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Perceptions Among African American Women Welfare Recipients in Advocating for Welfare Reform

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Walden University
2018

Abstract

Perceptions Among African American Women Welfare Recipients in Advocating for

Welfare Reform

by

Linda Scope

MA, Cambridge College, 2003

BS, American University, 1975

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Human Services

Walden University

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Abstract

The 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act (PRWORA) significantly affected many families by changing public assistance from an entitlement program to a work program for recipients and imposing a 60 month maximum period for receiving assistance. Unanticipated outcomes created deleterious results for many single parents. This multiple case study explored the experiences of four African American single mothers in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States receiving assistance regarding welfare reform, the welfare system and their perceptions of welfare advocacy. Black feminist and empowerment theories framed the study to examine how welfare policy changes affected African American women's families and their abilities to advocate. Data were collected from narrative interviews and artifacts provided by 4 participants and analyzed using thematic content analysis. The key findings demonstrate recipients who had no prior interest in Temporary Assistance to Needy Families advocacy found their voices when invited; offering insights about system challenges and successes as well as strategies for improvement. This study will impact social change by informing policymakers, think-tank researchers, community program developers, and public assistance case workers for policy discussions regarding PRWORA. Women may also learn strategies for advocacy and organizing from the analysis.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

The 1996 enactment of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA), passed by the U.S. Congress and signed by President Bill Clinton, fundamentally changed the system of which the U.S. government supported poor citizens (Highsmith, 2016; Loprest & Nichols, 2011). Several authors detailed changes made under the reformed law. Shaefer and Edin (2013) stated previously that welfare was a means-tested program that offered recipients benefits as long as their income was below a specified level. However, Fording, Schram, and Soss (2013) and Wiederspan, Rhodes, and Shaefer (2015) reported that under PRWORA, the federal government required recipients to find employment and imposed a 5-year lifetime limit to receive public assistance.

Sheely (2012) discussed how the responsibility for implementing PRWORA devolved to state and local governments whose authority became developing regulations and time limits to manage the implementation of the newly revised public assistance program entitled Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF). State and local legislators were responsible for designing programs to provide additional supports for welfare recipients; however, many used the opportunity to impose narrow definitions of work activities and reduce time limits below the federal 5-year limit (Phinney, 2016; Sheely, 2012). Under PRWORA, decisions made by state and local legislators adversely affected the lives of poor families.

In 2006, the federal government increased its control over the implementation of TANF (Patterson 2012). The reauthorization of PRWRA under the Deficit Reduction Act (DRA) of 2006 imposed greater restrictions, minimizing the flexibility of the state and local governments to expand time limits and narrowed the scope of acceptable work-related activities (Patterson, 2012). The changes in the public assistance program yielded mixed results.

Proponents of welfare restructuring purported the reform law was a success as it resulted in caseload reduction (Danziger, Wiederspan, & Douglas-Siegel, 2013). However, there was debate regarding whether caseload reduction was the most accurate measure of the success of this law. Bentele and Nicoli (2012) contested the accuracy of simply counting the number of cases removed from the welfare rolls, because it did not explain the conditions of the former welfare recipients in response to the law. They argued that it was necessary to explore why families left the system and how they managed their financial and other needs after leaving. The number of individuals who received cash benefits in an average month decreased from 12.6 million in Fiscal Year (FY) 1996 to 4.3 million recipients in FY 2010 (Pimpare, 2013). Recipient employment contributed to a small percentage of the caseload decline (Pimpare, 2013). Time limit expirations and sanctions accounted for much of the decline, which led researchers to explore the circumstances of those who exited the services to understand the effectiveness of the law (Bentele & Nicoli, 2012).

Federal regulations require states to adhere to guidelines for providing cash assistance. A primary requirement is restricting recipients receiving TANF to a 5-year lifetime limit (Wiederspan et al., 2015). Enforcing time limits accounted for a sizable portion of caseload reductions (Wiederspan et al., 2015). PRWORA sanctions also reduced cash benefits when recipients violated rules of the act (Fording et al., 2013). Sanctions could range from graduated cash reductions to complete loss of cash benefits. Researchers questioned why African American recipients were more likely than any other groups to experience penalties (Fording et al. 2013). Bentele and Nicoli (2012) concluded that states with large percentages of African American caseloads imposed greater punitive regulations on recipients. In addition, those who received punitive actions were more likely to receive multiple sanctions when compared with their European American peers (Schram, Soss, Fording, & Houser, 2009). Thus, poor African American women are more likely to experience financial losses than those of other races. Without any viable source of income, their families also suffer.

Disconnected became the term to define single mothers who had no salary, cash benefits from TANF, or financial assistance from Social Security or other governmental sources (Bentele & Nicoli, 2012; Highsmith, 2016; Powers, Livermore, & Creel Davis, 2013). Wiederspan et al. (2015) reported the number of disconnected single mothers increased significantly, rising from one in eight in 2004 to one in four in 2009. These

women were likely to have multiple barriers to employment, which further impeded their ability to comply with PRWORA requirements (Wiederspan et al., 2015).

Having no cash income made these women and their children vulnerable to living a life of poverty. Improvised circumstances contributed to becoming susceptible to hardships such as persistent hunger, inadequate clothing, and housing insecurity (Fisher, Busch-Rossnagel, Jopp, & Brown, 2012; Olson, McFerran, Morales, & Dahl, 2016). The mothers who received noncash benefits such as Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), also known as food stamps, or housing vouchers experienced hardships because they were unable to purchase nonfood items or pay bills (Olson et al., 2016; Wiederspan et al., 2015).

The challenges that these mothers encountered as TANF recipients increased the number of disconnected families and highlighted the need to make systemic changes. It is unclear whether policy makers or program developers understood the struggles recipients confronted based on the implementation of PRWORA. The reauthorization of PRWORA under the DRA of 2006, in which the government imposed more restrictive regulations on TANF recipients, indicated a lack of awareness by legislators of the challenges faced by recipients (Danziger, Chavez, & Cumberworth, 2012). Advocacy from the proponents of PRWORA was instrumental in its enactment and continued institutionalization. In this study, I sought to understand whether advocacy by TANF recipients is a useful tool for remediation.

McKay (2012) offered that public opinion is a major factor contributing to the initial redesign of the welfare system. Citizens advocated for their positions with the intention of influencing policy decisions. Constituents lobbied legislators to spend fewer public dollars on welfare recipients. Understanding the perspectives of those who were influential in the decisions made illuminated how they achieved certain outcomes to the detriment of those most affected by the changes in the reform process.

Morgen, Acker, and Weigt (2010), as well as Hancock (2000), highlighted how the decision-making process excludes the voices of welfare recipients. The reforms have created significant hardships for poor families, resulting in increased numbers of families living in extreme poverty, with an income of \$2.00 or less per day as documented by the World Bank (Fording et al., 2013; Shafer & Edin, 2013). However, politicians have ignored the potentially deleterious societal outcomes, and academicians seemingly overlook this growing vulnerable population, as exemplified by the minimal studies they have conducted (Shaefer & Edin 2013).

I was unable to locate salient empirical evidence revealing the experiences of African American women public assistance recipients' advocacy efforts in relationship to affecting changes in welfare reform decisions. In addition, I did not find literature in which these women discussed the power dynamics involved in welfare reform legislation or their perceptions of their ability to influence the decision-making process. Because these policies directly affect the lives of welfare recipients and their families, questions

arise concerning how and whether these women believe their voices and experiences can sway legislators to consider creating policies to affect their lives more favorably.

Highlighting major themes related to the research question posed later in the chapter, I begin by introducing the study, providing background, stating the problem, and explaining the purpose of my inquiry. Following these sections, I provide the conceptual frameworks used to explore the prior research and its relationship to the current topic. I also present the nature of the study, definitions of key words, my assumptions, limitations, and finally explain the significance of the study and summarize the major points of the chapter.

