable structural elements that are specific and identifiable, and the homo-Narran model of the individuals.

Strategies to manipulate and control the policy process included hegemony, patriarchy, problem definition, social construction of welfare recipients, and the absence of the intersectionality. The poverty policy constructs included narratives explicating that welfare is temporary; every abled body must work, states must report mandatory work hours to the federal government, state and local enterprises must work together to end poverty. These policy narratives influenced The ACT's policy language that included the U.S. Constitution, and the American Spirit are under moral attack, provide jobs, increase job training, and higher education in high demand local industries for welfare recipients, and hold states and local enterprises accountable reducing welfare dependency.

Employment, Self-sufficiency, Single Mothers, and College Degrees Constructs

The results of the employment construct from all presidential administrations include the need to employ welfare recipients in jobs leading to self-sufficiency and reduce welfare recidivism, removing barriers to work by providing quality childcare, transportation, food, and shelter for sustainability. Also, participation in work and mandatory allowable work hours depended on the status of the single-parent and the age of their children. In all cases, work was not eliminated as a means to reduce the welfare rolls. The results of the self-sufficiency from the four presidential administrations include the need to provide training and education directly related to high demand jobs and careers that lead to self-sufficiency and lessen the dependency of welfare recipients and the unemployed on welfare benefits.

The single mothers construct for the four presidential administrations included the need to reduce unintended pregnancies, placing caps on family size for welfare benefits, reducing teen pregnancies and the consequences of teen parenting, teaching abstinence, promoting healthy marriages and relationships to prevent single-parent households, and the healthy development of children on welfare. The college degree constructs for the four presidential administrations included promoting and supporting the children on welfare through college. Allowing college attendance by welfare recipients in high demand job areas such as healthcare, early childhood education and development, and extending career and technical training too two-years as opposed to one year under current welfare policies. The results for the employment, self-sufficiency, single mothers, and college degrees constructs over the four presidential administrations are contained in charts and placed in Appendix E.

RQ 2 Results

This study also sought to answer: How does NC state and local welfare policies address single welfare mothers seeking 4-year college degrees?

The Work First

Requires every nondisabled person receiving welfare benefits and SNAP to participate in work for at least 20 hours per week if you were a single parent with a child under 6-years-old; no participation in work if you are a single parent with a child 12-months or younger; and a maximum of 40 weeks with a minimum of 30 hours per week if you have children over 6 years of age. NC State Plans must include work preparation, a 2-year limit on technical training, 4-year college degrees if entering a high-demand field

in the local area and or State. Childcare vouchers were created under welfare policies. Childcare recipients received high-quality childcare, measures to reduce barriers to work. There was no mention of 4-year degree attainment for single mothers who did not want to enter high demand local and or state professions.

Welfare to Work

Welfare to Work requires the State to develop innovative plans, remove barriers to work, collect child support payments, and pass through those payments to welfare recipients as a path to self-sufficiency, as stated in the ACTs. States must locate absent fathers and prepare them for the workforce. Single mothers receiving welfare assistance in NC were required to locate absent fathers, allow the state to establish paternity as a part of receiving welfare benefits. Also, abolish Medicaid for abortions unless the pregnancy resulted from rape or endangered the mother's life. NC also adopted the drug testing policies of welfare recipients under the ACTs that also include college students.

Welfare recipients and the state were required to participate in allowable mandatory participation in jobs, job searches, and limited training that results in employment. Mentions of education in NC state welfare policies focused on the children of welfare recipients, their college preparation, access, and success. Specific areas of higher education included the medical profession, early childcare education, and technical courses that were in-demand, leading to working as allowable paths to higher education.

RQ 3 Results

This study's third research question was: How did the ACTs, and subsequent welfare reform legislation, affect enrollment and unenrollment of single welfare mothers seeking 4-year degrees at a state institution of higher education in NC?

NC does not track the enrollment and unenrollment of single mothers who attended 4-year state IHE while receiving welfare benefits. Alternatively, I collected and analyzed data from alternative sources that included official government websites and the IWPR. This nonprofit, nonpartisan organization tracks poverty and college access and completion of single mother heads of households in the United States. Both sources provided data that is audited regularly for completeness and correctness and increases the credibility of this research study and the results are contained in Table 4.

Table 4

Poverty Rates Amongst Single Mother Head of Households in NC by Education as of 2018

Education Attainment	Poverty National	Poverty NC	Percentage Degrees Nationally	Percentage Degrees NC
High School	11.5%	46%		
Associates	7.8%	26%	31%	<8%
Bachelors	3.9%	13%	28%	<8%
Graduate	3.9%			

Note. From "IWPR, Investing in Single 'Mothers' Higher Education in NC: Costs and Benefits to Individuals, Families, and Society (2019)."

RQ 4 Results

The final and fourth research question to be answered was: What decisions have

single welfare mothers made, if any, about 4-year degree attainment since the

implementation of the ACTs' 2 year limit of welfare to work requirement, 5 year lifetime

limit for benefits, and how have those decision affected their lives?

Based on the research protocol and the research guide, the interview process

began with Participant 5939920, a single mother of three girls who received welfare

benefits while attending public IHEs in NC when she only had two daughters whose

father was in prison for drug-related charges. The participant explained that she is 43

years old. She had two dependent children while on welfare. She received a Bachelor of

Nursing degree (4-year) degree while receiving welfare benefits. This participant shut off

the video camera for the remainder of the 40-minute online interview. She received

AFDC, food stamps, Medicaid, childcare, TANF, and housing assistance while on

welfare for eight years. The tone of the 'participant's voice was anger and frustration. Her

answers were long and descriptive.

I explained that I was also a recipient of welfare benefits. After explaining my

history, the participant began to reflect and remained open throughout the interview. The

participant explained that not many women would participate in a research study like this

because they just do not want to talk about that area of their life because it makes them

feel stigmatized when all they needed was help". She said that she was not proud of

receiving government assistance, but that is what the benefits are for, to better yourself. "I

made the decision to go back to school to elevate myself." When asked if she was familiar with the changes in welfare legislation, she said yes, but it did not affect her and her schooling. She did not provide details about welfare reform legislation even when probed. She explained that raising two daughters on welfare and by herself while their father was in prison, was very difficult, but "I received help from my mom, I did it".

She said that welfare helped her get her degree and that the college she attended gave her a free voucher for childcare so that she could attend school and also work-study. Attending college was a challenge but rewarding. "When I graduated, it was surreal.". "Graduating meant more money for her and her independence from welfare and poverty like being hungry and living in shelters, which she admitted being scared because I did not know if I could make it without welfare benefits." When asked about her future aspirations, My goal is to be an entrepreneur, have my own nurse practitioner business and help people with mental health." There was a time when she could not work, "I could not believe I was in the same situation again. The welfare caseworker told me to save the ten months I had left to receive benefits for when I needed it. "I needed it, and that is the reason I was there.". Because I had a nursing degree, they [caseworker] acted like why are you here? "the caseworker's attitude toward me made me feel helpless.". "Everyone goes through a crisis."

When probed about other welfare recipients going to college, she said, "welfare should support people in college programs that people want to be in, instead of what welfare wants them to be in." "The whole goal is to get them out of poverty, get a degree, if no degree, then vocational rehabilitation because some people have mental health

issues because getting a certificate to leave them on the edge' of poverty." "Hear what they [welfare recipients]want in life." After the interview, the participant was asked if she knew other women that may fit the study criteria; she said that she did and would ask them to contact me.

Participant P2479920 stated that she is 55 years old and had four children while on welfare and attending a 4-year degree program at an IHE in NC. She appeared confident and willing to answer the study's research questions. She gave additional details about her experience once probed by the researcher. She remained a relaxed tone throughout the 60-minute online interviews; however, she turned off the video camera, and audio-only was used throughout the interview. She shared that she remembers that "the welfare system added to her stress when she was trying to get a bachelor's degree." "All I wanted to do was get my degree and get off welfare." "They kept sending me a letter asking for documents to be brought down". She said attending college was a mental uplift for her "knowing that she was breaking the generational poverty of her family". She was the first in her family to attend college. Her family often asked why she was attending since she had to often rely on them [her family] to watch her four children. She said, "they just don't get it". When asked if she was familiar with welfare reform legislation and how welfare reform affected her college access and degree attainment, she stated that she was familiar with the time limits of 2-years for TANF and 5-years for all benefits limits and when her TANF 2-year limit ended, she continued to receive other benefits such as food stamps and Medicaid, and Section 8 housing vouchers.

The college that she attended allowed her to work more hours on campus through the work-study program to meet the required mandatory work requirements set by the state, which was 20 hours per week for her. She qualified for reduced childcare rates because of the on-campus childcare center while she worked and attended classes. She said with a sigh, "working for my welfare check made going to school hard", However, "I remember the overwhelming support that I received from my college" . "It was hard, but I did not want to let my children down nor the college". When asked what she would change about welfare policies, she said allowing to live and go to school to get off of welfare. "I felt welfare was harassing me because I was getting my degree".

Participant P1281020 was not familiar with the changes in welfare legislation but knew that she had to work, which she said made her more determined to get her degree and have a better financial future for herself and her child. The participant stated that she is 20-years old, has one child and attends a 4-year degree program at an IHE in NC while receiving welfare benefits. She appeared to be, guarded, angry and remorseful, stating that 'my white girlfriend was able to stay in college and get her degree". At the same time, she had to leave and work for her welfare check. I shared my welfare experience with the participant. She responded "that was then, and this is now, things are different. You were lucky". She remained angry during the remainder of the interview. I could not determine if she were angry about welfare legislation that she felt kept her from getting her degree or because of her past abusive relationship with her child's father. When prompted to reveal anything that she would change about welfare, the participant said no, "I just want a better job so I can take care of me and my child".

During the interviews, the introduction to the study began with me advising the participants that the interview and participation in the study are voluntary, will be recorded. However, there are privacy and confidentiality measures in place to protect your identity and information. I informed participants that they could end the interview at any time without recourse. I assured the participants that this is an open conversation and not an inquisition and to feel free to stop me and ask questions at any time. I began the interview using the IRB approved interview protocol and posed the open-ended questions while actively listening to participant responses. When appropriate, I asked probing and follow-up questions.

Respondents shared stories to explain their views and social positions. I recorded field notes on the research protocols to manage reflexivity and my thoughts during each interview and recorded follow-up questions. I reviewed the responses with the participants to ensure I had correctly captured their thoughts. The review process encouraged respondents to add, correct, and change any statements they chose. The first interview lasted approximately 60 minutes, but each of the others lasted approximately 40 minutes. After reviewing the transcripts several times, and my field notes from the first interview, I identified areas within the interview protocol where additional probes were appropriate to elicit deeper meaning. Following each interview, I transcribed the audio recordings. Transcribing the interviews took several weeks, and then I began the data analysis of the transcripts.

Data Analysis

Participant data analysis began with me reading each transcript several times. I

 wrote notes during the interview and when reading and rereading the transcripts. I then used initial coding to organize the data and then Nvivo 12 Plus for word frequency across the transcripts. Next, I used NVivo12Plus to theme code the data. The results of the initial and theme coding were analyzed to determine if there were shared themes and differences within and across the data. The results of the participant coding are displayed in Table 5.

Table 5

Participant Coding and Themes

Participants	P593920	P247920	P1281020
	Struggling all the time, stressed all the time, a better life for my children and me, need help, education	Generational poverty, a way out of the projects, teen-pregnancy, no help, hungry, education	Harassed, childcare, abusive father, poor, not fair, college, work
Codes:	A better life	Life is hard	Life is not fair
Themes Across: Do better, Independence, Life is hard, Helpless, Education, and Harassed			

Note. There were no discrepant cases in this study that influenced the study's outcomes.

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Participant Interview Coding Cycles

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First Cycle Coding- Initial Coding

Initial coding for participants' interviews was used to organize the data for analysis. This process included reading the interview transcripts several times and truncating several texts so that it was easier to read but without losing the meaning given by participants.

Second Cycle Coding -Theme Coding

Data from the semistructured, online interviews with mothers who were single and receiving welfare benefits while attending a 4-year college degree program in NC between 1996-2018 were recorded and analyzed for similarities, differences, and themes. Participant interviews began with data collection and then analysis of participants' interview transcripts. The results of the transcripts were analyzed using NVivo 12-Plus, a qualitative software program.

Summary

The research, data collection and analysis answered the study's research questions from interacting levels of analysis: the federal welfare narratives and policies, state and local welfare policies, statistical data about college access and completion from reliable sources, and the meaning are given to the lived experiences of single mothers who received welfare benefits while attending 4-year degree programs at IHEs in NC. An interpretation of the research findings of this study are presented in Chapter 5 and includes the research discussion, conclusions, and recommendations.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to address the gap in the literature and add to the body of knowledge in public policy analysis by comparing and analyzing policy narratives and policy language used by policymakers and political actors. Policy narratives had the power to influence policy language during the construction of the ACTs, and subsequent welfare legislation from the four presidential administrations: Clinton, Bush, Obama, and Trump. Increasing the understanding about the role and power of policy narratives that influenced welfare reform legislation regarding poverty, employment, education, and the financial independence of welfare recipients was warranted. I also examined the effects that the ACTs policy language had on NC state and local welfare policies and the enrollment and unenrollment of single welfare mothers attending 4-year college degree programs at institutions of higher education in NC. NC State and local welfare policies contained socially constructed language targeting single mothers receiving welfare benefits. Equally important were the lived experiences of single welfare mothers who sought 4-year degrees and the meanings gave to those experiences as a result of the ACTs and subsequent welfare legislation. Thereby, combining narrative policy analysis and phenomenological techniques helped to understand these experiences and helps to inform policymakers' decisions regarding welfare reform and increases this study's trustworthiness.

Although the ACTs address the main issue of employment for welfare recipients, the problem is the language in the ACTs did not consider the 4-year degree attainment by

single welfare mothers as work and limits benefits to 2 years and all benefits to 5 years over a lifetime for those seeking financial independence through higher education. Consequently, the ACTs' narratives had the power to influence policy language and include socially constructed language and what it means to work. Also, single welfare mothers who choose to complete 4-year college degrees as a sustainable path out of poverty have been penalized with the decrease and or elimination of benefits or forced to leave college. This study adds to the body of research in public policy analysis, and provides data to policymakers addressing the need to increase their understanding of how 4-year degree attainment of single welfare mothers can be used as a policy tool when creating narratives and policy language addressing poverty eradication and welfare legisilation. Therefore, these efforts can increase literacy, wages, and reduce dependence on welfare assistance programs.