Background

In the 1990s, the U.S. Congress underwent an intense debate regarding the need to overhaul the welfare system in the United States (Hancock, 2000; Loprest & Nichols, 2011; O'Connor, 2001). The issue became so prominent that presidential candidate, Bill Clinton, included major reforms to the entitlement program as a part of the democratic electoral platform (Bentele & Nicoli, 2012; Highsmith, 2016). Conservatives in Congress mounted a campaign in which they described welfare recipients as African American, lazy, highly sexed, single mothers, who chose not to work and depended on the support of taxpayers (Katz, 2012). This campaign was instrumental in turning public sentiment, whereby the public began to demand policy changes to limit the expenditure of public funds for welfare (Hancock, 2000; Loprest & Nichols, 2011; O'Connor, 2001).

Many voices were part of the policy discussion, but seldom were the voices of the African American single mothers included in either the discussion of the original policy signed into law in 1996 by then President Clinton, or of the subsequent reauthorization of the law (Hancock, 2000; O'Connor, 2001; Patterson, 2012). Although some achieved success based on participating in the program, the negative consequences increased hardships for many families (Shafer & Edin, 2013).

PRWORA requires recipients to join the workforce and restricted them to a 60-month maximum period to receive benefits (Patterson, 2012; Phinney, 2016). The strict guidelines impose punishments for noncompliance, including sanctions such as (a) suspension of benefits for specific time periods, (b) the expulsion of the parent from the benefits, or (c) expulsion of the entire family from the system (Patterson, 2012; Phinney, 2016). Many recipients have multiple barriers to employment, which affect their ability to gain or maintain sustainable employment (Economic Security Administration, n.d.; Loprest & Nichols, 2011; Wiederspan et al., 2015).

After the enactment of PRWORA, between 1996 and 2001, employment among the target population increased, but Katz (2012) found that the majority of the wages earned by former welfare recipients were near the amounts they received when on welfare, leaving many living below the federal poverty line. The recession, occurring between 2007 and 2009, caused the layoffs of low wage earners during a time when it was an employer's market (Katz, 2012; Melkot, 2010). The U.S. unemployment rate

doubled from 5% in 2007 to 10% in 2009 (Melkot, 2010). Workers without high school diplomas experienced a 15.35% unemployment rate as compared with a 5.5% rate among college graduates (Melkot, 2010). Limited education was one of the most common barriers to employment among former TANF recipients (Bloom, Loprest, & Zedlewski, 2011). Until the country began recovering from the fiscal crisis, legislators could consider amendments to reduce work restrictions related to the prior welfare reform provisions (Bloom et al., 2011).

Along with possessing limited education, poor physical or mental health, being a victim of intimate partner violence, or having a substance abuse problem impedes the recipients' abilities to maintain sufficient employment (Powers et al., 2013). Any of these barriers could render a recipient unable to fulfill the work requirements of PRWORA, resulting in agencies sanctioning families off TANF, and leaving them with low or no source of income (Fording et al., 2013). Shaefer and Edin (2013) estimated that 1.65 million households with 3.55 million children lived in extreme poverty in mid-2011. The researchers documented that the prevalence of extreme poverty was significantly higher than before the 1996 passage of PRWORA (Shaefer & Edin, 2013).

To compound the issue for these families, many in the 114th Congress were creating additional policies, resulting in additional challenges for those needing public assistance. Cain and Frothingham (2016) identified specific services or programs, which the conservative majority in the U.S. Congress blocked or defunded. Policies such as the

lack of pay equity for women, increasing the minimum wage, and requiring overtime pay would have helped the working poor, but the conservatives offered highly inadequate alternatives.

Conservatives attempted to defund child care assistance even though childcare cost is a significant barrier to employment for many African American families (Cain & Frothingham, 2016; Powers et al., 2013). A significant percentage of working women, particularly low wage earners, did not have access to paid sick time, family, or medical leave. Conservatives offered alternatives, such as compensatory time or pregnancy 401Ks, which proved to be inadequate substitutes (Cain & Frothingham, 2016; Department of Labor, n.d.; Ybarra, 2013). Lack of compensation for time away from work poses challenges for poor women, often leading to job loss. The lack of legislative support could be addressed through advocacy activities from affected women to improve their situations.

Lake, Adams, and Mermin (2013) found that beginning in 2000, the numbers of eligible women of color voters increased. The primary focus was the women's economic security. According to the U.S. Census (2013), Black, Asian, and Hispanic populations expanded the percentages of eligible voters between 1996 and 2012. However, non-Hispanic Whites experienced a drop in their share of the eligible electorate from 82.5% to 71.1%, and their share of the voting population declined from 82.5% to 73.7% for the same period. Lake et al. (2013) theorized that President Obama won elections in 2008

and 2012 due to the support of new voters, particularly Blacks, Latinos, unmarried women, and young people. Furthermore, Black women voted by approximately 9% points higher than Black men, which is approximately 6 percentage points greater than other races (Lake et al., 2013). Voters expressed concerns regarding issues such as gender, government, and social responsibility (Lake et al., 2013). As the voting bloc grows, increasing opportunities for these women to alter their conditions become possible by electing congressional representation to operate in their families' best interests (Cain & Frothingham, 2016).

The passage of PROWRA and the subsequent reauthorization significantly affected African American single mothers. However, researchers rarely present their stories, as told by them, nor conduct studies examining their perspectives of their perceived ability to influence policy decisions through advocacy efforts. Danziger et al. (2013) examined the TANF experiences of women in Michigan to understand the effectiveness of welfare programs from the viewpoints of the recipients. They randomly selected participants, which resulted in a diverse participant pool; however, I decided to conduct a purposeful recruitment of exclusively African American women (Danziger et al., 2013). In addition, the researchers conducted phone interviews but recommended carrying out future studies in other locations and employing face-to-face interviews to add more to the scholarly discourse (Danziger et al., 2013). While Danziger et al. (2013) study did not address advocacy, it documented the stories of the experiences of TANF

recipients, in their voices. I was unable to find current studies on advocacy perceptions or actions by these women, pointing to a gap in the literature, which I sought to rectify through carrying out this study.

Problem Statement

African American women face characterizations of being lazy, immoral, highly sexed people, who simply wanted to lay around, have multiple babies, abuse substances, and not take proper care of their children, as a way of convincing the public to support the conservative view of welfare reform (Johnson, 2010; Morgen et al., 2010). The misrepresentations led to advocacy from the public to direct Congress to reform the welfare system (Johnson, 2010; Morgen et al., 2010). The problem that I addressed in this study was a cadre of African American women TANF recipients and their families who through the years experienced serious hardships resulting from their failures to meet the requirements of the reform law and had no voice in policies related to their needs (Patterson, 2012). There is a gap in understanding how women TANF recipients advocate for their families' needs. I was unable to find research exploring their perceptions of advocating as a way of influencing legislators regarding welfare reform. In addition, I was unable to locate studies revealing the stories of these women, which would possibly combat the negative characterizations expressed by conservatives who have sought to impose further restrictions. In conducting the study, I wanted to understand whether

openly sharing their experiences would influence politicians to consider the effects that legislative decisions have on vulnerable families.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this multiple case study was to explore how single African American women recipients of TANF thought about advocacy and influencing local legislators in the implementation of welfare reform policies and programs. I recruited four women, who met the participant criteria, to share their stories during semistructured interviews at a mutually agreed upon location. My intention was to contribute the voices of these women to scholarly literature and inform legislators of their experiences based on living through the implementation of previous laws and restrictive regulations.

Research Question

The central question of this study was as follows:

RQ1: How do African American single mothers, who receive TANF, understand advocacy and influencing legislators regarding welfare reform implementation?

Conceptual Framework

Black Feminist Theory

I used two theories for the conceptual schema of this study. Black feminist theory, as espoused by Dr. Hill Collins (2000), formed the foundation for analyzing the experiences of the single African American mother participants. A preferred theory over feminist theory, Black feminist theory promotes the points of view of women in research

and builds on previous research on the intersectionality of race, class, and gender (Collins, 2000; Swingonski, 1994; Taylor, 1998). Black feminist theory supports researchers who wish to explore and evaluate the conditions of Black women from a multiplicity of factors affecting their lives (Collins, 2000). One example is the campaign by conservative Congressmen to mischaracterize welfare recipients as Black women undeserving of assistance from the public (Katz, 2012). Chepp (2015) explained such portrayals were evident as early as the late 19th century and served as justification for excluding Black women from any protections against violence, lynching, or other atrocities. While developing an understanding of issues facing the women in the study, I also investigated their views about their ability to advocate to improve their circumstances.

Empowerment Theory

I used empowerment theory as initially conceptualized by Rappaport (1987) and then reconceptualized by Zimmerman (2000). The researchers viewed empowerment as positive attributes individuals use to influence or control their environments (Rappaport, 1987). Specifically, environments consist of multiple levels of organizations and structures, including their neighborhoods, schools, and churches (Zimmerman, 2000).

According to Carr (2003), empowerment theory provides for discourse about how individuals gravitate to others who have similar challenges and collectively realize their ability to shift the balance of power to work on their behalf. Perkins and Zimmerman

(1995) offered other descriptions of empowerment theory, including how researchers use its focus on understanding how individuals gather the skills and knowledge to address issues to improve the quality of their lives.

During this research, I planned to reach an understanding of what the women in the study thought about empowerment and how to use it to support their ability to advocate on behalf of their families and themselves regarding the implementation of welfare reform. Black feminist theory and empowerment theory together created a foundation to guide the exploration of this subject with the specific sample of mothers. I used both theories to examine the unique perspectives and experiences of the African American women participants.

Nature of Study

The nature of the study was exploratory, seeking to understand the perceptions of African American single mothers who receive TANF benefits regarding advocating and influencing legislators regarding welfare reform. I planned to examine their decision making process by using a multiple case study approach. Using the design provided an opportunity to gather deeper meanings of the views, perceptions, and experiences of TANF recipients with respect to advocacy. Case studies include interviewing, observing, and collecting artifacts as methods of data collection, which provide a way to answer the research questions (Yin, 2014). Each of the four women represented a single case, within

the multiple case study. I analyzed the data in totality to identify patterns of agreement or divergence.

Undergirded by Black feminist and empowerment conceptual frameworks, I designed this multiple case study to examine the internal and external factors informing the participant's decisions regarding advocacy. Once I gathered the data, I used Saldana's (2015) manual coding method of data analysis, which focuses on emotional and repetitive coding. Data analysis involves identifying themes, subthemes, connections, and points of divergence expressed by the participants (Saldana, 2015). I present a detailed outline of the planned methodology in Chapter 3.

Definitions

Advocacy: Collective term for actions taken by an individual, group, or organization to inform and/or influence decision makers, such as employers, organizational leaders, or elected officials, to effect social change (Cohen, Lee, & Mcilwraith, 2012).

Multiple case study: A research methodology that investigates a single phenomenon by studying more than one case (Yin, 2014).

Single mother: A woman who has primary custody and responsibility for one or more children younger than 18 years. The child or children live with her, but no spouse or the children's father(s) lives with her (Casey & Maldonado, 2012).

Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF): The name of the main program in the welfare reform legislation enacted in 1996 (Sheely, 2012). Throughout this study, I will use the terms *TANF*, *welfare*, and *public assistance* interchangeably.

Assumptions

I had multiple assumptions in this study. When conducting this multiple case study, I assumed that I would be able to secure participants who met the study criteria by focusing on a target population based on demographic and economic characteristics. In addition, I assumed that the women would be forthcoming and share their stories openly and the questions posed in the interview would generate rich data to provide additional information to further the scholarly discussion. My final assumption was that I would remain unbiased throughout the process.

Scope and Delimitations

In addressing my research questions, I focused on engaging four single African American women, ages 21 to 50 years, who were raising their children without a partner. Having received TANF benefits between 2010, the year of the most recent scheduled reauthorization of the law, and January 2017, participants shared their experiences and discussed their views regarding advocacy and their decision making process. In this study, I did not explore the experiences of members of other cultural and ethnic groups, African American women who were not parents, or mothers who did not fit the age or geographic demographics. African American mothers who are between 21 and 50 years

old but have not received TANF benefits since 2010 were not eligible to contribute to the study. I explored advocacy experiences of the target population outside the scope of PRWORA.

Limitations

Restricting the study population to a small homogenous group yields outcomes that cannot be generalized to a larger population (Pearson, Parkin, & Coomber, 2011; Suri, 2011). The second limitation of this study pertained to the quality of the data reported by participants. When conducting qualitative research, participants recount stories; however, there is a risk of historical distortion (Yin, 2014). Situations such as respondents not remembering events accurately or their ascribing positive outcomes to their actions and negative outcomes to other entities can occur (Macaskie, Lees, & Freshwater, 2015). To minimize these risks, I asked follow-up questions and sought documents to augment the interviews and cross-case analysis to compare the data.

Significance

The increased number of families living in extreme poverty since the passage and subsequent reauthorization of the PRWORA has resulted in a rising demand for additional state and local resources. Although the requirements of PRWORA are not solely responsible for all poverty in the United States, they contribute to the rising poverty rates among TANF recipients as sanctions cause significant reductions in cash or complete expulsion from benefits (Fording et al., 2013). Highsmith (2016) reported that

basing cash assistance on work combined with the precarious nature of low wage jobs leaves TANF recipients vulnerable to poverty. Other phenomena such as the recession, changes in political power, job outsourcing, and technology are leading to the elimination of jobs, contributed to rising poverty statistics. As legislators deliberate policies, the stories of these women can help to guide their decisions. Federal, state, and local legislators, think tank researchers, along with anyone who contributes to the development of policies and programs designed to provide human services to poor families can gain insight from these women's stories. Informing policy and decision makers can contribute to the development of improved programming alternatives to alleviate the challenges that the women encounter. Other women can also learn from these stories.

The focus of my research grew out of reviewing previous studies concerning African American women in low income, inner city communities, many of whom were either on TANF or had left the program. A review of the literature revealed barriers to employment for African American women required to work as mandated by PRWORA and how barriers inhibit women's ability to fulfill the work requirements. I found no scholarly articles providing evidence of legislators considering self-reported stories of women when considering changes to TANF. The literature I reviewed also did not provide information about advocacy activities of African American single mothers receiving TANF. In conducting this research, I intend to share their experiences and perceptions of how advocating can influence welfare reform policy to the scholarly body

of knowledge. In addition, the outcomes may encourage other women to explore advocacy as a tool.

Summary

In this first chapter, I included a brief explanation of the PRWORA, enacted in 1966 as well as subsequent revision, to substantiate the need and relevance of the proposed research. A cursory review of the history of this law revealed the conspicuous absence of the voices of African American single mothers who received assistance and the consequences they and their families experienced because of the enacted policies. I articulated the gap in the literature as the absence of their voices, telling their stories about the effect that the policy had on their lives, and their views of advocacy and influencing legislators as they manage PRWORA.

In Chapter 2, I explore the breadth and depth of the challenges and successes that single African American mothers receiving entitlement benefits experience. Furthermore, I will present historical efforts to involve the women in using their voices to advocate with state and local legislators regarding the implementation of welfare reform. In Chapter 3, I explain the research design and the rationale for selecting multiple case studies as the research tradition. Considerations of my role as the researcher, including researcher bias and research ethics, follow. I present my choice of methodology, including participation criterion logic, recruitment, and data collection procedures. My

method of analyzing the data, strategies to ensure trustworthiness of this study, and ethical procedures conclude the chapter.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

In 2006, the federal government imposed additional restrictions on TANF recipients during the reauthorization of PRWORA under the DRA (McKay, 2012; Patterson, 2012). Reportedly, these changes were in response to public outcry to further limit public expenditures on TANF recipients (McKay 2012; Morgen et al., 2010). The purpose of this study was to explore how these women thought about advocacy and influencing local legislators regarding welfare reform. From previous research related to this population, I found insufficient scholarly literature articulating the voices of recipients in discussions about PRWORA, even though many recipients suffered significant hardships (Shaefer & Edin, 2013).