Also, this research has the potential to inform policymakers' understanding and policy decisions about policy designs, narratives, and language during the policy process that address welfare reform, poverty, employment, and 4-year college degree access and completion of single welfare mothers leading to self-sufficiency, financial independence, and sustainable paths out of poverty through higher education. There are modified researcher-developed instruments for this study that were certified and qualified by three subject matter experts in specific disciplines relevant to public policy and analysis.

This chapter contains a summary of the research study, which includes the (a) interpretation of findings, (b) limitations of the study, (c) Implications, (d) recommendations for future research, (e) recommendations for policymakers, political

actors, and institutions of higher education, (e) implications for positive social change, and (f) the study's conclusion.

Interpretations of the Findings

This study included the narrative policy analysis of 287 federal welfare policy documents, 81 N.C. welfare policy documents, higher education statistical data, and semistructured online interviews with three single welfare mothers who attended 4-year degree programs at IHEs in N.C. while receiving welfare benefits; and helped to triangulate the research data. This study confirms and extends knowledge in public policy analysis based on the constructs: poverty, employment, self-sufficiency, single mothers, and degrees, found in the scholarly literature and the theoretical and conceptual frameworks applied in this study. The interpretations of the findings for policy narratives confirm the NPF, a theory of the policy process, which postulated that policy narratives are storied and contain the strategies, belief systems, philosophies, ideals, and normative ideas of policymakers and political actors to advance their political and policy agendas.

The NPF assumptions also include that narratives contain social construction, bounded relativity, generalizable structural elements, three interacting levels of analysis, and the homo-narrans model of the individual (Shanahan & McBeth, 2010, Shanahan et al., 2018). Because welfare legislation affected single mothers the most, the FCPA, a gender lens, was applied to the policy language in the Acts and confirms that critical discourse that "policy analysis has systematically ignored or marginalized the feminist critique" (Shaw, 2004, p.1). Therefore, policymaking is gender blind, silences women,

and influenced the ACTs' language that limits women's input and social positions that begins with problem definition of the social problem.

Also, policymaking is blind to the intersectionality of single welfare mothers whoever socially constructed as abusing the welfare system for their good, hegemony which claims how things should look in society as opposed to how things are, and patriarchy and dominance to control and maintain the status quo of political and social power in the policy arena and society (Crenshaw, 1989; Katz, 2012; 2019; Lorde, 2007;1984; Marshall, 1999; 2004). Policymakers and political actors used narratives and their political power to influence the policy process and language in the ACTs and subsequent welfare legislation from four Presidential administrations: Clinton, Bush, Obama, and Trump.

Poverty

This study found that the poverty construct under the Clinton administration (1996-2001) included the narrative thrust, content, and context of policymakers and political actors during the policy process that had the power to influence the language in the ACTs by blaming welfare recipients for the plight of poverty and crime in society. Also, the lack of parental responsibilities when mentioning single, unwed, welfare mothers as villains. This policy narrative confirms that narratives are stories that policymakers and political actors tell one another that transfer to society, containing the social construction of single welfare mothers. Also, defining social problems, such as poverty, are often from the standpoints of those not living in poverty, such as policymakers, and include the political strategies, belief systems, philosophies, ideals,

and normative ideas of those with power and often from a male perspective (Marshall, 1999). Consequently, the poverty policy narratives lacked consideration and are absent of the unmarried mothers' standpoints and allow embedded power systems to thrive (Crenshaw, 1989; Marshall, 1999; Schneider & Ingram, 1993; Schneider et al., 2014; Shaw, 2004).

The poverty construct under the Bush administration (2001-2009) included the narrative thrust, content, and context of the policymakers and political actors during the policy process and had the power to influence the ACTs' language and confirms the social construction of single mother households receiving welfare benefits, and the inevitable social dysfunctions of their children growing up in poverty without fathers. Policymakers positioned themselves as a hero by applying patriarchy prescriptions for single mothers who should have their children's fathers in the household to protect the child without considering the mother's perspectives (Kohler-Hausmann, 2015). Through narrative language, hegemony, and patriarchy work together in the policy arena allowing policymakers and political actors with the power to define social problems such as poverty (Jones & McBeth, 2010; Jones et al., 2014; Katz, 2012; Shanahan et al., 2018).

Additional policy prescriptions for single welfare mothers include the male dominance in the household and how welfare children and their mothers will turn-out if there is no father there to keep order. These narratives contain specific and identifiable generalizable structures and the bounded relativity of policymakers and political actors describing poverty, who use their elitist- power and dominance over single mothers receiving welfare benefits, and what they can and cannot have and do, which becomes

fixed over time (Bensimon & Marshall, 2003; Marshall, 1999). The intersectionality of the single welfare mother such as gender, race, socioeconomic status, standpoints, social location, and current employment skills is ignored in the stories that policymakers and political actors tell each other and society (Crenshaw, 1989; Marshall, 1999; Shaw, 2004); thereby, silencing single mothers and their political participation in the policy process and their lives (Collins, 1990; 2000; hooks, 1989). Additionally, "states have a clear role in gender politics even when it is not overtly discussed in official documents (Apple, 1994, p.356)". The idea of work to reduce poverty and the welfare rolls and limited training is repeated throughout the poverty construct narratives that transferred to the ACTs.

Poverty under the Obama administration included the narrative thrust, content, and context of policymakers and political actors regarding poverty. The social construction of welfare recipients and the negative duality of being a woman and receiving welfare benefits were evident. The ACTs, which were under attack by Congressional Republicans, did not consider the economy, only that the President was gutting the welfare reform policies of his predecessors that allowed the poor to stay at home and collect welfare checks as opposed to working (Workforce Innovations and Opportunity Act, PLAW-l128, 113th Cong., 2014; Conley, 2013). The 2008 Great Recession increased the welfare rolls due to the lack of jobs; however, the population that lost jobs were referred to as the unemployed workforce, the victims, while welfare recipients were referred to as people who do not want to work, the villains, by

policymakers and political actors (American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, PLAW.publ5, Cong. 111th [2009]).

Those working under Work First (1996) programs were negatively affected by the recession and job loss; however, the generalizable structures, bound relativity, and the homo-narrans of the individual were used by policymakers and political actors at multiple levels to manipulate and control the policy process and language regarding poverty. By infusing their ideologies and beliefs, which sustained the enforcement of sanctions in the ACTs regarding work requirements for welfare recipients, during a recession transferred to the ACTs. The ACTs allowed policy cleavages that left the room to ensure injustices were written into public policies (Crenshaw, 1989; Schneider et al., 2014) that marginalize populations with little to no political power. Those with political power infuse patriarchal beliefs, such as dominance and power, that became benchmarks for social systems that maintain power with the elite and justify their dominance over women, welfare policies, and gender politics (Apple, 1994; Benison & Marshall, 2003; Marshall, 1999; Marshall, 2000; Shaw, 2004). The lack of inclusion in the policy process silences targeted populations, such as those living in poverty and single welfare mothers.

The poverty under the Trump administration included the narrative thrust, content, and context of policymakers and political actors regarding poverty and had the power to influence the language in the ACTs. The PPOEM (2018) contained language to incite taxpayers by including taxpayer dollars are for their intended purpose, to alleviate poverty in America; however, left a cleavage stereotyping those that do not pay taxes. Thus, "all able-bodied adults must work through work-fare and other activated

employment programs for food stamps and welfare benefits (PPOEM, 2018)." The narratives that had the power to influence the ACT emphasized "welfare benefits are for the truly needy and are only temporary"; however, truly needy is not explained and those living in poverty. Confirming that narratives are used to achieve political agendas, policymakers and political actors told stories about how the many programs designed to help families living in poverty delayed their economic independence, perpetuated poverty, and weakened the family bond.

The antidote for poverty because the narrative for making ending poverty a collaborative effort between federal, state, local, and business entities that encourages self-sufficiency and do not require government assistance. (PPOEM, 2018). Also, "welfare for needs not weed (Preserving Welfare for Needs Not Weed, H.R. 5853, 115th Cong. [2017])" required drug testing of welfare recipients, confirming the socially construction and criminalization of welfare recipients as drug users who use welfare benefits for illegal drugs which extended to college students. The narratives and policy language in the PPOEM (2018) made it unamerican to be poor. Policy language included "examining federal welfare and state programs that are consistent and central with the principles of the American Spirit" (PPOEM, 2018,p.3). The American Spirit principles made it unamerican not to work and receive welfare assistance (i.e. Living in poverty). However, competing narratives claimed that 60% of low-income persons work and want to work. Therefore, the PPOEM (2018) makes core assumptions about the poor (and those living in poverty) that informs policy realities and becomes public laws implemented by those who hold political power and rending those without political

power helpless (Campbell, 2012; Katz, 2012; Marshall, 1999; Shanahan et al., 2018; Shaw, 2004).

The policy narratives and language regarding poverty from the four presidential administrations confirms that narratives are stories containing content, context, political strategies, belief systems, philosophies, ideals, and normative ideas of policymakers and political actors to control and influence policy language that transfers to society targeting and marginalizing certain populations and is in line with the theoretical and conceptual frameworks of this research.

Employment

The employment construct under the Clinton administration includes the narrative thrust, content and context of policymakers and political actors that insist that two-parent households are the solution to unemployed welfare recipients. The narratives encouraged two-parent households, increases child support enforcement, and employment for welfare recipients that support the Welfare to Work Act (1978;1996;1997). This social construction of single welfare mothers as the problem includes the ideologies and belief systems of policymakers and political actors that are embedded in generalizable structural elements that remained stable over time and influenced policy decisions (Katz, 2012; Lorde, 2007; Marshall, 1999; Shanahan et al., 2018). Generalizable structural elements include policy structures that blame the victim for problems in society, such as unemployment and poverty. Therefore, the central role of policymakers' and political actors' beliefs are bounded, are not random, influence policy realities through social

construction and become public laws that inform society about who is to blame for societal problems.

Problem definitions occur before reaching the Congressional agendas, thereby maintaining hegemony, dominance, and the status quo in policymaking and how society should look and make decisions about the poor (Crenshaw, 1989; McPhail, 2003; Marshall, 1999). When resolving societal problems about women defined by men, these stories must be reconciled, especially when it comes to how women are ignored and where they are placed in society (Collins, 2000; Lorde, 1984;2007; Marshal, 1997; 2004). Therefore, women should tell their own stories about their ability to work other than those told by men with power. Such as the narratives of policymakers and political actors include, 'you get what you pay' for since the welfare system pays people more to stay home (The Contract With America Act [CWAA], 1996). Also, the current welfare system pays for non-work and penalizes two-parent households because marriage is the American society's foundation (CWAA, 1996). Rhetoric such as people want to know that states are not paying welfare recipients to stay home and collect welfare checks incites claims that welfare recipients do not want to work and are abusing the welfare system for their good (Hancock, 2000; James & Rashid, 2013; Rich, 2016). Countering this narrative, scholars argued that the idea that welfare recipients were moved into jobs and this reduced the welfare caseloads does not include welfare recipients who timed-out or leavers of welfare, nor that at the time, there was a robust job market (Scope, 2018). Therefore, narratives can influence the policy outcomes beginning with the social construction of welfare recipients as staying home because it pays more than working.

The idea that marriage (two-parent households) as the foundation of American society helps with a successful society is gender politics. Gender politics uses the power of the male elites to dictate a successful society and the social construction and targeting of single welfare mothers as deviants who are not living up to the status quo and justifies the marginalization of target populations to achieve political and policy agendas (Apple, 1994; Crenshaw, 1989; Marshall, 1999; McPhail, 2003; Schneider et al., 2014). The silence about the intersectionality of single welfare mothers reinforces how patriarchy enters the policy arena, policymaking, politics, and society (Schneider & Ingram, 1993; 2005) and how policy rhetoric positions policymakers and political actors as heroes who must save single welfare mothers from themselves and who should make decisions about their lives (Crenshaw, 1989; Marshall, 1999; McPhail, 2003).

The employment construct under the Bush administration includes the narrative thrust, content, and context of policymakers and political actors to improve the conditions of absent fathers through economic empowerment and job training and was an attempt to move single mother head of households off of welfare, increase child support payments, and to create responsible fatherhood. This issue of absent fathers, which was once maintained outside of the policy arena, became a narrative to reduce the welfare population (Parrot et al., 2011) through the employment of single welfare mothers and child support from absent fathers. However, circumventing the absent father narrative relative to employment increased work hours commitments under TANF from 24 hours per week to 40 hours per week except if children are 12 months old or younger then the single parent is exempt. Single heads of households with children under 6 years old were

required to participate in work 20-24 hours per week. This MOE included welfare recipients' participation in work versus training, education, and job searches. Policymakers passed mandates and removed barriers to employment, so absent fathers could pay child support (DRA, 2005). Therefore, states could provide employment-related expense reimbursements and allowances.

The competing narratives included evidence that welfare recipients who were fully engaged in work only accounted for 33% of recipients between 1999-2000 and rebuked the claim that all states met the overall required work participation rates required by (H.R.4090, H.R. 4 Amendment, 107th Cong. [2002]). "Only 33% of all families with an adult participated in work activities that were countable toward the state's participation rate and some states failure to meet the work requirement for their welfare populations (H.R.4090, H.R. 4 Amendment, 107th Cong. [2002])". Employment included 24 months of vocational education to count as a work activity under TANF work-related education or training that directly enabled family members to work (Personal Responsibility, work, and family promotion Act, H.R.4090, 107th Cong., [2002]). Consequently, the same policy language did not extend to 4-year degree access and attainment for single welfare mothers as a sustainable path out of poverty. However, when policies are burdensome, they may not be implemented as planned by street bureaucrats who will do what is best for their localities (Lipski, 1969; 2010).

The employment construct under the Obama administration included the narrative thrust, content, and context of policymakers and political actors during the 2008 Great Recession and defined what was considered full-time work. Policymakers and political

actors determined that a full-time workweek included 40-hours of work. The ARRA (2009) provided opportunities for low-income families and the unemployed through job creation strategies that infused federal funds into state economies for the unemployed due to the lack of jobs. The ARRA (2009) also required states to promote healthy marriages and responsible fatherhood to cure welfare reduction and recidivism. The plot of promoting healthy marriage and responsible fatherhood to resolve the poverty problem and reduce welfare caseloads brought hidden meaning with little empirical data and reason to support the policy positions of policymakers and political actors. When policies contain patriarchal ideas that spill over to society, then poverty may be seen as a culture for certain populations. Competing narratives included the pass-through of child support payments to single welfare mothers as a way of reducing social program expenditures and holding fathers accountable for their children.