In this chapter, I begin with an introduction and literature search strategy, followed by the historical background and implementation of the law. I then present the conceptual frameworks for this study, Black feminist and empowerment theories. Finally, I discuss advocacy as it relates to historic and current research and conclude the chapter with a summary and overview of Chapter 3.

Literature Search Strategy

To review salient literature associated with my research question, I examined Google Scholar and EBSCO search engines. Using an iterative process, I searched the following databases: Academic Search Complete, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses, Education Research Complete, Educational Resource Information Center, MEDLINE

with Full Text, Military & Government Collection, Political Science Complete, PsycARTICLES, SocINDEX with Full Text, Federal and District Government, Urban Institute, Center for American Progress, and Sage. Keywords included *welfare reform, welfare, advocacy, African American and women, legislative advocacy, Black women and advocacy, empowerment theory, empowerment, Black Feminist theory, feminism, TANF, Black women's well-being, welfare recipients and advocacy, and Welfare Rights Movement, welfare reform, single mothers, TANF recipients, empowerment, and workforce development.*

Historical Development of the Issue

In 1996, the government profoundly changed the welfare system in the United States (Phinney, 2016). Numerous scholars and conservative politicians made a case for changing the entitlement programs, specifically the public welfare system. Fording et al. (2013), Patterson (2012), and Phinney (2016) presented how systems changed from being an entitlement, which anyone who met the eligibility criteria could receive cash, medical care, housing, and food assistance, to one requiring the recipients to pursue full time employment, within stricter time limits for receiving assistance. Legislators introduced Bill H.R.3734, PRWORA of 1996, to Congress on June 26, 1996, and subsequently signed into law by President Clinton on August 22, 1996 (Fording et al. 2013; Patterson, 2012). Following the enactment of the bill, it became Public Law No: 104-193 Personal

Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (Fording et al. 2013; Patterson, 2012).

Fording et al. (2013) discussed how this new law eliminated Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), a program in which recipients continued receiving aid as long as they met the family and income qualifications. TANF replaced AFDC. TANF imposed specific work requirements on recipients and established criteria for denying benefits to recipients who failed to meet the conditions of the new law.

Several authors stated the stipulations included in the reform law were efforts to govern the behaviors of recipients (Pimpare, 2013; Brush, 2011; Patterson, 2012). The new law interjected stipulations to encourage marriage, payment of child support, and discourage teen pregnancy (Pimpare, 2013; Brush, 2011; Patterson, 2012). Patterson (2012) shared how the law allowed denial of benefits to recipients if they or their family members who resided with them received convictions for felony drug abuse or distribution of controlled substances. TANF regulations imposed sanctions for failure to participate in approved training programs or gain employment within a prescribed time frame (Patterson, 2012). As the primary punitive tool, sanctions significantly reduced the number of their cash payments or prohibited recipients from receiving any public assistance (Fording et al., 2013; Patterson, 2012). In addition, the law imposed a 5-year maximum lifetime limit for receiving public assistance, whether the recipient became employed or not (Brush, 2011; Highsmith 2016; Patterson, 2012).

The enactment of this law fundamentally changed the way poor families received support. PRWORA was the most profound change in the system of support to the poor since the programs of the New Deal between 1933 and 1941 (Pimpare, 2013). It is important to discuss how this change happened, because it has some bearing on the possibilities of advocacy affecting policy decision making germane to this research.

Welfare Reform Creation and Voice

Many did not understand how the law passed when decision makers rejected such sweeping changes to welfare in prior years. Katz (2012), Dagueere (2008), and Jacobson (1996) presented discussions of how a combination of events led to the eventual passage of PRWORA. Democrats and republicans began to consider the necessity to revise the welfare system as groups of citizens began to express concerns regarding the spending of public dollars for entitlement programs. Although the public began to question the system, the republicans won the majority in Congress in 1994 in large measure because of the Contract With America, authored by Gingrich and Armey but based on former President Regan's political influence (O'Connor, 2001). Several articles outlined the major strategy initiative used by conservative republicans to pass new, restrictive legislation (O'Connor, 2001). They mounted a campaign to denigrate welfare recipients by using race and gender to sway public opinion against them collecting entitlement dollars (Johnson, 2010; Katz, 2012; Morgen et al., 2010; O'Connor, 2001).

In an article discussing the protagonists and ideas that seeded PRWORA, O'Connor (2001) went to Washington in 1997, shortly after passage of the law, and interviewed 16 members of Congress or of the administration. A number of congressional republicans, led by Gingrich, embarked on a campaign to change the narrative regarding welfare from one of providing a safety net for poor families to one of eradicating illegitimacy, uncontrollable sex, immoral behavior, and laziness on the part of the recipients, whom they purported were predominately African American single mothers O'Connor (2001). The campaign promoted the concept these women were undeserving of government assistance (Hancock, 2000; O'Connor, 2001).

O'Connor (2001) further discussed how this group of legislators united on a common message they relentlessly pursued in the media, in public forums, and inside Congress. It castigated the welfare recipients, particularly African American single mothers, to sway the public sentiment toward demanding major welfare reform. Authors explained how a constant barrage, characterizing welfare recipients as Black, hyper-sexed, lazy, bad single mothers, shifted the public concept of welfare from being a safety net to help people in need to one of giving public money to women who did not deserve it (Katz, 2012; O'Connor, 2001; Pimpare, 2013).

One strategy used by the conservatives was promoting the idea of forcing welfare recipients to work was empowering them to become self-sufficient (Johnson, 2010). O'Conner (2001) posited, however, that democratic advocates for welfare reform used

the same argument when they encountered opposition from opponents of the legislation. Both groups portended they were helping welfare recipients gain better lives for themselves and their families.

Several authors explained, to further bolster their campaign to overhaul welfare, conservatives engaged scholars, as well as politicians with similar thinking to provide research to substantiate their claims. Katz (2012) and Stryker and Wald (2009) reported Murry, who co-authored *The Bell Curve*, provided scientific support for conservatives to spread the rhetoric as they fought to win the debate to reform welfare from an entitlement program to one focused on obtaining employment. Havemann (1995) highlighted part of the testimony to the Senate during the debates over welfare reform, in which Murry warned welfare reform must address the number of out-of-wedlock babies being born. The rationale was this phenomenon would exacerbate the problems of the state and local governments having to care for these people. Dagueere (2008) shared how Mede, another conservative leaning scholar, purported welfare caused laziness and the reform should focus on forcing recipients to avail themselves of jobs. The focal point of Mead's argument was welfare recipients had the wrong attitudes toward life, work, and marriage. Thus, the system should punish them when they did not live according to the morals of the conservative conscience (Dagueere, 2008). This line of rhetoric laid the groundwork for what became sanctions in the legislation (Dagueere, 2008). The expressed view was the foundation for welfare reform articulated by conservative republicans was Work First.

In doing so, they blamed the poor for their impoverishment and punished them for not working and deviating from the moral dictates of the conservative party (Dagueere, 2008).

In contrast to the conservatives' work first approach, some democrats supported changing the welfare system based their proposed reformed system from a Human Capital Approach (Dagueere, 2008). The relentless conservative campaign for welfare reform and the republicans' Contract with America put pressure on liberal democrats to explore ways to change the system. Two prominent voices from the liberal viewpoint who supported welfare reform were Lewis, a liberal anthropologist, and Moynihan.

According to Dagueere (2008), Lewis espoused the concept of generational poverty and how poor minorities adapted to their conditions by developing coping skills to survive. Moynihan, serving as Under Secretary of the US Department of Labor, wrote a report, which proposed that the federal government needed to address the challenges of Black men and their families by implementing jobs and training programs to enable these men to earn wages to support their families. In the report, researchers shared literature explaining the prolific unemployment of Black men in inner cities would lead to their families experiencing continued generations of poverty.

Noted sociologist Wilson, proposed that with large numbers of no or low skilled unemployed African American men in urban cities, marriage became unlikely (Dagueere, 2008). Wilson reasoned the limited number of marriageable Black men contributed to an

increasing number of single mother headed households and welfare dependency (Dagueere, 2008). Furthermore, the researcher asserted a need to address structural issues to correct this problem.

In addition to these scholars and politicians, perhaps the most important democrat to weigh in on this issue was President Clinton. Many scholars wrote about how Clinton promised to significantly change the welfare system during his campaign to become president (Bentele, & Nicoli, 2012; Dagueere, 2008; Katz, 2012; Morgen et al., 2010). Clinton's bill focused on providing training and other incentives for recipients to develop skills to enable them to build their capacity to qualify for jobs paying them adequate wages to sustain their families without government assistance (Daguerre, 2008; Katz, 2012).

President Clinton vetoed two early welfare reform bills focused heavily on Work First and punishment for non-compliance (Katz, 2012). After some compromises, the urging of 37 House Democrats and increasing public pressure to pass welfare reform, the president acquiesced and signed the bill in 1996 (Dagueere, 2008; O'Connor, 2001). While many voiced their opinions, which the Congress considered during the debates to bring welfare reform to fruition, a conspicuous absence was of one significant group, welfare recipients (Hancock, 2000).

Hancock's dissertation presented information discussing welfare recipients in the public square during the debate over the development of, what became PROWRA.

Hancock (2000) explained, during the debate in congress regarding welfare reform, a Congressperson read excerpts from a US News interview of one woman, to demonstrate the plight of welfare mothers. This information was a part of Hancock's dissertation, which reported the public identity of the *Welfare Queen* constructed by conservative scholars, politicians, and media, impeded these women's ability to participate in the shaping of public policy. Furthermore, the use of the negative public identity of welfare recipients directed public opinion against continued support of welfare as an entitlement program. According to Hancock (2000) and O'Connor (2001), the combination of the strategies employed primarily by conservatives made it possible for the major reforms to the welfare system to succeed. By controlling the narrative of who is receiving welfare and creating a multi-faceted campaign to paint the recipients as undeserving, conservatives swayed public opinion against continuing to support the recipients portrayed as lazy freeloaders (Hancock, 2000). The characterization of welfare recipients as Black, highly sexed, amoral, lazy, freeloading single mothers with many illegitimate babies, built upon pre-existing perceptions held by some in the public.

Ein-Gar and Levontin (2013) presented the idea that it is common for people in the community to share with less fortunate, but when the donor perceives the recipients are lazy or unwilling to work, the donor develops feelings of anger. Constant reports of welfare recipients as lazy, amoral, and content to freeload without having alternative information from the perspective of the recipients to balance the narrative, caused the

public to lobby their political officials with flawed information. The absence of the voices of the women on welfare, explaining their challenges, resulted in Congress people citing pressure from their constituents as the driving force behind their promoting and passing PRWORA.

Devolution to the States

Another significant alteration to the welfare system under the new law changed the authority for administering public assistance. The federal government previously provided oversight of the welfare system but under PRWORA the administration of the program transferred to the state and local government (Patterson, 2012; Sheely, 2012). The federal government issued block grants to the states and allowed them to establish their own guidelines for how they would implement the law (Patterson, 2012; Sheely, 2012). According to Patterson (2012), this act was significant because if states could demonstrate progress in the implementation of a creative program, they could petition the federal government for waivers from some of the more stringent components of the law.

Patterson (2012) explained how the reauthorization of the law under the DRA 2006 DRA, reduced the flexibility previously granted to the states. The major foci became getting recipient's jobs and lessening the burden of the government to provide financial support. As a method of enforcing the work first focus of welfare reform, the federal government rated the states according to the percentages of recipients they moved off the welfare rolls and into work.

Those who did not meet their targets faced penalties such as having some of their funding revoked (Patterson, 2012). However, some states decided to supplement families who had needs extending beyond the federal time frame or needed unique programs to prepare them for work (Economic Security Administration, n.d.). The state welfare reform policies complied with the law, but they also extended TANF beyond the scope of the federal legislation by providing programs to provide enhanced supports to recipients and extending the deadlines for those with barriers to employment (Economic Security Administration, n.d; Patterson, 2012).

Local Implementation of the Law

In the region where the participants of this study live, TANF was a significant challenge (Economic Security Administration, n.d.). The TANF population numbered 17,100 families, a larger percentage of the population than in other places TANF recipients had barriers to employment, hindering them from obtaining employment. In the region targeted for the study, 41% of work eligible recipients received TANF for longer than the federal 60-month time limit (Economic Security Administration, n.d.).

The difficult economic picture and the challenges faced by many long term TANF recipients caused the target region to redesign the program, increasing the opportunities for more recipients to achieve long term, sustainable employment outcomes (Economic Security Administration, n.d.). To accomplish this goal, they revised vital components to incorporate strategies, which yielded success in a pilot project and updated its website to

inform the public about the new program. According to their website, all who applied for TANF had to attend an orientation to learn about their rights as recipients. An individual assessment of skills, goals, and abilities followed the orientation. Based on the assessment, a counselor worked with applicants to develop an individual responsibility plan (IRP), which included the strategies for getting the person prepared for work. The plan could include education or training goals or direct the applicant to pursue employment opportunities immediately (Economic Security Administration, n.d.). The caseworkers prescribed specific combinations of programs to prepare recipients for work. However, in the target location, there was a shortage of approved programs, which created a long waiting list. Once spaces opened in approved programs, recipients had to complete all program elements. If the recipients failed to complete any of the steps, they faced denial of TANF benefits (Economic Security Administration, n.d.).

Once a family received TANF, sanctions punished them for non-compliance (Economic Security Administration, n.d.). Sanctions constituted a reduction of cash benefits when clients fail to meet the requirements of their IRP for four consecutive weeks. Three levels of sanctions existed: Level 1 removed the adult from the grant (approximately \$70 reduction); Level 2 reduced the grant by 50 % if the adult recipient remained non-compliant, and Level 3 removed the entire family from the grant for one month. However, this level of sanctioning did not sufficiently motivate recipients to comply, which resulted in terminating recipients and their entire family who repeatedly

fail to fulfill their obligations. The recipient consulted with their case manager to develop a satisfactory plan to get back into compliance (Reductions and Terminations, 2013). The sanction continued until the participant was back in compliance for four consecutive weeks.

In addition to sanctions, permanent reductions, and termination from TANF could occur. Federal law imposed a 60-month maximum for anyone to receive TANF benefits (Sanctions, 2013). In the target city, families who reach the 60 months (total combined since 1977) time limit and were still unable to sustain themselves independent of government assistance experienced a gradual reduction in funds until they were finally terminated (Sanctions, n.d.). These reductions began at 20% in April 2011, followed by intended reduction of 25% more in October 2013 (Kids Count, 2011).

For a family of three receiving the maximum TANF grant the income reduced from \$428 to \$342 in April 2011, then down to \$257 in October 2013 and was subject to another 47% reduction in October 2014 (Kids Count, 2011). The law mandates TANF reductions and subsequent terminations (Reductions and Terminations, n.d.). However, recipients with disabilities received special provisions in the 2012 redesign of TANF.

Some recipients who were heads of households and had verifiable disabilities preventing them from working for at least 30 days became referrals to the Program on Work Employment and Responsibility (POWER). The POWER Program (2013) offered specialized training and resources to help the recipients eventually prepare for work.

When accepted in the POWER program, caseworkers suspended the time clock and the need to adhere to the federal work requirements. If they fulfilled the requirements of the POWER program, they could fully restore their grants and eliminate sanctions. While in the POWER program, the recipient could receive medical or professional help to remediate their disability. If the disability was determined permanent, the recipient received assistance in obtaining Social Security Disability.

Cities and states spent large sums of money and time implementing the PRWORA, however many recipients were still unable to find and maintain employment. The federal law significantly changed the structure of the safety net for welfare recipients in the country. However, an evaluation of the outcomes is important to understand what worked and what needs improvement so more recipients successfully move off TANF and into sustained, viable employment.