The employment construct under the Trump administration included the narrative thrust, content, and context of policymakers that included moving welfare and SNAP recipients into work, even if this meant working for welfare assistance. States were required to promote equality when serving all political subdivisions, but not necessarily uniformly, and assist needy families with or expecting children (PPOEM, 2018). However, hidden meanings about employment of the poor must be explored (Smith, 2001) and uncovered, and lay in the definitions of work by policymakers and political actors with little regard to the social positions of single welfare mothers. Certain targeted populations, such as the poor, were made to engage in work activities that include direct

employment, community services, or any job determined by the State under the Work Opportunity Tax Credit ACT (WOTC; 1996; 2006).

When policies are constructed without the input of those impacted by the policy's language, the implementation may not occur as intended (May, 2006). The post-positivism structuralism standpoints of policymakers and political actors allow for the interpretation of policy issues (Smith, 2001) as stories used to silence the intersectionality of being women, single, mothers, poor, a minority, and lacking employable skills, which are in contrast with the minimum work participation rates imposed on states. The MOE required by states and the mandatory work participation required of welfare recipients is left to define the social problems. The work requirements expounded the need for quality childcare, transportation, and child support are seen as policy solutions to the welfare stay-at-home mom, their social realities, and paths to employment, independence, and self-sufficiency as defined by policymakers and political actors.

Self-Sufficiency

The self-sufficiency construct under the Clinton administration included the narrative thrust, content, and context of policymakers and political actors that influenced the language in the ACTs during the policy process by allowing States to determine when parents were ready for work, capping the time that welfare recipients could receive benefits, and determining when welfare recipients reach self-sufficiency. The existence of food was delegated to community organizations to meet welfare recipients' needs and increase self-sufficiency from the food stamp (SNAP) program, and to create the self-reliance of communities. Through self-reliance, such as enlisting community

organizations in providing food, childcare assistance, job training, work, and public

education, is an attempt to help welfare recipients with independence and increase the

involvement of communities and educational institutions by reducing food insecurity

amongst the poor and especially college students who struggle with self-sufficiency

(Stidum, 2020).

States, although reluctant of federal oversight in state affairs, was required as a

condition of receiving block grants to develop State Plans that provide services to

families equally, and especially for those leaving welfare programs that include child

support payments received by the states. Increasing child support enforcement orders and

collection were seen as a path to self-sufficiency and poverty reduction; however, this

would require absent fathers to work, which may not be a stable source of income for

single welfare mothers seeking self-sufficiency. States were mandated to teach sex

education classes so that children can realize the importance of self-sufficiency before

engaging in sexual activities. Competing narratives included the moral conscious, such as

"there is a moral crisis in our society where young people must be taught basic values

about the importance of two-parent families, prevent unwed births, and to alleviate

poverty in America (H.R. conference report to accompany H.R. 3734, H.R. 725,104th

Cong., [1996]".

The policy language of social construction about the morals of young people does

not address self-sufficiency, instead ignores the intersectionality of single motherhood

and the context in which they became single mothers, such as teen-mothers became

pregnant by adult men over the age of 25 and the majority were sexually and or

physically abused (Parikh, 2005). When policy narratives are absent of the voices of those affected by policy language, the stories told by policymakers and political actors that influenced the language in the ACTs become the political strategies, belief systems, patriarchy, social construction, dominance, control, and hegemony to advance their agendas and to maintain the status quo in society (Marshall, 1999; Katz, 2012, McPhail, 2013; Schneider et al., 2014). The stories that policymakers and political actors tell each other and the public are used to socially construct single welfare mothers by insisting that two-parent households are ideal, are in the best interest of children on welfare, helps the self-sufficiency of single welfare mothers, and are in line with the moral compass of a great society (H.R. conference report to accompany H.R. 3734, H.R. 725,104th Cong., [1996]), excludes 4-year college degree access and attainment, nor provides prescriptions for victims of statutory rape and abuse.

The self-sufficiency construct under the Bush administration includes the narrative thrust of policymakers and political actors describing what self-sufficiency looks-like in society and includes the generalizable structures and bounded relativity of those defining the social problem. The social construction of single welfare mothers includes narratives such as America has experienced a 50% increase in single mothers' employment and a 50% increase in unmarried mothers. This analogous description of single welfare mothers does not serve any purpose other than to socially construct and silence women and is a way for those in power to prescribe what they think is best for them (Lorde, 2007;). The purpose of self-sufficiency was moving single mothers from TANF through work, and any additional concurrent qualified activities were not allowed

because they take away from this purpose (Rector, 2004). The ideologies and hegemony of policymakers and political actors of doing one-thing-at a time, such as work, is about social control and limits or eliminates sustainable paths out of poverty through 4-year degrees for single welfare mothers when they were forced to work full-time or lose benefits. Thereby, the standpoints and intersectionality of single mothers are not present in the narratives that influenced the ACTs' language.

Increasing child support enforcement measures were seen as paths out of poverty and self-sufficiency for single welfare mothers; however, this political strategy relied on the employment and child support of absent fathers and their ability to take care of their children. Also, the absent fathers are to blame for the lack of economic and social mobility of the single welfare mother. Therefore, work, and transitional benefits to working and child support collections are seen as the only feasible and sustainable paths to self-sufficiency and independence from government assistance programs. Patriarchy through dominance from the male perspective who hold power during the policy process that produced language such as concurrent activities impair the policy's intent is a power-move that marginalizes women. Systematic male perspectives in government and society hold women powerless and become a reality (Marshall, 1999).

Policy narratives had the power to influence policy language regarding the self-sufficiency of welfare recipients results in the intentional outputs of party politics and language such as "work first programs correct the behaviors of poor deficient mothers are aligned with conservative fiscal policies that are passed to the states for program development and implementation" (Polakow et al., 2004, p. 3). Also, framing 4-year

college degrees as a loophole to avoid work denies women autonomy and self-determination about their care and rights to pursue education (Marshall, 1999; Fairclough, 1999; Rector, 2004). These narratives tell a story of single welfare mothers abusing welfare for their good and shapes public opinion when language includes "allowing financial aid to single mothers receiving welfare benefits is just a financial loophole for them to attend college while working people cannot afford to do so (Rector, 2004, p.4)", and legislative provisions allowing college access discourages marriage and rewards out-of-wedlock births. Therefore, "have a child out-of-wedlock and the government will support you and your family and put you through college (Rector, 2004, p.4)," suggest single mothers are not worthy of a college education and confirm "the master will not give you the tools that will dismantle his house (Lorde, 2007, p. 112)," such as using 4-year degree access and attainment of single welfare mothers as a sustainable path out of poverty.

The self-sufficiency construct under the Obama administration included the narrative thrust, content, and context of policymakers and political actors' belief systems about how single welfare mothers and the State must interact toward self-sufficiency. States "must establish legal relationships between fathers and their children so that noncustodial fathers can leave the underground economy (Responsible Fatherhood and Healthy Families Act, S. 1309, 111th Cong. [2009]); Julia Carson Responsible Fatherhood and Healthy Families Act, H.R. 2193, 112th Cong. [2011])". Policymakers and political actors insisted that the presence of fathers would cure welfare dependency reveals the patriarchal ideologies that determine what is acceptable and unacceptable and

became the benchmark of what American society should look like (Marshall, 1999).

Thereby, a father's love and emotional support has good outcomes for children's social,

emotional, cognitive development their academic achievement and creates low rates of

risky behavior, resulting in positive emotional health and healthy self-esteem

(Responsible Fatherhood and Healthy Families Act, S. 1309, 111th Cong. [2009]).

      Therefore, to resolve the issue of self-sufficient of single welfare mothers, the

ACTs include requiring states to pass through full child support payments to welfare

recipients and deduct an administrative fee making child support no longer a welfare

reimbursement (Welfare Reform Act, S.1904, 112th Cong., [2011]). By passing-through

child support payments can decrease public assistance used by families instead of

providing a revenue stream for states (Child Poverty Act, H.R.3434, 113th Cong. [2013]),

making child support a Family First program (Family First Prevention Services Act, H.R.

5456, S.3065, 114th Cong., [2016]) with a reliable source of income and counts toward

MOE and states and work participation for families. However, the reliability of child

support may increase welfare recidivism when the absent father stops working.

      Competing narratives insist that domestic violence plays a role in single mothers

and their lack of work. The reauthorization of the 1994 Violence Against Women Act

(2012) and the Homeless and Housing Assistance programs increased awareness of

violence against women. Although fiscal expansion policies were meant to stimulate the

economy, these policy strategies did not authorize access and attainment of 4-year degree

programs for single welfare mothers seeking self-sufficiency and financial independence

from welfare programs. However, they added awareness that single welfare mothers

might be victims of abuse, which hinders their social, economic mobility and self-sufficiency.

The self-sufficiency construct under the Trump administration included the narrative thrust, content, and context of policymakers and political actors that "states must develop programs leading to self-sufficiency and meet MOEs" (PPOEM, 2018) as a priority. The eligibility requirements under the Trump administration were relaxed for educational assistance through the Perkins Federally funded grants for Career Technical Education (CTE, 2018) training and skills leading to workforce development, employment, and self-sufficiency. However, the relaxing of eligibility requirements did include clear paths out of poverty, self-sufficiency and instead required mandatory work requirements for states and allowed states to determine who was eligible and not eligible to attend college.

When policies are created to empower some but not others, the results can be gender politics and injustices against women that silence their multiple identities (Korteweg, 2006; Lorde, 2007; Marshall, 1999; McPhail, 2003). Controlling welfare recipients and what education is suitable, policymakers and political actors changed the narrative of IHEs. Social control of women is seen in policy language. Students (single welfare mothers) usually choose what college program they want to pursue instead of states, employers, and IHEs. Also, SNAP recipients, similar to TANF recipients, were required to keep benefits; therefore, when single welfare mothers timed out of TANF and all welfare programs, they were still eligible for SNAP. The SNAP program was used to increase employment, encourage healthy marriage, and promote prosperous self-

sufficiency. Self-sufficiency included the ability of households to maintain income above

the poverty level without services and benefits from the federal government and for

employers to provide unsubsidized employment with on-the-job training (PPOEM,

2018). Included in the policy language were financial incentives for States for successful

employment placement, economic self-sufficiency, child wellbeing, reducing unmarried

births, increasing marriage, increasing economic mobility, and reducing welfare

recipients' poverty. These incentives lead to claims of reductions in caseloads instead of

timing out or being forced to leave welfare programs (Argys et al., 2000; Highsmith,

2016; Scope2018).

Single Mothers

The single mothers construct under the Clinton administration included the

narrative thrust, content, and construct of policymakers and political actors to enforce

child support orders and establish paternity for children of single unwed mothers

receiving welfare benefits. The narratives confirm the scholarly literature about the

limited economic and educational mobility of single welfare mothers (Cruse et al., 2018;

Jimenez et al., 2016; Marshall 1999), however, blame absent fathers who are implicit of

gender politics. The negative effects of absent fathers on the economic and educational

mobility of the single mother are implicit in the narratives that had the power to influence

the language in the ACTs. By implicating absent fathers as the cause of children growing

up in poverty and requiring government, assistance ignores the intersectionality of single

mothers (Crenshaw, 1989; Marshall, 1999; McPhail, 2003). The idea that single mothers

are a burden on taxpayer dollars is dominant in the narratives; however, historically,

social welfare programs were established to care for this population of women, ignoring single motherhood standpoints. When policymakers explicate policy language based on how things ought to be in society from a male perspective, as opposed to how they are, the reality of single welfare mothers and their standpoints are silenced. Therefore, policy problems become policy issues long before reaching the legislative agenda (Sabatier & Jenkins, 1999), allowing patriarchal behaviors, language, and politics to produce policy tools that maintain the dominance and status quo in policymaking and society. (Lorde, 2007; Marshall, 1999; Shaw, 2004).

The wellbeing of the child, not the mother, is the narrative that influenced the ACTs language that claimed: "89% of children receiving aid live in homes with an absent father and this hurts the wellbeing of the child (Bipartisan Welfare Reform of 1996, H.R. 3832, 104th Cong., [1996])". Therefore, marriage is amplified as the foundation and core of a successful society, albeit placing family caps on single mothers' receiving welfare imposes on their reproductive rights and is used as a tool to reduce welfare government expenditures. Although policymakers confirming that 70% of children born to teen mothers are fathered by men over the age of 25 (Parikh, 2005), there is no aggressive and consistent policy language making this illegal nor defined in problem definitions of poverty. Also, the policy language in the ACTs claims that the younger the teen mother, the less likely she is to complete high school and end up on the welfare rolls (PRWORA, 1996). Yet, the policy narratives and language offer help for absent fathers as a way of collecting child support and allows fathers to be present with the mother and children without immediate reductions in benefits.

Work and fathers' presence are the catalyst for single mothers' independence from being poor in America and is absent of poor women's realities in the welfare narratives that include stories about stay-at-home welfare recipients. Higher education for single mothers receiving welfare benefits is not mentioned as qualified work leading to employment unless the education relates to a high demand industry such as nursing or to fill gaps in high-demand jobs to support the needs of employers. Further, the policy language states, "make available bachelor's degrees and prevent high school dropouts (PRWORA, 1996)", were devolved to states and localities where some states allowed 4-year degrees and others did not work as sustainable paths out of poverty.

The single mothers construct under the Bush administration include the narrative thrust, content, and context of policymakers and political actors through the social construction of single mothers receiving welfare benefits and their children who are suffering because of their absent biological fathers. Therefore, biological fathers are the ones who need saving and government help so that they can take care of their families, move them out of poverty and become independent from government assistance.

Systematic and institutionalized patriarchy in the policy arena allows those with power and dominance to construct marginalized populations to achieve their political agendas and maintain the status quo (Marshall,1999; Shaw,2004), thereby influencing the ACTs' language. Locating, training, and employing absent fathers allows them to pay child support, marry single mothers collecting government benefits, and moves them off of welfare (Child Support Improvement Act, 2004). Therefore, it is the male dominance and responsibility to reduce welfare cost and save single mothers from raising children

that eventually become criminals and teen parents. The narrative of deviant populations collecting welfare benefits is passed to the states and required states to develop State plans and Individual Self-sufficiency Plans that describe how they will move their welfare populations off welfare and into work so that society can be safe.