Evaluation of the Law

Measuring the success of policies is important. However, there are several challenges to measuring how effective PRWORA has been. Pimpare (2013) reviewed several evaluating studies of the PRWORA and exposed some of the problems. One of two major difficulties with evaluating the law were many states had significantly reduced their AFDC, requiring stricter work efforts by recipients prior to the enactment of the 1996 reform law, leading to overestimating the effect of PRWORA.

The other major issue Pimpare (2013) raised concerning evaluation was the analysis of the law from a quantitative perspective did not sufficiently capture the differences in implementation. While PRWORA was a federally mandated law, it offered states wide autonomy in its implementation (Danziger, Seefeldt, & Shaefer, 2016; Pimpare, 2013; Sheely, 2012). This latitude led to a large variety of eligibility requirements including, (a) classifications of approved work, (b) whether school attendance qualified within the scope of the implementation plan, (c) whether to provide support systems, such as child care assistance and transportation assistance, (d) the lifetime time limit, and (e) reasons for and length of sanctions (Pimpare, 2013).

Pimpare (2013) also noted circumstances varied among counties and cities within the same state. Sheely (2012) reviewed PRWORA evaluation studies and found some jurisdictions offered support/rewards systems. The opponents of devolution stated the law allowed such a wide spectrum of authority to states to implement the PRWORA; there was the potential for negative outcomes (Sheely, 2012). One such result they alleged would be the states would make their programs less attractive to discourage people from other states from gravitating to their state, thus overloading their system (Sheely, 2012).

Additionally, Pimpare (2013) noted the variations in economic situations in various locations and in the national economy further complicated the evaluation. At the inception of this bill, the national economy was robust and offered recipients greater opportunities to gain employment (Pimpare, 2013; Katz, 2012). However, the economic

downturn severely crippled employment overall in the US and presented significant challenges to securing employment for recipients, many of whom were low skilled workers (Pimpare, 2013).

A further complication in evaluating PRWORA highlighted by Pimpare (2013) was the confusion among researchers as to how to evaluate the law. Researchers felt conflicted about what variables to include in their assessments. As a result, studies lacked consistency because they examined different programs, which varied significantly in what and whom they addressed. Therefore, it was difficult to find a consensus of whether PRWORA was successful.

Finally, Pimpare (2013) concluded PRWORA achieved one major goal, reducing the welfare caseload. In studying the evaluations of the law, researchers generally found the welfare rolls declined. However, there has not been a methodology to consistently analyze the outcomes on those who left the rolls. While PRWORA reduced caseloads of people receiving cash benefits, the economic coverage of poor women and children was difficult to analyze (Bentele & Nicoli, 2012). It was difficult for researchers to determine the components of PRWORA that resulted in caseload reductions, what programs successfully moved recipients off government assistance and into self-sufficiency, or what happened to families who were no longer eligible (Bentele & Nicoli, 2012). Variations in state policies prevented employing consistent measurements to evaluate the success of the legislation (Bentele & Nicoli, 2012; Pimpare, 2013).

Trisi and Pavetti (2012) offered another method of evaluating the success of TANF as a safety net. They suggest using a TANF-to-poverty ratio. The authors calculated this ratio by dividing the number of TANF cases by the number of children in poverty. Using this ratio would remain relatively constant if TANF adjusted to economic swings such as a recession. States with low ratios indicated TANF was responsive to economic changes, providing a safety net for those in poverty. While TANF-to-poverty ratio provided a possible method of evaluating the responsiveness of TANF to those in poverty, it does not explain how TANF recipients or those who stopped receiving benefits fared based on caseload reduction. The stories of recipients in both the scholarly and policy realms provide insight for policy makers and human service providers regarding how the law affected the lives of people. Qualitative results allow researchers to hear the voices of those affected by policies, therefore, have direct data with which to deliberate.

The Effect of the Law

As a part of evaluating the law, it is important to understand the effect the law had on recipients. Katz (2012) evaluated the influence of the law on the possibilities of the women and their families experiencing upward mobility. The four main goals of PRWORA included assisting needy families, ending government dependence by requiring the poor to work, curtailing the incidences of out-of-wedlock pregnancies, and encouraging marriage. Katz challenged the law arguing its intention was not to lift people

out of poverty. The major disagreement espoused by Katz was the design of the law had faulty assumptions and stereotypes about the women on welfare and the challenges they faced. According to Katz, the policies were ill conceived and thus did not yield the intended outcomes. It is important to investigate how these policy requirements affected recipients.

Several authors Katz (2012), Melkote (2010), and Zedlewski, Callan, and Acs, (2012) reported significant caseload reductions following the enactment of PRWORA. Caseloads fell by more than 60 % between 1997 and 2007 (Melkote, 2010). Zedlewski et al. (2012) documented the decrease in caseloads from 12.6 million in 1966 to 4.6 million in 2010. The work first focus concentrated on reducing caseloads by guiding clients into work.

Melkot (2010) explained during the Great Recession in the US, many low skilled jobs disappeared due to business declines, outsourcing, and the increase in the use of technology. Data from the US Bureau of Labor Statistics showed the unemployment rate in the US doubled from 5 % in 2007 to 10 % in 2009. For those with less than a high school diploma, the unemployment rate was 15.3 % in December 2009, while only 5 % among people with college degrees.

Single mothers represent a disproportionately high percentage of TANF recipients and among them, a 13% unemployment rate compared to 5.8% for married women (Melkot, 2010). A 6.5 % decline in employment occurred among this population between

2000 and 2005 (Acs & Loprest, n.d.). According to Katz (2012), this decline in employment left many poor mothers to move from job to job, and many more faced layoffs and were unable to find another job. These factors increased the numbers unable to maintain their families. Fording et al. (2013) explained there was an increase in the number of families living in extreme poverty from 1.46 million in 1996 to 2.4 million in 2011. While the 2007-2009 recession caused some of the hardships faced by these women and their families, the direction and restrictive regulations of the welfare reform law also contributed to their oppression (Fording et al., 2013).

Zedlewski, Callan, and Acs (2012) reported under the reauthorization of TANF in February 2006, the federal government required each state to have 50 % of their eligible families working or face financial penalties. The researchers reported in 2012, 22 states imposed the most stringent punishment. They removed the entire family from the program the first time they did not meet the requirements. This hardline punishment caused serious adverse conditions to many recipients because the low skilled job market had yet to recover from the recession.

Barriers to Employment

Fording et al. (2013) reported many TANF recipients had multiple barriers hindering them from gaining and maintaining employment. The more obstacles a person confronted, the less likely they were to find employment (Fording et al., 2013). Some of

the major impediments included having limited education, job skills, and work experience (Fording et al., 2013). Issues resulting from being a victim of domestic violence or intimate partner violence, having a mental or physical health challenge, or caring for an elderly family member or relative with disabilities also obstructed their path to sustaining a livable income (Haney, 2013).

A primary barrier to employment for many of these women was their limited education (Alfred & Martin, 2007). Researchers surveyed welfare recipients in six states and Washington, DC (Bloom et al., 2011). They found 4 in 10 TANF recipients did not graduate from high school (Bloom et al., 2011). Having limited education significantly reduced the likelihood of a woman qualifying for jobs with wages high enough to lift her and her family out of poverty (Bloom et al., 2011). An employment summary for people with less than a high school diploma or equivalency revealed the median annual income was \$20,110, those with a high school diploma, \$34,760, completed post-secondary/no degree \$35,170, associate's degree \$57,590, and a bachelor's degree \$67,140 (Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), 2012). The federal poverty guideline for a family of four for 2012 was \$23,050 per year (2012 HHS Poverty Guidelines, 2013). Thus, a single mother with three children and no high school diploma was likely to earn less than the poverty level (Katz, 2012). However, if the women could earn a post secondary education, they would have a greater chance to significantly increase their incomes, thus improving their economic mobility (Katz, 2012).

Researchers clearly showed advancing education is an important strategy to moving people out of poverty. Katz (2012) explained that in addition to earning higher wages, women improved their self-confidence, critical thinking, and decision making as they increased their educational level. The children also benefited when their mothers attended college. When parents model achievement behavior and expose children to educational opportunities, such as visits to libraries, museums, and similar academic events, they internalize the behavior, value education, and exert effort to achieve their goals (Dubow, Boxer & Huesmann, 2009). Additionally, Katz (2012) purported the children's exposure to a college education through their mothers' attendance made them more likely to attend college. Thus, a mother receiving TANF and having an opportunity to pursue a college degree can change the trajectory of the lives of her children, possibly breaking the generational cycles of poverty (Katz, 2012). A college education proved to be a viable method of reducing poverty, but the welfare reform legislation did not fund these efforts (Katz, 2012).

PRWORA had a work first requirement prohibiting federal TANF dollars to fund college education (Katz, 2012; Kim, 2012). Katz (2012) explained the original legislation made it difficult for TANF recipients to pursue college degrees by promoting work over education. It required recipients to get a limited amount of training, if necessary, as well as establish specific numbers of hours they had to be involved in work activities. With the reauthorization of the legislation under the DRA in 2006, the number of work hours

increased, and college education was severely limited, the time to pursue post-secondary education was a maximum of 12 months, which prohibited completing a bachelor's degree (Parrott et al., 2007).

With mounting research supporting the value of higher education for the poor, a need for advocacy is important in soliciting changes in welfare policy to allow mothers receiving TANF to obtain post-secondary degrees. In the one article I could locate regarding recipient advocacy for higher education in PRWORA, Katz (2007) presented a study of a nonprofit group designed to empower the women to pursue their goals of attaining higher education, conducted advocacy efforts for a group of women receiving TANF. The group used two methods to achieve their goal: (a) direct advocacy with elected officials and (b) engagement with grassroots community organizations to join in advocacy work to change welfare policy (Katz, 2007).

Katz (2007) discovered voices of the women on TANF, who were also advocating for higher education achieved success. While discussing their pursuits of higher education, they also expressed their understanding of the current welfare policies and how they could change the system to allow more people access to higher education. Following the example of the women in this California community, the women in the target area could mobilize to advocate for the inclusion of higher education in the implementation of TANF where they live.

Quoss and Longhurst (2000) reported the work requirements of the 1996 PRWORA and those of subsequent welfare reform legislation significantly restricted TANF recipient opportunities to attend college while receiving aid. The authors conducted a qualitative study of women in college and receiving TANF who organized themselves and advocated for the right to continue to receive TANF while completing their degree program. The students defeated the state legislation removing their ability to continue college attendance and receive TANF benefits twice. The study demonstrated how successful advocacy by TANF recipients was possible.

Several researchers identified domestic violence or intimate partner violence (IPV) as a serious barrier to employment for many women receiving TANF (Adams, Tolman, Bybee, Sullivan, & Kennedy, 2012; Bloom et al., 2011; Patterson, 2012; Postmus, Plummer, McMahon, Murshid, & Kim, 2012). The CDC identified intimate partner violence as physical or sexual violence, stalking, and psychological aggression (including coercive tactics) by a current or former intimate partner (Intimate Partner Violence, 2010). Compared to White non-Hispanic women (35%), Black non-Hispanic women (44%) and multicultural non-Hispanic women (54%) experienced IPV at higher rates (CDC, 2010). IPV was a significant public health issue because the consequences often had economic costs for the greater society (CDC, 2010). Many victims of IPV created financial burdens on public services (Green, 2004). Women who had been victims of IPV might suffer severe injuries, depression or posttraumatic stress, other

mental health issues, along with homelessness and death (CDC, 2010; Green, 2004). The CDC (2010) found women who experienced IPV received the following services, (a) 21.1% medical care, (b) 21.2% legal services, (c) 7.5% victim's advocate services, (d) 6.9% housing services, and (e) 6.1% community services. When one considers some women were targets of abuse on multiple occasions, with multiple partners, the costs of providing care and support could be quite significant (CDC, 2010). Intimate Partner Violence significantly affects TANF recipients (Butler et al., 2008). In many instances, it is the cause of women enrolling in TANF (Butler et al., 2008).

Brown (2001) outlined a picture of the effect of IPV on employment possibilities for women on TANF. Between 15 and 56 % of the women receiving TANF reported having been victims of domestic abuse within the 12 months before the report, and between 55 and 65% of the women receiving TANF reported they had been victims of IPV within their lifetimes. Among these women, those in abusive relationships were less likely to have jobs. Some reasons reported by 16-60 % of the women included the intimate partners discouraged them from working, and 33-46% said their intimate partners prevented them from working.

The psychological and physical abuse can prevent women from participating in work preparation and activities. Brown (2001) studied the effect of psychological abuse on victims including psychological intimidation from an intimate partner, causing a woman to have low self-esteem and lack the confidence needed to sustain a job. Abusers

can destroy her work appropriate clothing or promise to provide child care or transportation then renege. Both the psychological and physical abuse can be hindrances because they can lead to mental and physical illnesses, such as stress, anxiety, hypertension, as well as visible bruises and broken bones. These injuries can prevent women from completing required work activities. IPV is a serious barrier to employment and another topic in which the mobilization of TANF recipients and their allies could advocate for more effective solutions.

Brown (2001) cited the definition of disability used by vocational rehabilitation programs. "Disability is a mental or physical impairment that substantially hinders a person from working" (Brown, 2001, p. 7). This definition leaves much to the interpretation of the case worker. Butler et al. (2008) conducted a study in which 28 TANF recipients in Maine participated in focus groups and interviews. The researchers conducted the sessions to document the experiences of long term TANF recipients (Butler et al., 2008). They found the ruling of case managers might be a refusal to classify a health challenge as a viable disability, which would require the recipient to work. (Butler et al., 2008). This is another area in which, advocacy might be helpful. Advocates might convince governing bodies to implement an appeals process. Recipients should have an opportunity to have someone else evaluate their disability claim (Butler et al., 2008).

Mental health challenges can also be an obstacle for women on TANF (Blank, 2007; Brown, 2001). Blank (2007) reported poor women had higher incidents of various forms of mental illnesses than wealthier women. Mental health conditions (e.g., depression, panic attacks, and anxiety) often resulted from the traumas of domestic abuse, accidents, surviving childhood sexual abuse, and generational poverty (Beegle, 2003; Butler et al., 2008; Lee & Tolman, 2006). Brohan et al. (2012) added recipients might experience episodes when they are unable to function due to a mental illness, and some TANF recipients are reluctant to disclose a mental illness to prospective employers for fear of stigmatization or rejection. For many poor women, mental health challenges cooccur with physical health challenges (Brown, 2001).

According to Landrine and Corral (2009), Black women suffer greater health disparities than White women. Black women have higher incidents of adult asthma, diabetes, cancers, hypertension, heart disease, and mortality. Some unhealthy behaviors, lack of accessibility to healthy nutrition, inadequate health care, and unhealthy environmental exposures jointly contribute to the significantly higher health challenges for Black women.

Several studies included substance abuse as another barrier to employment for women on TANF (Blank, 2007; Bloom et al., 2011; Brown, 2001). In some states, recipients must submit to drug testing at the time of application. However, it is difficult to determine how many TANF recipients are involved with substance abuse for a few

reasons. One difficulty is determining whether substance abuse refers to illicit drugs, prescription drugs, or alcohol. The cost of drug testing along with jurisdictions debating about treatment or punishment for substance users yields limited consistency in data. Discrepancies in the data sources, as well as the questionable reliability of various testing methods further confounded any consistent count. Some state agents deny substance abusing recipients assistance of any kind while in others the recipients receive drug treatment with the ability to have assistance restored. While challenges exist in quantifying the extent of substance abuse among TANF recipients, more unclear is to what extent substance abuse is a barrier to employment. Advocating for drug treatment, rather than sanctions for affected recipients is another area of possible advocacy.