Not including single mothers in problem definition before reaching the legislative agenda limits their political participation and voices about what paths out of poverty is best for them. Silencing women allows policymakers' and political actors' political strategies and belief systems containing bounded relativity and the homo-narrans model of the individual to be written into welfare policies where the prescriptions for social problems, such as poverty, become self-sufficiency through work and not through a 4-year degree access and attainment especially when 4-year degrees are not considered work; however, research confirms college degrees increase literacy, wages, and reduces those living in poverty (Cruse et al., 2018; Jimenez et al., 2016; IWPR, 2018; 2020).

The single mothers construct under the Obama administration include the narrative thrust, content, and context of policymakers and political actors by comparing single-parent families to married-couples. The socially constructive narratives of single mothers mandate parental involvement and cooperative parenting, promote marriage, responsible parenthood, protection from child abuse, and or the custodial parent. Promoting work for areas of high unemployment and low income, preventing high school dropouts among low-income single-parent families, matching employer cash or in-kind contributions for hiring welfare recipients, and fostering joint-labor management

programs will increase the chance that children will have caring parents and grow up healthy and secure.

States mitigating teen pregnancy consequences and the dangers of early child-rearing through education, the negative consequence of sons and daughters living in single-mother heads of households, the implications of their poor socioeconomic circumstances increase their likelihood that they will engage in risky behaviors and have children during adolescence are presumptive (Lewis, 1966). The sons and daughters of welfare recipients must be taught and understand the consequences of single-parent households receiving welfare benefits because the consequences of single parenthood become a culture within the family unit (Lewis, 1966) and decrease their chances of higher education degrees.

The single mother construct under the Trump administration included the narrative thrust, content, context of policymakers and political actors that influenced the language in the ACTs, through the PPOEM (2018). Through a Presidential Directive, the PPOEM includes references to every student who succeeds but places limitations on the Excellence in Education Credit (2014) so that the American Dream can be realized by the poor. There were additional programs to help the poor. However, they were based on meeting asset tests when most welfare recipients are asset poor. Also, the marriage narrative continued, requiring states to describe how they will promote marriage and break the cycle of early parenthood and single mother head of households in their State Plans and policies. Failure by states to implement the PPOEM (2018) and measure

outcomes, including drug testing of welfare recipients, left states with less funding for their poverty programs.

The competing narratives of policymakers and political actors include the failed welfare policies of other administrations that prevented economic independence, prolonged poverty, and weaken family and social bonds of those receiving welfare benefits (PPOEM, 2018). Policy language included "too many states have abandoned the goal of self-sufficiency; therefore, states must reserve benefits for those truly in need" (PPOEM, 2018). The locus of the PPOEM (2018) is saving welfare benefits of the needy, mandating private sector employers to find solutions for poverty in their localities, states enforcing the work requirement for nondisabled adults and making work a requirement for Medicaid and food stamps (SNAP).

Counter-narratives claim that welfare enrollment is at an all-time high despite near-record low unemployment in all states and confirm the IMF's 2016 statement on the status of the United States wellbeing, poverty, and the growing disparities between the rich and poor. Consequently, the policy language in the PPOEM (2018) does not mention access and attainment of 4-year college degrees for single welfare mothers as work and as a path out of poverty. However, it claims that "what is most important is that we empower individuals, and that the American idea is available for anyone who wants to chase it" (PPOEM, 2018), which falls short for single welfare mothers and their social and economic standpoints and mobility.

Degrees

The degree construct under the Clinton administration includes the narrative thrust, content, context policymakers, and political actors that influenced the language in the ACTs—empowering children living in poverty by disregarding all income of each dependent child receiving TANF as determined by the State to be a full-time student or a part-time student who is not a full-time employee attending a school, college, or university, or a course of vocational or technical training designed to fit him for employment (PRWORA, 1996). The language in the ACTs confirms that infusing deliberate written and or oratory narratives and political rhetoric in narrative language shapes policy realities that became implemented policies and people's realities (Trattner, 1999). The same policy narratives and language that empower children of welfare recipients is also used as a mechanism to marginalize single welfare mothers who are not mentioned as eligible for the same support for higher education as their children.

Institutions, community organizations, and programs or projects that effectively enhance the access of low-income individuals and first-generation college students to post-secondary education, college-preparation for post-secondary education, and success within Federal programs (PPOEM, 2018) pertain to children of welfare recipients but also describes single welfare mothers. The idea to foster and improve parent involvement of the child and the benefits of post-secondary education, especially for students from low-income families, required the involvement and support of local or State community programs and community centers to promote higher education academic support and guidance for children from welfare families confirms the scholarly literature, is void of

single welfare mothers and their higher education promotion (Christopher, 2005; Crenshaw, 1989; Cruse et al., 2018; hooks, 1994; 2000; Marshall 1999), other than "do not count parents income when determining educational benefits and the child's educational benefits should not affect the parent's public assistance" (DRA, 2005: PPOEM, 2018). Thus, the policy allows the children of public assistance to lift their families out of poverty through post-secondary, but not the parent. Instead, place the parent on time limits benefits and move them into work. However, research confirms that college degrees increase literacy, higher wages, and reduces the need for government assistance (Cruse et al., 2018; Green, 2016; Jimenez et al., 2016). This policy reality is based on a 1999 GAO evaluation report of existing welfare programs that found welfare recipients want rapid employment, not education. The GAO (1999) findings added prescriptive regulations mandating states not to reduce the minimum participation rates of participants nor the MOE and states that help individuals become, and remain, employed in the private sector—penalizing states for failing to meet Federal standards in moving welfare recipients off welfare by engaging them in privates sector employment.

The degree construct under the Bush administration included the narrative thrust, content, and context of policymakers and political actors that influenced the ACTs' language. The contextualized narratives from those with power include full-time educational participation requirements of the degree or vocational educational training program and career pathways for welfare recipients, which add to the scholarly literature that states welfare policy denies degrees as a part of paths out of poverty for welfare recipients (Cruse et al., 2018; Jimenez et al., 2016). However, Career Pathways includes

workforce education and job opportunities within specific industries or occupations that cut across multiple business and industry sectors (ARRA, 2009). Also, Career Pathways begin at the lowest skill and extend through for-credit college opportunities such as earning a relevant associate or bachelor's degree and prepares individuals for advancement in high-demand jobs in local or regional labor markets.

Although college degrees are allowed at multiple levels and are included in the policy language, contradiction is seen in the mandatory work requirement, the standpoints, and multiple identities of motherhood, something that does not affect single men nor absent fathers who are not responsible for rearing children. These standpoints and multiple identities of single welfare mothers attending degree programs, who must work, and also take care of their children (Polakow et al., 2004), makes obtaining a 4-year degree challenging or unattainable for single welfare mothers and their sustainable paths out of poverty; especially, when time limits on benefits and degree completion collide.

The degree construct under the Obama administration included the narrative thrust, content, and context of policymakers and political actors that had the power to influence the language in the ACTs. The locus of the narratives that influenced the ACTs include states reporting the individual characteristics of recipients before exiting and at the exit from welfare programs. Reporting must include the educational level, and earnings of recipients exiting welfare programs and exclude college students from determining the number of disadvantaged adults in a state (Poverty Measurement Improvement Act, H.R. 5891, 111th Cong. [2010]). The ACTs' policy language also

focused on domestic violence prevention, the decline in contraceptive use by poor women, and the number of unintended pregnancies and abortions of poor women since poor women are four times more likely to have an unintended pregnancy as her higher income counterpart and interferes with college degree completion (Reduce unintended pregnancies abortion and support women Act, H.R. 3312, 111th Cong. [2009]).

In the context of unintended pregnancies and education, 61% of women who have children fail to finish community college, which is 65% higher than women who do not have children (Act, H.R. 3312, 111th Cong. [2009]). The Federal government and the states used community colleges and State to develop programs that inform welfare recipients and their children about the consequences of unintended pregnancies and college completion. Alternatively, education support content is extended to "students enrolled in and pursuing a degree or certificate that is not a bachelor's, master's, professional, or other advance degrees in emerging professions "(Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, PL113-128, 113th Cong, [2014]). The WIOA (2014) creates an option for welfare recipients, and the unemployed to acquire technical skill proficiency for industry-recognized credentials, a certificate, or an associate degree including prerequisite courses; and removes barriers to degree completion by providing education related expense allowances leading to the reduction in poverty among these students and improve college success. The findings confirm with the literature, that policymakers and political actors determine who is deserving of a 4-year college degree and who is because of the narratives used to construct targeted population (Fairclough, 1999). However, given the time limits, work requirements, and the type of degrees available to welfare

recipients set by welfare legislation, 4-year college degree attainment may be out-of-reach for single welfare mothers who are also raising families.

Although degree access and attainment for welfare recipients were possible and disconfirm the scholarly literature about no or limited access to college degrees for single welfare mothers (Cruise et al., 2018; Green, 2016, and Jimenez et. al., 2016); the degrees must be responsive to health professional needs, early childhood education, and elementary and secondary education within the State or local region. Vocational education must be within a specific industry; pre-apprenticeship programs, literacy programs, and CTE were included in the ACTs' policy language. Subsequently, through welfare legislation and the ARRA (2009), qualified education degrees expanded to include counseling, social work, psychology, disabilities studies, business administration, human resources, and special education. Surprisingly, and supporting education legislation, State plans must include supportive services such as transportation, childcare, dependent care, housing, and needs-related payments that enable individuals to participate in activities such as in-demand industries and occupations in the State. State plans, approved by state Governors, must include how the State will coordinate with employers and educational institutions to provide training and subsidized employment.

The degree constructs under the Trump administration include the narrative thrust content, and context, of policymakers and political actors that influenced the language in the ACTs, such as Early College Programs through high school with dual enrollment, work-based learning opportunities, and financial literacy that are necessary for state plans. Although access and degree attainment are included in the PPOEM (2018), and the

MOE reduced to 10-30 hours per week depending on the household makeup, Federal

Work-Study programs being defined as work to meet the MOE was not explicitly stated

in welfare legislation and leaves the interpretation of policy language to the states who

use their autonomy in policymaking to serve their best interest (Lipski, 1969; Schneider

et al., 2018).

In response to research question number two: how do NC state and local welfare

policies address single welfare mothers seeking 4-year college degrees? This study

yielded that although states were given broad autonomy through federal block grants to

develop and implement welfare programs, welfare legislation in N.C. was influenced by

the language in the ACTs and the political agendas of state and local policymakers and

political actors. N.C. state and local welfare policies do not directly address single

welfare mothers seeking 4-year college degrees. However, research confirms that those

with degrees have increase literacy, higher wages, and reduced their need for government

assistance (Cruise et al., 2018; Jimenez et al., 2016). Specific areas of higher education

for welfare recipients were allowed and included the medical profession, early childcare

education, and technical courses in high-demand fields in local and State areas leading to

work (N.C. Work First, 1999).

The Work First policies in N.C. required non-disabled welfare and SNAP

recipients to work for their benefits for 20-30 hours per week and included childcare

vouchers to reduce childcare costs to welfare recipients. In turn, N.C.'s policy silence

about 4-year degree attainment for single welfare mothers allows policymakers and

political actors to determine who is deserving of college degrees and who is not

(Fairclough, 1999; hooks, 1989; Marshall, 1999). Providing college preparation and resources for children of single welfare mothers and not explicitly stating that Federal Work-Study meets the standards of the welfare work participation rates under the ACTs confirms the scholarly literature that rebukes financial aid for single welfare mothers to attend college while working people cannot afford to do so (Rector, 2004). Stories that marginalize single welfare mothers had the power to influence the ACTs language and impacts N.C. state and local welfare policies that support the theoretical and conceptual premise of this study.

In response to research question three: how did the ACTs and subsequent welfare reform legislation impact enrollment and unenrollment of single welfare mothers seeking 4-year degrees at a state institution of higher education in NC? The research revealed that N.C. does not track enrollment and unenrollment of single welfare mothers seeking a 4-year degree at state IHE as mandated by Federal legislation (PROWORA, 1996; ARRA, 2009). Alternatively, data was collected from reliable government websites that are audited for accuracy, and the IWPR, a non-partisan, non-profit organization that conduct research related to poverty, college access, and completion of single parents and single mothers, nationally and in N.C. The data confirmed that degree attainment is correlated to poverty. N.C. is below the national average for single parent degree completion and high poverty (Cruise et al., 2018; IWPR, 2020; Jimenez et al., 2016).

When patriarchy and the normative ideas of policymakers and political actors are included in policy narratives that marginalized single parenthood receiving welfare benefits, such as welfare benefits are not a means for attending college when working

people cannot afford to go to college (Rector, 2004) and when research confirms that college degrees decrease poverty among single parents, and the scholarly literature confirms that degrees increase literacy, wages, and reduces the need for government assistance (Cruse et al., 2018; Jimenez et al., 2016) the political agendas of policymakers are achieved.

In response to research question four: what decisions have single mothers who received welfare benefits made, if any, about 4-year degree attainment since the implementation of the ACTs' 2-year limit of welfare to work requirement, 5-year lifetime limit for benefits, and how have those decisions affected their lives? The study revealed that the data collection and analysis allowed me to focus on the narratives of three women who were single welfare mothers attending IHE in N.C. during welfare reform and the stories that they shared. The online semistructured interviews revealed six main themes (a) life is hard, (b)helpless, (c) harassed, (d) do better, (e) independence, and (f) education. The results of the individual semistructured interview provide insight to policymakers and political actors about 4-year degree access and attainment as a sustainable path out of poverty.

Familiarity with Welfare Reform Legislation

Disconfirming the scholarly literature that single welfare mothers are not familiar with changes in welfare policies that affect them (Scope, 2018), Participants P5939920 and P2479920 were familiar with the changes and implementation of welfare reform containing two-year limits on cash assistance and five-year limitation on welfare benefits. However, P5939920 was unsure how the changes affect her and her children. Participants

P5939920, P2479920, and P1281020 were familiar with the welfare to work

requirements and the MOEs to maintain benefits through the NCDHHS.

Although not directly involved in the formulation of welfare policies, the

participants understood that completing 4-year degree programs was something that they

wanted to do, to better themselves and the lives of their children, and to get off of

welfare. When those affected by public policies are not included in the problem definition

during the policy process, the outcomes can have intentional and unintentional effects

(May,1991; 2009).

Life is Hard

Participant 5939920 felt " all I needed was help" but felt pressured by case

managers confirms the literature that postulates that street-level bureaucrats use policies

to satisfy their local needs, especially when federal legislation becomes too cumbersome

(Lipsky, 1996;2000). She was familiar with the changes in welfare legislation but was

uncertain how this would affect her and her children. She also stated that welfare reform

"did not affect her and her schooling". She said that "raising two daughters on welfare, by

herself while their father was in prison, was hard." She received a BSN, which is one of

the high-demand areas explicated in the ACTs, and allowable under N.C. welfare

legislation.

The findings of this study confirm that the intersectionality of single motherhood,

school, and the welfare system's time demands ignores their standpoints in policymaking

(Christopher, 2005; Crenshaw, 1989; Cruse et al., 2018; hooks, 1989; 2000; Marshall

1999; 2004; McPhail, 2003). When she decided to attend a 4-year degree program at a

state IHE in N.C., she felt pressure to make decisions that would adversely affect her and her sustainable path out of poverty. However, her decision to continue in school so that she could "get-off-of-welfare" and make a better life for her children was challenged, especially since she did not know how this decision would affect her and her children.

P2479920 explained that she was familiar with the changes in welfare reform and how it would affect her and her children. However, she was able to use Federal Work-Study (FWS) as meeting the mandatory work requirements and credit the IHE that she attended for their assistance by increasing her FWS hours. She also stated that knows that she was breaking the generational poverty of her family by getting a degree which disconfirms the scholarly literature that welfare (poverty) is a culture (Lewis, 1966). The idea that poverty is a culture containing poor single welfare mothers who view themselves as marginalized, powerless, helpless, and outsiders (Lewis, 1966) instead of powerful women who are silenced during the policy process and victims of patriarchal behaviors is maintained. She said that she remembers welfare; she spoke of welfare as a system, a structural organization, "welfare adding to my stress when I was trying to get my bachelor's degree; all I wanted to do was get my degree and get off welfare." She said that "working for my welfare check made going to school hard, but I did not want to let my children down nor the college". Confirming the scholarly literature, the intersectionality of single welfare mothers and the multiple identities that they present are often overlooked, ignored, or silenced during the policymaking process to maintain the status quo in policy and society (Bensimon & Marshall, 2003; Crenshaw, 1989; Marshall, 1999; Ingram, et al., 2007). Gender politics contains the stories, belief systems, and

normative ideas of policymakers and political actors that had the power to influence the language in the ACTs and subsequent welfare legislation. Silence on policy issues allows cleavages for injustices to seep in and become the societal norms of how groups are perceived and treated in society (Collins, 2000; Lorde, 2007; Marshal, 1999; 2004).

P1281020 was not familiar with the changes in welfare legislation but knew that she had to work. Confirming the scholarly literature and the theoretical and conceptual framework of this study, often when those affected by policy narratives and language are not involved in the policy process, the stories that are told about them are written into policies determining how they are viewed and treated in society to maintain the status quo that includes patriarchy (Crenshaw, 1989; Bensimon & Marshall, 2003; Marshall, 1999;2004; Ingram et al., 2007).

When I explained that I too was once a welfare recipient, she said, " that was then, and this is now, things are different, and you were lucky." The marginalization of targeted populations often leaves those targeted feels helpless when they have no control over policies that directly affect them (Scope, 2018). When prompted to reveal anything she would change about welfare, she replied, "I just want a better job so I can take of my child and me." Contrary to the stories told by policymakers and political actors, single welfare mothers do want to work and provide for their families (Nelson, 2018) and are not abusing the welfare system for their good. These generalizable structures are stories that blame the victim for their standpoints in society, such as being poor and living in poverty, carryover to society, to gain support for the political agendas of policymakers

and political actors; and remain stable over time (Katz, 2012; Lorde, 2007; Marshall, 1999;2004; Shanahan et al., 2018).

Helpless

Being stigmatized for being poor, single, and woman are tools used by those with power to control populations that have little to no political power and resources, confirming that policymakers and political actors use the policy process achieve their political agendas (Crenshaw, 1989; Schneider et al., 2014). P5939920 said, "not many women would want to participate in a research study like this because they just do not want to talk about that area of their life because it makes them feel stigmatized when all they need was help."

She explained sadly that 'there was a time when I could not work and could not believe I was in the same situation again." Welfare recidivism is often the result of unstable and or low-paying jobs when ex-welfare recipients must return to government assistance programs to provide their basic needs. The time limits established by the 1996 PROWORA remained stable over time regardless of the socioeconomic situations of the economy and welfare recipients. She explained that "the welfare caseworker told me to save the ten months I had left to receive benefits for when I needed it. "I felt helpless, and I needed it now, and that is the reason I was there."

P2479920 "I felt welfare was harassing me because I was getting my degree." Confirming the scholarly literature and policy language in the ACTs that states were required to move welfare recipients into work and meet the MOE of the Federal government in order to maintain block grant funding for state poverty programs (ARRA,

2009; DRA, 2005; PPOEM, 2018; PRWORA, 1996). Street-level bureaucrats often made decisions that best serve their State and or localities and to meet federal mandates (Lipsky, 1969; 2010).

P1281020 stated: "it is not fair I have to work, and my girlfriend gets to stay in college and get her degree'. When those affected by welfare legislation are not involved in the policy process, they often feel marginalized and discriminated against, confirming Gestalt's theory (1912) that interpretations are embedded in every structured system and begin with individuals' hidden meanings that must be explored. These hidden meanings are based on empirical data and not the hegemony that is explicated by policymakers and political actors (Shanahan et al., 2018); and spill over into society, especially when those affected by policy language do not have complete information in order to make informed decisions.

Harassed

Feeling harassed was a story told by participants P5939920 who explained that she went back to welfare because "I needed it, that is why I am here," she told a caseworker when she needed welfare's help after graduating and working and then losing her job. She felt because she had a BSN, she was being discriminated against by the caseworker. "the caseworker's attitude made me feel helpless…She was acting like, why are you here? You have a nursing degree". Her second bout with welfare (welfare recidivism) was because she worked and lost her job, and "because I had a nursing degree, they [caseworker] acted like why you are here?" "Everyone goes through a crisis; that is why I was there." The attitudes of social workers, who are the frontline workers,

implementing welfare policies are often from their interpretation and the needs of their agencies. Confirming the literature and theory which claims how people understand, communicate, and interpret what is happening in society spills over into policy implementation impacting those who are not a part of the policy process (Gestalt, 1912; Lipski,1969; 2010; May, 2006; Marshall, 1999; Shanahan et al., 2018).

When prompted to explain her relationship with welfare, P2479920 stated, "I remember welfare adding to my stress when I was trying to get my bachelor's degree. All I wanted to do was get my degree and get off welfare." The ideas and philosophies of policymakers and political actors that single welfare mothers are abusing welfare for their good because it is more feasible to stay at home and collect a welfare check is disconfirmed by those affected by welfare policy outcomes (Conley, 2013). She explained that "I felt harassed because welfare kept sending me letters to bring down to their office". When it came to her family and watching her children, she explained "they just do not get it," since she was the first to attend college and was breaking her family's generational poverty, which confirms Scope's (2018) research findings. Also, she confirmed that "working for my welfare check made going to school hard, but I did not want to let my children down nor the college," which shows her dedication.

P1281020 felt that "welfare is different now" confirms that what had been stable welfare policies over long periods had changed and the effects felt by welfare recipients (Highsmith, 2016; Trattner, 1999), and "I felt harassed and discriminated against because my white girlfriend was able to stay in school when welfare made me work." When problem definition and welfare construction does not include those most affected by

changes in welfare policies, the outcomes can be feelings of harassment and discrimination. The research confirms that certain areas of study were supported by the Acts and subsequent welfare legislation, such as, fulfill state industry shortages in nursing and the medical profession; early childhood education, primary and secondary education, thus determining who is deserving of a 4-year college degree and who is not (Fairclough, 1999; Jacobs & Winslow, 2003; Shaw, 2004). When public policies are silent on social issues, it leaves cleavages for injustices (Crenshaw,1989; Ingram et al, 2007).

Do Better

P5939920 explained that "graduating meant more money for her independence from welfare and poverty, being hungry, and living in shelters. She said that politicians and welfare agencies must hear what they [welfare recipients] and want in their life". Confirming the literature that college degrees increase literacy, wages, and lowers the need for government assistance (Cruse et al., 2018; Jimenez et al., 2016). She also explained that "I do not know if I would have made it without welfare benefits," which shows the needs of those living in poverty and rely on welfare assistance. The participant explained that "not many women would participate in a research study like this because they just do not want to talk about that area of their life because it makes them feel stigmatized when all they needed was help". She said that she "was not proud of receiving government assistance, but that is what the benefits are for, to better yourself." Even with the rhetoric surrounding welfare legislation that became policy priorities for the four presidential administrations (CBPP, 2018), policymakers and political actors

seldom talk about single welfare mothers using welfare assistance to better themselves. She still "decided to go back to school to elevate me."

P2479920 "All I wanted to do was get my degree and get off welfare." Getting off of welfare was the aim of getting her college degree. Disconfirming policymakers' claims and the finding of the GAO Report (1999), claiming welfare recipients do not want to go to school, they want to rapid employment (1999). Also, IHEs have a stake in supporting single welfare mothers and their degree attainment, which lessens those living in poverty. Especially when research confirms that IHEs can support single welfare mothers seeking 4-year degrees (IWPR, 2018; 2020).

P1281020 said that she was "determined to get a degree so that I can provide for herself and my son." While some single welfare mothers wanted to obtain 4-year college degrees to better themselves, all participants in this study also wanted to provide for their children. However, welfare legislation historically supports and provided resources for college access and achievement for welfare recipients' children and does not explicitly mention single welfare mothers (DRA, 2005; HEA,1965; HEA,1992: HEOA, 2008).

Independence

P5939920 stated that "graduating meant more money for her independence from welfare and poverty, being hungry, and living in shelters." Statements regarding their independence from welfare from single welfare mothers are often ignored or silenced during the policymaking process, especially when states were charged with providing the basic needs for those in poverty within their states (Katz, 2012; Marshall, 1999; McPhail, 2013).

P2479920 stated, "all she wanted was to get her degree and get off of welfare." Like all participants in this study, they wanted their degree to be independent of welfare. Contrary to policymakers' claims that they have babies to use welfare to obtain college degrees (Rector, 2004).

P1281020 stated, "I just want a better job and be able to take care of myself and my son." Doing better and independently taking care of themselves and their families is repeated through the interviews. What surprised me was no participants mentioned child support as a means of independence or self-sufficiency, something policymakers attempted to initiate through pass-through payments to children on welfare (Family First Act, 2016).

Education

P5939920 stated that "welfare helped me to get my degree and gave me childcare vouchers so she could attend school and also work-study. This participant complimented 'welfare 'as the source of her educational achievement. Stories like 4-year degree attainment by single welfare mothers and how this changes their standpoint in life are often silenced so that policymakers and political actors can maintain their political power through the narratives that they tell one another and society and include their political strategies, hegemony, bounded relativity, and ideas that are not random, but become stable overtime to maintain control and to gain support for their agendas (Katz, 2012; Lorde, 2007; Marshall, 1999; Shanahan et al., 2018). P5939920 also stated that welfare should support people in college programs that people want to be in, instead of what welfare wants them to be in, which confirms the scholarly literature about college and

training programs that are available to people on welfare leading to employment (PRWORA, 1996; DRA, 2002; 2005; PPOEM, 2018).

P2479920 explained that she knows that she was breaking the generational poverty of her family by getting a degree, confirming Scope's (2018) findings that welfare recipients in her study are not from single mother holds who were on welfare. While attending her 4-year college degree program, she stated that "I remember the overwhelming support that I received from my college… It was hard, but I did not want to let my children down nor the college" and confirms that IHEs can support single welfare mothers in their degree attainment (IWPR, 2019; 2020).

Also, she received help from the IHE she attended, who allowed her to work 20 hours per week to meet the welfare MOE. She received reduced childcare expenses at the IHE's childcare center. What she would change about welfare was for welfare "to allow people to live and go to school to get off of welfare and stay off of welfare."

P1281020 explained that although she attended a 4-year degree program, she said, "I had to leave college for work", which was confirmed by the literature that welfare legislation's main priority was to move welfare recipients into work, even if that work meant continuing receiving government assistance (Cruse et al., 2018; Jimenez et al., 2016).

Limitations of the Study

The limitations of this study included the researcher's interpretations of the findings since NPF is interpretative. The small sample size in this study was due to the inability to reach single mothers, after employing several reliable research data collection

strategies, who were receiving welfare benefits while attending 4-year degree programs at IHEs in NC during welfare reform. Additional data collection mechanisms were used such, additional advertisements in newspapers, posting the IRB approved the flier on support group websites and in public places. The increase data collection techniques did not increase participation in this study and may be due to the COVID-19 pandemic's decreased gatherings in public places and the closing of public facilities. Qualitative research is based on the subjective lived experiences of participants and cannot be generalized (Guba, 1981; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Lastly, since NC does not track the enrollment and unenrollment of single welfare mothers pursuing a 4-year degree at its IHEs, an alternative, source was used that produced reliable and auditable data about single mother households, poverty, and degree attainment in NC.

Recommendations

Future studies should include a population of single welfare mothers attending 4-year degree programs while receiving welfare benefits from several states. The NPF, as the theoretical foundation and the FCPA as the gender lens when approaching research for hard-to-reach populations, such as single welfare mothers, can be increased. Increasing the population size by including a multi-state analysis for qualitative and phenomenological studies can offer further insights across states about welfare reform and higher education for single welfare mothers. Therefore, this study can serve as a foundational study for best policy practices adopted and implemented as sustainable paths out of poverty through higher education. Also, the NPF, a theory of the policy process that is relatively new in policy analysis can be used across social policies to

reveal the narratives of policymakers and political actors during the policy process and how narratives have the power to influence the language in public laws that affect marginalized populations. Lastly, including single welfare mothers in policy formulation allows for their voices to be heard and considered during the policy process beginning with problem definitions.

Implications

The implications of this study offer an insightful and thorough review of welfare legislation from four presidential administrations between 1996-2018 and multiple levels of policy analysis: federal, State, and local. Also, this study included the lived experiences of single welfare mothers who attended 4-year degree programs while receiving welfare benefits during welfare reform implementation. The NPF, through post-positivism structural standpoints, was a useful theoretical approach when examining and analyzing policy narratives and policy language of welfare legislation from four presidential administrations. The NPF allows data based on empirical research evidence as opposed to the normative ideas of policymakers and political actors who hold political power and influence (Shanahan et al., 2018). This research confirms scholars' assumptions that posit narratives are stories containing characters, moral of the story (policy solutions), political strategies, belief systems, hegemony, and social construction, told by policymakers and political actors to achieve their political agendas and to influence policy outcomes (Jones & McBeth, 2010; Jones et al., 2014; Shanahan et al., 2018).

The outcomes of this research have positive social implications when policymakers, political actors, institutions of higher education, advocacy groups, and women receiving welfare benefits realize that 4-year degree attainment is a tool that can be used to combat poverty in America (Cruse et al., 2018), especially when research confirms that college degrees increase literacy, wages, and reduces the need for government assistance (Cruse et al., 2018; Jimenez et al., 2016). In states like NC that experience high levels of concentrated poverty (Nichols, 2018; U.S. Census Bureau, 2018) and overall elevated poverty in the United States (IMF, 2016), 4-year college degrees offer a sustainable path out of poverty when supported by IHEs and policymakers, changes to policy narratives, and single welfare mothers' participation in the policy process beginning with problem definition. Thereby, this study fills a gap in the scholarly literature about the power of policy narratives that influenced welfare legislation from four presidential administrations and contained social construction of targeted populations, lack of intersectionality about motherhood, lack of political participation in problem definition during the policy process, and the silencing of poor women which ignores their standpoints and transfers to society about how they are viewed and treated. This study contributes to public policy analysis scholarship from a FCPA standpoint. Therefore, this research can create positive social change for single welfare mothers and their families and help alleviate poverty in America.

Conclusion

There is a problem with poverty in America while social welfare policies remain a contentious issue amongst policymakers, political actors, and those most affected by

policy narratives and language that targets marginalized populations such as single welfare mothers. Welfare legislation was developed to eradicate poverty and to help America's poorest citizens. However, poverty persists according to a 2018 Census Bureau report that confirms there is 2.78 million single-mother households living below the federal poverty threshold, of which 678,400 single mother households were living in poverty in NC. Taking care of America's poor is written in the U.S. Constitution by the founding fathers; however, the policymakers and political actors use their political power and the power of narratives to influence public policy language that includes the political strategies, belief systems, ideas, philosophies, hegemony, patriarchy, dominance, and social construction of target populations to achieve their political agendas thereby silencing and ignoring the standpoints, intersectionality, and voices of those affected by welfare policy language outcomes; single welfare mothers.

The participants in the study felt that obtaining a 4-year college degree increases their socioeconomic standpoints in society and would like to see welfare policies that are fair so that they can leave welfare, obtain degrees that interest them, and feel supported by the welfare system while trying to attain their degrees. The standpoints and the decisions that they made to pursue college degrees regardless of the changes in welfare legislation defies the social construction of these women, which included not living in poverty and the ability to take care of themselves and their families as single mothers.

Participants in the study received a variety of welfare assistance while attending 4-year IHEs in N.C. Some participants received more than others because of the time frames in which welfare reform and subsequent welfare legislation were being

implemented in N.C. and the market demands in certain occupations. However, they all felt that the welfare system made them feel helpless, harassed, and at times indifferent about them pursuing 4-year degrees. They made decisions and were determined to attain a 4-year college degree, except for one participant that was forced to leave school and work. The study participates decided to raise their children on their own, deconstructing the policy narratives, language, and literature rhetoric that they did not want to work and wanted to stay home and collect welfare checks (Conely, 2013; Rector, 2004). Although the participants expressed obtaining a degree and raising children were hard, they saw welfare as a path to degree attainment so that they could get off of welfare, get out of poverty and make a better life for themselves and their children.

The policy narratives of policymakers and political actors leading up to welfare reform described single mothers on welfare as abusing the welfare system, generational welfare recipients, misusing taxpayers' dollars for their good, criminals and drug abusers, and constructions of being 'welfare queens' (Christopher, 2005; Douglas, 2019), and had the power to change the language in welfare legislation over four presidential administrations. Consequently, based on the interviews, and the literature, disconfirms the rhetoric spewed by policymakers and political actors who used welfare policy narratives with intent to target and socially construct single welfare mothers and how they should be treated in policymaking and society. Also, Scope (2018) found in her study that single welfare mothers did not come from generational poverty nor single mother households on welfare.

Since the implementation of the ACTs and subsequent welfare legislation, states and IHE remain silent when interpreting the language in ACTs concerning single welfare mothers and 4-year degree access and attainment. State policy in NC does not contain direct language allowing this population of mothers to fulfill 4-year degree requirements and mentions only specific high demand occupations that fulfill state and industry shortages such as medical professions, childcare, and early child education, thus, determining who is deserving of a 4-year college degree and who is not (Fairclough, 1999; Jacobs & Winslow, 2003; Shaw, 2004). When public policies are silent on social issues, it leaves cleavages for injustices (Crenshaw,1989; Ingram et al., 2007), and the silence is usually interrupted by street-level bureaucrats to implement policies that suit their communities' needs (Lipsky, 1969; 2010).

Silencing targeted populations allow for the patriarchy, dominance, hegemony, ideals, philosophies, and the normative ideas of policymakers and political actors to control policy language and society as policy prescription to maintain the status quo (Benison & Marshall, 2003; Marshall, 1997; Schneider & Ingram, 1993;2005); such as marriage is the foundation of a successful society but does not explicitly allow 4-year degree access and attainment, and Federal work-study as meeting the MOE in N.C. This silence leaves welfare policy openings for uncertainty in policy creation and implementation. Especially when N.C. policymakers and political actors can impose new restrictions on IHEs attendance of single welfare mothers by using work as a policy tool that increase work hours and by limiting which college programs can be taken and for how long. Additional punitive policy tools can include counting student financial aid as

income, limiting childcare vouchers, not counting Federal work-study as work, and disallowing transportation allowances; thereby determining who may earn a degree and who may not. The politics in policymaking and the power of narratives confirm that "the master will not give you the tools to dismantle his house" (Lorde, 2007, p.112) by maintaining control of the policy process and language. The control of single welfare mothers is embedded in welfare legislation through silencing that does not include the voices and standpoints of those most affected by policy language (Schneider & Ingram,1993). When policy decisions are constructed without input from the public (those most affected), they may not be implemented as planned (Lipsky, 1969; 2010; May 1991) such as public policies that address poverty.

The public policy process through FCPA allows women to talk back (Collins, 2000; hooks, 1989; Kates,1996; Katz, 2012; Lorde,1984; 2007; Marshall,1999; Shaw, 2004) about public policies, beginning with problem definition, and involving them in the policy processes that are directly impacting them. This research may have positive personal and social outcomes for single welfare mothers, reduce poverty and welfare recidivism, supports single mothers' higher education access and completion of 4-year degrees, and alerts policymakers and political actors about considering 4-year degree attainment as work and as a sustainable path out of poverty.

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Appendix A: Researcher Permission to Use a Modified Version of Demographic

Questionnaire and Research Protocol

Re: Permission

Thank you for granting me permission to use a modified version of your Demographic Form/Questionnaire and Interview Protocol/Guide.

I will cite your work and data collection instruments in my study.

Subject: Permission

I apologize for not responding sooner. I did not see your email. You many use my questionnaire and research protocol if it will help you. I only ask that you reference my work in your dissertation.

Appendix B: Demographic/Criteria Information Questionnaire

Instructions: Please provide a response for each of the following questions:

What is your age? _____

What is your sex? Female ___ Male ___ Other ___

What is your marital status? Single ___ Married ___ Separated ___ Divorced ___

Widowed ___ Other ___

What racial or ethnic category do you identify? Afro-American ___ Caucasian-

American___ Native-American___ Hispanic___ Non-Hispanic ___ Other ___

Are you a United States Citizen? Yes___, No___ or Neither ____.

How many children were dependent on you in 1996____? Now____?

How many children under the age of 18 years old were living with you in 1996? _____

Did you receive welfare benefits in 1996? _____

Did you receive TANF? _____If yes, how long?_____

Are you currently receiving welfare benefits? ____ If yes, for how long? __

Are you currently receive TANF? _____If yes, for how long?

Are your employed? _____

What State and County did in you reside in 1996? _____

What State and County do you currently reside? _____

Did you attend a four-year degree program at a state institution of higher education in

1996? ____ If yes, which institution? _____What is your highest level of education?

Did your graduate with a four-year degree? _____, when?___? If not why?_____

Did you receiving Welfare Benefits and or TANF to attend college? _____

Appendix C: Interview Guide

Time of Interview:		
Date:		
Place/Setting:		
Interviewer:		
Interviewee:		
Position of Interviewee:		
Demographics		
Gender		
Age		
No. of years on welfare		
Were you on Welfare before welfare to-work (TANF)?		
Number of Dependent children in the home		
Have you attended Welfare to Work training? If so, for how long? Did it result in a job above the poverty threshold?		
Did you earn a four-year degree before, during, or after welfare to Work?		
Did you get a job after or during earning a four-year degree? Did the degree result in a job above the poverty threshold?		

Did you keep your job? If so, for how long? Did you time-out of TANF and Welfare Benefits?		
Research Question:		

1. What decisions have you made, if any, about four-year degree attainment since the implementation of the ACTs' 2-year limit of welfare to work requirement, 5-year lifetime limit of benefits?

Interview Questions:	What was (is) it like being a single mother? What challenges, if any, did (do) you face as a single welfare mother? What was (is) your typical day like as a single welfare mother attending college? How do others perceive you as a single welfare mother? What do you know about welfare reform and legislation? How has welfare reform and legislation affected you, if at all? What is poverty (mean)? What sustainable paths out of poverty did (do) you engage and what were the results? What does self-sufficient mean to you? What decisions have you made about degree attainment, if at all? What does (did) attaining a four-year college degree mean to you? If there were something that you could change about welfare, what would it be? What are your plans for the future?

Appendix D: Example of the NPF Worksheet

The power and influence of policy narratives -NPF Units of Analysis

Level of Analysis: Federal (Institutional) Coding a policy narrative with plot, character,

and moral of the story (*example*)-narrative form, and content:

NPF Text Coding:	Process step-policy narrative form
Policy and Narrative:	Identify narrative statements Setting: Macro Level- Federal (Institutional) Space and Time: Congressional legislation and report
Policy narrative content: Belief system (constructs) Medicaid eliminate payments for abortion of the poor (welfare recipients) Welfare recipients: Cannot use Medicaid for abortions and States must increase Abstinence opposed to abortions. Strategies: Cancel Medicaid payments for abortions and reduce welfare expenditures. Manipulate/control policy process: Gender, Rights Choice, Taxpayer Expenditures, Right to Life (competing narratives).	Apply plot template (organizes action): Character template; Moral of the story template: **Identify characters in the plot** (heroes, villains, victims): Heroes: Legislators Villains: Welfare Recipients (Gender) Victims: States and Taxpayers **Moral of the story** : States must Teach Abstinence (policy solution) (plot) Standardized-Competing narratives Plot: legalize abortion with taxpayer funding only in case of rape, death, or illness, and teach abstinence instead; Right to Life

Appendix E: Results of Constructs

RQ1					Appendix K: Chapter 4 Results				
Construct: Poverty	Policy Narrative Form:				Policy Narrative Content:		Policy Constructs:	Literature Constructs:	The ACTs Policy Outputs:
Presidents and Terms of Office	Setting and Time	Characters	Plot: Organizes Action	Policy Solution: Moral of the Story	Belief Systems: Set of values or beliefs	Strategies to Manipulate/Control the Policy Process Through Beliefs	Alleviate Poverty, Increase Employment, Create Self-Sufficiency	Poverty, Employment, Self-Sufficiency, Single Mothers, College Degrees	Policy Language
Clinton (1993-2001)	Congress, Political Acts (1996-2001)	Heroes: Policymakers; Villains: Welfare Recipients and the Current Welfare Policies; Victims: Taxpayers and States	Move welfare recipients off of welfare and into work.	Reduce poverty through mandatory work and time limits for benefits; win contingency support.	Social construction, Generalizable structural elements, Multiple levels of analysis, Bounded relativity, Homo-narrans model of the Individual	Beliefs containing: Problem definition, Social construction, absence of Intersectionality, Patriarchy, Hegemony, Dominance	Policy Narratives: Limit welfare benefits, reduce unintended pregnancies; teach marriage; provide training for work	Competing Narratives: Welfare holds recipients trapped in a system of dependency; Welfare creates single parents households; The child suffers a life of crime; Most teen pregnancies are by men over 25 years old; problem definition contains embedded power system and are often from a male perspective.	ACTs Policy Language: Reduce welfare dependency through employment; Time limit on benefits; Teach abstinence; Teach responsible parenting
Bush (2001-2009)	Congress; Political Actors (2001-2009)	Heroes: Policymakers; Villains: Single mothers receiving welfare benefits; Victims: Children on welfare	Children on welfare in single mother households grow up to commit crimes; Increase child support collections and payments; States must create healthy marriages.	Increase child support payments to welfare mothers increases self-Sufficiency and lessen poverty; Allow children, their fathers, and mothers to marry; Allow higher education for the poor; Include Earned Income Tax and Child Expense Credit as an incentive to work with benefits.	Social construction, Generalizable structural elements, Bounded Relativity, Multiple levels of analysis, Homo-narrans model of the Individual	Hegemony; patriarchy; problem definitio; lack of Intersectionality, social construction	Policy Narratives: Alleviate poverty; Increase child support payments and employment of absent fathers, Create self-sufficiency for unwed mothers.	Competing Narratives: Putting a time limit on welfare is like putting a time limit on being poor.	ACTs Policy Language: No penalty for marriage; Find fathers and hold them accountable; Create self-sufficiency through child support payments to welfare recipients and not the States as a revenue stream..
Obama (2009-2017)	Congress, Political Acts (2009-2017)	Heroes: Federal Government ; Villains: Welfare Recipients and Policy; Victims: States, the unemployed	Create jobs for the unemployed; Change eligibility for welfare benefits to allow more people to apply; Increase time for unemployment benefits.	Reduce poverty by increasing job preparation and availability. Provide funding for child care; Reduce unintended pregnancies; Increase self-sufficiency.	Social construction, Generalizable structural elements, Bounded Relativity, Multiple levels of analysis, Homo-narrans model of the Individual	Problem definition; hegemony;patriarchy; absence of Intersectionality; Social construction of welfare recipients versus the unemployed.	Policy Narratives: Alleviate poverty, create jobs; provide child support;	Competing Narratives: Provide funding to States with high poverty and unemployed; Increase Medicaid funding; Increase training.	ACTs Policy Language: Increase Medicaid waivers for the unemployed; Allow training at community colleges for jobs; Increase State funding from the federal government. Pass-through child support collections to welfare recipients.
Trump (2017-2018)	Congress, Presidential Directives, Political Actors (2017-2018)	Heroes: President; Villains: Welfare Recipients; Victims: Taxpayers and the U.S. Constitution	Reduce welfare rolls by pushing able-bodies into work.	States to reduce the welfare rolls or lose state funding.	Social construction, Generalizable structural elements, Bounded Relativity, Multiple levels of analysis, Homo-narrans model of the Individual, and Social Construction	Hegemony; Social Construction; Problem Definition, Patriarchy,Absence of Intersectionality	Policy Narratives: Welfare is temporary; Every abled body must work; States must report mandatory work hours to the federal government. States and local entrprises must work together to end poverty.	Competing Narratives: None	ACTs Policy Language: The Constitution and the American Spirit is under moral attack; Provide jobs and increase job training and higher education in high demand local industries for welfare recipients. Hold States and local enterprises accountable for reducing welfare dependency. Reduce welfare rolls.

Chapter 4 Results: RQ1

Construct: Employment	Policy Narrative Form:				Policy Narrative Content:		Policy Constructs:	Literature Constructs:	The ACTs Policy Outputs:
Presidents and Terms of Office	Setting and Time	Characters	Plot: Organizes Action	Policy Solution: Moral of the Story	Belief Systems: Set of values or beliefs	Strategies to Manipulate/Control the Policy Process	Alleviate Poverty, Increase Employment, Create Self-Sufficiency	Poverty, Employment, Self-Sufficiency, Single Mothers, College Degrees	
Clinton (1993-2001)	Congress, Political Acts (1996-2001)	Heroes: Policymakers Villains: Welfare recipients Victims: Children on welfare and taxpayers	Move welfare recipients off of welfare and into work. Hold States and local agencies accountable for JOBS programs that do not work.	Hold States accountable for moving able bodied welfare recipients into work.	Hegemony, Patriarchy, Bounded relativity, Homo-narrans model of the individual; Generalizable structural Elements; Social construction.	Problem definition, Social construction; Welfare recipients want to work and not engage in education; Lack of intersectionality	Policy Narratives: Give states more autonomy and rights over their welfare populations; Children born out of wedlock are three-time more to be on welfare as an adult; State shall have minimum work participation rates. Locate absent parents; Collect child support as a means of self-sufficiency; Teach responsible parenthood.	Competing Narratives: Young women must stay home with parent to receive welfare benefits; Young mothers must live with parents to receive welfare benefits; Remove penalty for two-parent household; States must teach abstinence education States must provide basic needs, including Section 8 housing.	ACTs Policy Language: Reduce welfare dependency through efficient JOBS programs; Young mothers must live with parents to receive welfare benefits; Locate absent father and increase child support payments. Limit time from welfare to work; Provide section 8.
Bush (2001-2009)	Congress; Political Actors (2001-2009)	Heroes: Federal Government; Villains: Single mothers; Victims: States	Promote family formation and healthy marriage	Welfare to work must include a 40-hour week, with a min of 24 hours per week of direct work unless waived by the State and the Federal Governments.	Homo-narrans model of the individual, Generalizable structural elements; Bounded relativity; Social construction;	Problem Definition; Social construction; Hegemony; Patriarchy; Dominance.	Policy Narratives: Formation of family and healthy marriage; 39.7 percent of single mother households live in poverty; States and participants have work participation requirements; There has been a dramatic increase in employment of current and former welfare recipients; Working recipients have reached an all-time high. States can n a case-by case basis allow work-eligible individuals to participate in education or training for certificate programs or other course of education to fill a known job need in a local areas and be considered countable hours but not to exceed four-months.	Competing Narratives: While all States met the overall participation rate by law, only 33.3% of all families with an adult participated in work activities that were counted toward the States' participation rate. States Attribute to increase in work and welfare expenditures to supportive services in TANF programs such as childcare and activities to support work.	ACTs Policy Language: Allow 24 months for vocational education; Improve welfare to work transition support; Provide details of quality childcare to parents; Integrate multiple public assistance programs and workforce development to help families escape welfare dependency.
Obama (2009-2017)	Congress, Political Actors, Presidential Memorandums (2009-2017)	Hero: Federal Government, Villain: Children on welfare and single mothers	Welfare recipients should be given child support and allowed two-parent households; Those experiencing domestic violence should not be discriminate against by employers; Educate the workforce.	Fill positions in the local economy that are in demand; Allow higher education for early child care and other careers that support welfare recipients transitioning to work; Let child support be a means of self-sufficiency for welfare recipients; create jobs; Partnerships with local industry.	Bounded relativity; Generalizable structural elements; homo-narran model of the individual; Social construction.	Social construction; Problem definition; Lack of intersectionality;	Policy narratives: The Federal Government to provide for an additional 250,00 part-time work-study jobs through the Federal Work-Study; Programmatic Inventory of State's higher education programs that prepare individuals for work in high-quality prekindergarten programs; include certificate programs, associate degree, baccalaureate degree, master's degree programs, and professions that lead to direct access to children; Pass-through child support payments; Encourage healthy marriage and responsible fatherhood Federal Work study as work.	Competing Narratives: Give award preference to early childhood education programs especially those that serve children in the welfare system; Eliminate the 12-month rule for vocational training. Increase Medicaid waivers for the unemployed.	ACT's Policy Language: Children should receive child support payments; Increase the 12-month rule for vocational education to 24-months; Include domestic violence awareness and anti-discrimination requirement for employers; Add additional work-study jobs and exclude income from determining the levels of benefits; Promote marriage and mandatory work hours for couples shall not exceed 50 hours per week; Promote responsible fatherhood programs. Partnerships with lcal industries. Increase Medicaid waivers to the unemployed; Pass-through child support payments. Federal work study as work.
Trump (2017-2018)	Presidential Directives (2018)	Heroes: President; Villains: Welfare Recipients; Victims: Taxpayers and the U.S. Constitution	Reduce the welfare rolls through work for welfare and SNAP recipients.	Hold welfare recipients and States accountable for mandatory work and supervised job searches. Reduce welfare rolls or lose State Funding.	Social Construction; Homo-narran model of the individual; Generalizable strutual elements; Bounderd reality.	Social construction; Lack of intersectionality; Problem definition; hegemony; Dominance; Patriarchy.	Policy Narratives: The American Spirit of the Construction allows help to those that need it, however, those that can work must work to uphold the values of our Nation. Deny benefits to those who fail drug testing; Job readiness assistance includes childcare, transportation expenses, and child support payments; Allow post secondary education at no cost to the student or student's family; SNAP recipients must work like welfare recipients; States and local governments must work together to end poverty.		The ACTs Policy Language: The American Spirit of the Construction allows help to those that need it, however, those that can work must work to uphold the values of our Nation. Deny benefits to those who fail drug testing; Extend the Work Opportunity Credit; Promote economic and financial literacy; Job readiness assistance includes childcare; allow post secondary education at no cost to the student or student's family; SNAP recipients must work like welfare recipients;

Chapter 4 Results: RQ1									
Construct Self-Sufficiency	Policy Narrative Form				Policy Narrative Content		Policy Constructs:	Literature Constructs:	The ACTs Outputs
Presidents and Terms of Office	Settings and Time:	Characters	Plot: Organizes Action	Policy Solution: Moral of the Story	Belief Systems: Set of values or beliefs	Strategies to Manipulate/Control the Policy Process	Alleviate Poverty, Increase Employment, Create Self-Sufficiency	Poverty, Employment, Self-Sufficiency, Single Mothers, College Degrees	
Clinton (1993-2001)	Congress, Political Actors (1996-2001)	Hero: Federal Government; Villain: Welfare Policies; Victim: Welfare recipients and their children	Create self-sufficiency through work and limited training that leads to work. Promote marriage.	Make welfare recipients self-sufficient without dependence on welfare benefits.	Social construction; Homo-narrans model of the individual; Generalizable structural elements; Bounded Relativity.	Social Construction; Problem definition; Patriarchy; Lack of Intersectionality.	Policy Narratives: The State determines if the parents or caregiver is ready for work or 24 months of assistance which ever comes first; Treat families of similar circumstances similarly; Eliminate inequality in State Plans; Make provisions for battered women; Encourage two-parent families; Promote work over welfare and self-reliance over dependency; Show compassion for those who need a helping hand and not a handout; Engage representatives from the community and Institutions of Higher Learning; Encourage CTE.	Competing Narratives: There is moral crises in our society; Young people must be taught moral basic values that include not engaging in sexual activities; AFDC has failed welfare recipients and taxpayers.	The ACTs Policy Language: Increase self-sufficiency of Food Stamp Recipients; Provide childcare assistance; Job training, work, and expenditures for public education. Collect child support payment so families can be self-sufficient; Teach importance of self-sufficiency before engaging in sexual activity. encourage marriage; Create equality in assistance.
Bush (2001-2009)	Congress; Political Actors (2001-2009)	Hero: Federal Government; Villain: States; Victims: Welfare Recipients	Hold States accountable for reducing poverty and the welfare rolls	Reduce welfare expenditures by holding States accountable; promote marriage.	Social Construction; Generalizable structural elements; Bounded relativity; Homo-narrans model of the individual.	Hegemony; dominance; Problem definition; Lacks Intersectionality.	Policy Narratives: States to define work and alternative self-sufficiency; create individual self-sufficiency plan for recipients; Promote family formation and healthy marriage; Develop Fatherhood programs; Include work requirement for Section 8 housing; Make TANF programs mandatory partners with Onestop employment centers; Crack down on fraud in the Food Stamp program; Eliminate incentives for coaching children to misbehave so they qualify for SSI; Promote marriage.	Competing Narratives: eligibility for work is left to the States; States will be penalized for not developing individual self-sufficiency plans; States to be penalized for not reducing poverty; Welfare recipients are asset poor; allow home and car ownership without be penalized with lost of benefits; Teach financial literacy; make child support no longer a welfare reimbursement; reduce bureaucracy in Section 8 housing; Allow welfare recipients to achieve The American Dream; Cap TANF funds to existing welfare recipients who become pregnant	The ACTs Policy Language: Include direct work activity and provide on-going support to reduce welfare recidivism; Allow welfare recipients to achieve the American Dream of home ownership through 'sweat equity'; States may place family caps for TANF funds to existing welfare recipients who become pregnant; Promote marriage.
Obama (2009-2017)	Congress; Presidential Directives (2009-2017)	Hero: Federal Government; Villain: the economy; Victims: Welfare recipients and the unemployed	Create jobs and training.	Provide additional funds to States to stimulate employment; Allow welfare eligibility for the unemployed; Expand Medicaid waivers.	Social construction; Generalizable structural elements; Bounded Relativity; Homo-narrans model of the individual.	Intersectionality; Problem definition; Status quo; Hegemony; Social construction.	Policy Narratives: Reduce Federalism and allow Federal Government intervention in State poverty programs; Allow Medicaid Waivers; Include Fathers in welfare programs in order to collect child support; Child Support is no longer a welfare reimbursement. Promote marriage.	Competing Narratives: Father's Love lowers risky behavior in children, promotes self-esteem and positive interpersonal skills such as dating, romance, marriage, friendships, and family interactions. Remove barriers to employment; Develop reemployment programs. Allow extended training at community colleges and IHEs. Provide childcare.	The ACTs Policy Language: Extend unemployment benefits and associated benefits; Develop a quality workforce; Allow postsecondary credentials that will reduce welfare dependence; Allow post-secondary education for welfare recipients and their children; Provide daycare subsidies; Increase economic self-sufficiency; Train to meet the requirements of employer; Enhance the productivity and competitiveness of the Nation. Encourage healthy marriage and two person household to reduce poverty and reduce government dependency. Promote homeownership and resources. Increase Father's capacity to provide for their children through training and job placement; provide childcare.
Trump (2017-2018)	Presidential Directive (2018)	Hero: President; Villian: Welfare Recipients; Victim: Taxpayers	Welfare is temporary; Everyone that can work, will work; Reduce taxpayer cost on welfare programs; public transparency on welfare costs and benefits.	Reduce the welfare rolls. Require SNAP recipients to work or loss benefits.	Social Construction; Generalizable structural elements; Homo-narran model of the individual; Bounded Relativity.	Problem definition; Social construction; Lack of Intersectionality; Hegemony; Status quo; Patriarchy; Dominance	Policy Narratives: Economically under severed communities have suffering from low income and low purchasing power, limiting their ability to generate sufficient goods and services in exchange for its consumption needs; Relax educationally assistance through Perkins Federal assistance; Provide and prepare special populations for high-skill, high-wage, or in-demand industry sectors or occupations that will lead to self-sufficiency, such as Career and Technical Education; High-quality childcare. Require SNAP recipients to work for benefits. Reduce unwed births; promte marriage. Incentivize states to reduce welfare dependency.	Competing Narratives: State must engage more TANF recipient and SNAP recipients in activities leading to employment and self-sufficiency through work based learning; Create sustained interaction with industry or community professionals in real workspaces; Monitor local levels of performance and provide activities to prepare special populations for high-skill, high wage, or in-demand industry sectors or occupations in competitive, integrated settings that will lead to self-sufficiency. Recipients that decline employment will be penalized. Wages to be at or above the State or Federal minimum wage.	The ACTs Policy Language: Help individuals receiving assistance under means-tested welfare programs obtain self-sufficiency through unsubsidized employment, subsidized private sector employment, subsidized public sector employment, on-the-job training, and increase work experience associated with refurbishing of publicly assisted housing if sufficient private sector employment is not available. Increase marriage, promte self-sufficiency; Make available online to the public searchable reports containing the self-sufficiency of means-tested programs and work. Increase childcare providers serving toddlers and infants that reflect the cost of high-quality childcare. Recipients that decline employment will be penalized; provide states with bonuses when reducing welfare dependency.

Chapter 4
Results:RQ1

Construct: Single Mothers	Policy Narrative Form:				Policy Narrative Content:		Policy Constructs:	Literature Constructs:	The ACTs Outputs
Presidents and Terms of Office	Settings and Time:	Characters:	Plot: Organizes Action	Policy Solution: Moral of the Story	Belief Systems: Set of values or beliefs	Strategies to Manipulate/Control the Policy Process	Alleviate Poverty, Increase Employment, Create Self-Sufficiency	Poverty, Employment, Self-Sufficiency, Single Mothers, College Degrees	
Clinton (1993-2001)	Congress, President, Political Actors (1996-2001)	Hero: Federal Government, Villains: Single, Unwed mothers on welfare, Victims: Children on welfare	Eliminate abortions through Medicaid; Stop unintended pregnancy to reduce poverty and welfare eligibility; two-parent households; increase child support enforcement to create self-sufficiency; blame absent fathers for the lack of economic and educational mobility of the single welfare mothers.	Give States more autonomy in developing and implementing welfare programs; Hold States accountable; Family caps; Reduce teen-pregnancy; Teach abstinence.	Social Construction; Homo-narran model of the individual; Generalizable structural elements; Bounded relativity	Problem definition; Social construction; Lacks Intersectionality; Status quo; Dominance; Hegemony	Policy Narratives: The current system pays for non-work, there is a lack of mandates for work requirements; The current JOBS program lacks accountability and lacks employment as a goal; Welfare participants do not want to participate in education they want to work as quickly as possible; The Public wants assurances that States are held accountable for placing every able-bodied person into work; States must report enrollment and unenrollment of welfare and low income students to be eligible for grants; Collaborate with local community organizations; Remove funds from block grants for mandatory childcare; Remove unnecessary prescriptive state requirements; teach abstinence.	Competing Narratives: Legalize abortions with taxpayer funding in the case of rape, death, or illness. Most teen pregnancies are the result of men over 25 years old; 70% of children on welfare are fathered by a man over 25 years old; most young mothers have experienced sexual and physical abuse; Teach abstinence; Prevent out-of-wedlock births; Unwed-mothers must help states locate fathers; Deny aid to minors not living with an adult; Allow fathers to interact with their children since studies show that sons without the father's interaction end-up in the juvenile law enforcement system; Studies show that the lack of priority on employment in the JOBS program is	The ACTs Policy Language: Promotion of responsible fatherhood and motherhood; 89% of children receiving aid live in a household headed by a single woman; If those able to work must work, unless especially the unemployment is 10% or higher in the State; Enlist statutory rape laws especially by predatory older men committing repeat offenses; Individuals are making progress in work activities for at 35 hours per week during the month, no fewer than 30 hours per week and no fewer than 20 hours per week with a child under 6 years old; Teen parents must stay in high school in order to receive benefits or remove eligibility; Teen head of households must make satisfactory progress in school. Allow countable hours by the State when individuals are conducting job searches; encourage marriage; create equality in assistance.
Bush (2001-2009)	Congress, Political Actors, the President (2001-2009)	Hero: Federal Government, Villains: Single, Unwed Mothers on welfare, Victims: Children on welfare and society.	Reduce unintended and teen pregnancy to reduce welfare dependency; Promote healthy marriage; prevent single-parent households; focus on the healthy development of the child.	stop unwed births and welfare dependency.	Social construction; generalizable structural elements, the homo-narrans model of the individual.	Problem definition; Social construction; Lac[k] of intersectionality; status quo; dominance; hegemony;patriarchy	Policy Narratives: TANF has been successful in moving families from welfare to work; The number of families receiving cash assistance declined 52 present, Unemployment rates have increased by 25 percent; an estimated 23,900,000 children do not live with their biological father; establish individual self-sufficiency plan designed to maximize the degree of self-sufficiency; monitor participation; Make available bachelor degrees. Allow absent fathers to use welfare for training and employment so they can pay child support and avoids their childrens criminal activities.	Competing Narratives: All States met the overall participation rates since only 33.3 percent participated in work activities between 2001-2002.	The ACTs Policy Language: The negative consequences of out-of-wedlock births on the mother, father, the child, the family, and society are well documented; and include prolonged welfare dependency, risk of low birth rates, poor cognition development, child abuse and neglect, and decreased likelihood of marriage; State plans must include individual self-sufficiency plans on how individuals will be mover from welfare to work and attain the maximum level of self-sufficiency through direct work activities, require each family member that is work eligible to participate in work. Hold absent fathers accountable for childsupport thereby promoting the interest and well being of the child. Make available bachelor degree.
Obama (2009-2017)	Congress, Political Actors, President (2009-2017)	Hero Federal Government, Villain: Single women parent households; Teen pregnancy; Victim: None	Reduce out-of-wedlock births and teen pregnancy; Reduce welfare dependency; Increase employer participation.	Reduce welfare dependency through self-sufficiency. Incentivize employers to hire welfare and unemployed citizens. Employers to participate and treat welfare employed like other employees who were, are, and not on welfare; Prioritize the healthy development of the child.	Bounded relativity; Generalizable structural elements; Social construction; Homo-narran model of the individual	Social construction; Intersectionality; Problem definition; Dominance	Policy Narratives: Single-parent families are likely to be poorer than married-couple families. Children raised in single-parent families are more likely that children raised in two-parent families to do poorly in school, have emotional and behavioral problems, become teenage parents, commit crimes, smoke cigarettes, abuse drugs and alcohol, and have poverty-level incomes as adults. Daughters of teen mothers are more likely to become teen mothers. Sons of teen mothers are more likely to be incarcerated; Both more likely to engage in risky behaviors; mandate parental involvement, cooperation, and promote marriage.	Competing Narratives: Give priority to applications propose to serve areas of high poverty, high youth unemployment, high dropout rates, high rates of low-income single-parent families; Have employers include a substantial cash or in-kind match; Treat workforce employees like other employees with full benefits including union memberships, retirements, and paid employee leave for workforce education participants; reduce unintended pregnancies.	The ACTs Policy Language: Individual self-sufficiency plans under the state plan must specify appropriate activities including direct work designed to assist families to reach their maximum degree of self-sufficiency and monitor participation; Negative consequences of out-of-wedlock births on the mother, father, the family, and society are well documented and increase the likelihood of welfare dependency, low birth weight, poor cognitive development, child abuse and neglect, and teen parenthood; and decreases the likelihood of having an intact marriage during adulthood. Promote marriage, responsible parenting; incentivize employers to hire welfare recipients and the unemployed.
Trump (2017-2018)	Presidential Directive (2018)	Hero: President; Villian: Welfare Recipients; Victims: Taxpayers	Promote, encourage marriage to reduce welfare dependency and increase self-sufficiency. Promote the American Dream; Promote the American Idea; Protect the constitution.	Evaluate and monitor state plans and self-sufficiency plans that maximize independence from government assistance and reduces single-parent households. Engage private sector employers in the fight against poverty.	Social Construction, Bounded relativity; Generalizable structural elements; Homo-narran model of the individual	Social construction; Lack of intersectionality; Problem definition; Dominance; Partriarchy	Policy Narratives: Enact Every Student Succeeds Act as a qualified welfare to work program; States must promote marriage and temporarily disregard the income of the new spouse due to marriage; Transitional benefits allowed for those who become employed and have income over the poverty threshold; Promote and sustain healthy marriages and relationships; Help participants in the fatherhood programs; Teach recipients who are not parents about the economic, social, and family consequences of early parenting; Help divorcing parents in coparenting; Promote responsible fatherhood. Promote the American Dream and Spirit. Engage private employers to hire and train welfare recipients and to end poverty.	Competing Narratives: Welfare enrollment is at an all-time high despite near-record low unemployment; Too many states have abandoned the goal of self-sufficiency	The ACTs Policy Language: Enact Every Student Succeeds Act as a qualified welfare to work program; States must promote marriage and temporarily disregard the income of the new spouse due to marriage; Transitional benefits allowed for those who become employed and have income over the poverty threshold; Promote and sustain healthy marriages and relationships; Help participants in the fatherhood programs; Teach recipients who are not parents about the economic, social, and family consequences of early parenting; Help divorcing parents in coparenting; Promote responsible fatherhood. Engage states and private employers to partner to end poverty. The American idea is available to anyone that wants to chase-it.

Chapter 4 Results: RQ1

Construct: College Degrees	Policy Narrative Form:				Policy Narrative Content:		Policy Constructs:	Literature Constructs:	The ACTs Outputs
Presidents and Terms of Office	Settings and Time:	Characters	Plot: Organizes Action	Policy Solution: Moral of the Story	Belief Systems: Set of values or beliefs	Strategies to Manipulate/Control the Policy Process	Alleviate Poverty, Increase Employment, Create Self-Sufficiency	Poverty, Employment, Self-Sufficiency, Single Mothers, College Degrees	
Clinton (1993-2001)	Congress, Political Actors, President (1996-2001)	Hero: Federal Government, Villain: Female head of households, Victims: Children of single welfare female head of households	Support post-secondary education for children on welfare; Set requirements for welfare parent(s) and state plans.	Require education; Allow postsecondary education and community involvement for children on welfare; Get the private sector involved.	Social construction; Generalizable structural elements; Bounded relativity; Multiple levels of analysis; Homo-narrans model of the individual.	Social construction; Intersectionality; Problem definition; Dominance	Policy Narratives: Disregard all income of each dependent child receiving welfare assistance as determined by the State to be a full-time student or part-time student who is not employed full-time and attending school, college, university, or courses of vocational or technical training designed for employment; Foster and improve parent involvement of the child and the benefits of post-secondary education. Localities in low-income and high poverty areas through state or community centers and programs are to promote and provide academic support and guidance.	Competing Narratives: Let children of low income families get a college degree to lift the family out of poverty.	The ACTs Policy Language: 46 percent of female head of households have income below the poverty line; Children of teen parents are three-time more likely to fail or repeat years of school and likelihood of being teen parents; Set obligations of the individual to including they attend school, maintain good grades and attendance; Keep school age children in school, immunize children; Have parents attend parenting and money management classes; Have single-parents do things to help themselves, and become and remain employed in the private sector. States must explain why they are needy-states. Penalize states for not meeting the Federal standards in moving welfare recipients in private sector employment. Provide transition benefits to include childcare, medical assistance, and child support collection. Do not count welfare child's income when
Bush (2001-2009)	Congress, Political Actors, President (2001-2009)	Hero: Federal Government, Villain: States, Victim: Welfare recipients	Move welfare recipient to work by providing training and career development. Promote high demand jobs. Extend to two-years technical training/education.	Partner education and training with specific industries.	Social construction; Generalizable structural elements; Multiple levels of analysis; Homo-narrans model of the individual	Problem definition; Intersectionality; Hegemony	Policy Narratives: In addition with full-time education participation requirements of the degree or vocational education training program they are enrolled in, participate for not less than the number of hours required per week that can be counted as work. Develop career pathways in industry that cuts across multiple business and industry sectors; Begin with the lowest skill and English language levels, and extends through for credit college opportunities such as relevant associate or bachelor's degrees that prepares individuals for advancement in jobs in demand in local and regional labor markets. Extent to two-years technical training.	Competing Narratives: Allow college attendance a maximum of 20 hours per week and the remainder of the week require mandatory work requirement. Maintain mandatory wrok hours for adult welfare recipients.	The ACTs Policy Language: Modify the Higher Education Act of 2005 with the main focus on student loans and means-tested loan programs; Work with inter and intra industry sectors to increase the capacity of welfare recipients to work within their industry by increasing their education and skills. Extend to two-years technical training and count as work. Promote career paths through high deman, high tehnical industries. Remain mandatory work hours for adult welfare recipients.
Obama (2009-2017)	Congress, Presidential Directives (2009-2017)	Hero: Federal government and private employers; Villain: Unintended pregnancies Victim: Unemployed	Increase revenues at all levels of government by placing welfare recipients and the unemployed into industry jobs that require training and education. Reduce abortions an dunintended pregnancies.	Create partnerships with employers and provide training and benefits. Determine disadvantaged adults in a state, exclude college students; report education levels during and after welfare interventions; examine employer discrimination of domestic violence victims.	Generalizable structural elements; Bounded relativity; Multiple levels of analysis; Social construction; Homo-narrans model of the individual.	Problem definition; Intersectionality; Hegemony; Patriarchy; Status quo; Dominance.	Policy Narratives: Create links of workforce education and job opportunities within a specific sector; Provide benefits and conditions that are provided to other employees; Identify in application for grants domestic violence at the local, state, or national level; Fifty-seven percent of women who have abortions live below 200 percent of the poverty level; Unintended pregnancies increased by thrity percent among low-income women between 1994 and 2001; Contraceptive use amongst this population decline to 86 percent; Enact the Preventing Unintended Pregnancies Act, reducing the need for abortion legislation; States process for reducing unintended pregnancies amongst teen students; Create opportunities and entry-level health professional workforce; Support early childhood, elementary, and secondary education, and public institutions of higher education; Anyone who completed childhood education, early childhood, elementary, and secondary education shall receive support; States must report the total number of students enrolled in institutions, students estimated to enroll in pursuing a degree or certificate that is not a bachelor's, master's, professional, or other advanced degree. State plans must include strategies and activities to coordinate with employers in the state; Provide subsidized employment opportunities to the unemployed, low-income adults, and the levels and durations of subsidies; State and local entities determine the percentage of wages and costs and duration of employing; States must increase sexual and domestic violence legislation to protect victims which can impact a victim's ability to maintain employment. State must provide supportive services: transportation, childcare, housing, needs-related payments necessary to enable an individual to participate in work activities.	Competing Policy Language: Provide Pekins loans, career pathways, and direct disbursement to employers; Those receiving unemployment, and working, their wages shall exceed the unemployment benefits level;	The Acts Policy Language: Reduce poverty, child poverty, reduces costs for Federal, State, and Local social services and benefits programs and increases tax revenue at all levels of government. States must pay the costs for supportive services such as transportation, childcare, housing, dependent care, needs-related payments. Increase domestic and sexual violence legislation to protect victims. Report education levels of welfare recipients; report welfare recipients enrolled in higher education institutions and post secondary degree and non-degree programs; support high demand industry education and employment; The Perkins Loans are needs-based and includes career pathways. Career pathways include rigorous and high-quality education, training, and other services aligned with skills needs for which the employer pays a significant portion of the cost of training, as determined by the local
Trump (2017-2018)	Presidential Directive (2018)	Hero: President, Villain: States, Victims: Taxpayer	Allow education to develop children and adult literacy.	Create access to education opportunities and financial literacy programs to reduce poverty and increase employability.	Generalizable structural elements; Bounded relativity; Multiple levels of analysis; Social construction; Homo-narrans model of the individual.	Problem definition; Status quo; Lack of intersectionality.	Policy Narratives: None	Competing Narratives: None	The ACTs Policy Language: Coordinate through articulation agreements, early college high school programs, dual or work-based learning opportunities, early college high schools, financial literacy, concurrent enrollment programs, and dual credit as in the Higher Education Act of 1965. Allow education that add to child and adult literacy; Increase employability.