Conceptual Foundation

Black Feminist Theory

Black feminist thought is an iterative concept developed to understand the unique experiences of Black women. As early as 1831, Black women scholars and leaders documented the oppression and discrimination Black women face. Scholars and freedom fighters such as Stewart, Truth, Cooper, and Wells-Barnett built a foundation for discussing Black women's issues from the viewpoint of Black women based on their race, sex, and class. These women wrote and fought for the rights of Black women (Gines, 2011). This evolution of Black feminist work continued in the 1980s and 1990s with works from such scholars as Morgan, Anzaldua, Hull and Talpade Mohanty (Gines,

2011). Additional scholars such as Smith, Bell Hooks, Davis, Walker, Lorde, and Giddings, continued the research and debate to define Black feminist thought (Gines, 2011).

In 1989, Crenshaw contrasted the analysis of Black women's experiences from a multidimensional approach versus a single axis point view (Gines, 2011). Collins (2000) expanded the concepts of intersectionality to develop Black feminist theory.

Intersectionality theorist analyze the way various social and cultural constructs interact on multiple levels to oppresses groups of people (Hamilton-Mason, Hall, & Everett, 2009). Collins (2000) explained constructs (i.e., race, gender, class, sexuality, and nation) meet to form a system of oppression influencing the lives of African American women.

Researchers using this theory presented the histories and views of African American women regarding their life stories (Collins, 2000). They encouraged African American women to articulate their life situations from their vantage point to provide a unique way for them to address the intersection of gender, race, class, and sexuality when assessing and voicing their challenges in the world (Collins, 2000; Hamilton-Mason, Hall, & Everett, 2009). Researchers used Black feminist concepts as a tool for African American women to gain new knowledge from their history, community, and culture to reassess their lives in the United States, redefine their identities on their terms, and articulate their truth from their standpoint to become empowered to improve their lives (Collins, 2000; Hamilton-Mason et al., 2009).

Collins (2000) articulated African American women armed with their truths can develop a reference point from which to engage the dominant culture in the fight for equality. Eurocentric American men often ignored African American women or dismissed them, thereby making it challenging for African American women to engage in meaningful dialogue with people who have no idea of their experiences. During periods of history in America, Eurocentric White men objectified African American women, telling untrue stories about them to cast them in a negative light to subjugate them. Many of these same men set policies affecting the lives of African American women.

Black feminist theory provides a way for African American women to impart knowledge about their experiences to the dominant culture when fighting for equal treatment and effective policies (Collins, 2000; Hamilton-Mason, Hall, & Everett, 2009). It is necessary for their experiences to be included in the epistemological discussions of oppression and domination, on equal levels with White men and women, and Black men (Collins, 2000).

Collins (2000) found the creation and incorporation of the domination matrix, central to Black feminist theory, makes space for African American women and other oppressed people to share their stories of oppression and domination in an analogous manner. The matrix enables disenfranchised groups to identify their experiences of oppression due to a combination of factors, such as racism, sexism, and classism. Mutual understanding and coalition building can happen when different groups articulated their

varied experiences using similar categories. The sharing can result in divergent groups identifying shared interests all people can pursue. Traditionally, others addressed oppression as originating from singular access points, that is subjugation based either on gender, race, class, religion, or sexuality. However, Black feminist theory presents a view of the oppression of African American women as emerging from multiple perspectives simultaneously.

African American men present their oppression from the dual access points of being African American and male, according to Collins (2000). However, they often view African American women as subordinates based on their gender. According to Black feminist theory, African American women can view oppression as being comprised of multiple subsystems, requiring redress in order for them to reach maximum functionality.

Collins (2000) presented the differences in the definition of family as an example of how Black feminist theory can empower African American women and change the basis for policy definition. The masculine, Eurocentric, traditional definition of family is a birthmother, married to one man who works to support the family while the mother remains at home caring for the children. However, in the African American experience, family can look very different.

The role of mother takes many different forms among African American women including birthmother, related other mother, and community other mother, as well as

single and working mother. Collins (2000) illuminated how there may be a spouse or father figure in the home. Social politicians often consider the Eurocentric definition as acceptable and any others, except for widow headed households, unacceptable, causing them to react with punitive responses.

In the case of PROWRA, the definition of *family*, as decided by Eurocentric males, became one of its major tenets (Blank, 2007; Bloom et al., 2011; Loprest & Nichols, 2011; O'Connor, 2001; Patterson, 2012). Many reasons exist why marriage may not be central in the lives of single African American mothers. However, policy makers did not include alternative family lives when considering changes in laws.

Marriage is a significant a component of PRWORA, however single African American mothers experience significant barriers to marriage. Black feminist theory offered insight for these recipients. Collins (2000) purported when Black women faced oppression and joined with other Black women, they evaluated the oppression from their unique perspectives. As a group they gained new knowledge to develop the skills to resist the oppression.

Matrix of Domination

Black feminist thought differed from Eurocentric American male ideologies, which purported people experience oppression based on their social or cultural constructs (Collins, 2000). This either/or proposition takes the form of you are either oppressed because you are a woman or because you are African American (Collins, 2000).

However, African American women can experience oppression on three levels. For example, as women, they may receive unequal pay for performing the same job as men. As African Americans, they may experience discrimination against them in hiring and promotions, and as poor people, they might not have access to high quality health care (Collins, 2000).

To articulate the concept of both/and forms of oppression, Collins (2000) created a Matrix of Domination, which demonstrated the myriad of combinations, which oppress African American women, as well as others. This important concept provided oppressed populations with succinct knowledge to express the life experiences from their worldview. It also presented an instrument to employ when engaging the dominant culture with the need for changes in social justice.

Levels of Domination

Collins (2000), discussed how people experience and form resistance to oppression on three levels, personally, as a member of a cultural community or groups based on race and gender, and at the systems level. At the individual level, Black feminist thought makes it clear Black women, although they belong to the same ethnic group, do not all experience the phenomenon of being a Black female the same way. To illustrate this point, Collins pointed out some women do not leave abusive situations, even when an opportunity to leave presents itself. Some women continued to fight oppression even when there seemed to be no win. Such differences in individuals contributed to Black

feminist thinkers emphasizing the necessity for individual women to acquire new knowledge as a key to empowerment to fight for equality and freedom. When individuals redefined themselves and their lives, they defied control from the top down, but rather they assumed the power to control their own lives.

The individual development results in large part from the norms, traditions, and mores of the cultural group to which individuals belong. Collins (2000) contended these historical narratives from slavery through present day shape the experiences, values, and traditions for African American women. Dominant groups have employed various tactics to keep oppressed groups subjugated. From omissions of Black women to controlling the depictions of Black women in music, stories, and media, the dominant groups seek to control the public perceptions of the oppressed people.

As an example, Broughton (2003) conducted an ethnographic study to explore the extent of acceptance of the pejorative stereotypes of women on welfare by the women themselves. The researcher participated in a multi week job training program, Readywork. First, the researcher joined as a participant and then as an interviewer of graduates. Recounting the author's experiences led to finding programs teaching improvised women about the poor choices they made contributing to their plight (Broughton, 2003). During interviews, some of the participants referred to others in the group by attaching the same negative concepts used by people who stereotyped them (Broughton, 2003). While the women did not refer to themselves using those concepts,

they did use them to contrast themselves from the others (Broughton, 2003). When individuals join to address common issues, they share knowledge and strategies to mount advocacy campaigns. Such was the case of Quoss and Longhurst (2000) where oppressed students joined forces with others to mount successful advocacy activities. The third level is at the systems level. Collins (2000) posited domination and resistance take place within formal institutions for example, schools, churches, and government agencies.

Butler et al. (2008) conducted a case study to demonstrate the power of using stories of the experiences of mothers receiving TANF who had multiple barriers to employment impeding them from meeting the TANF work requirements. The legislature of Maine was considering a bill, which when enacted would be even more stringent than the existing work requirements (Butler et al., 2008). As a part of the campaign by proponents of the bill, a negative public education campaign ensued to cast the women receiving TANF as lazy and undeserving of government assistance (Butler et al., 2008). However, the women gathered and shared their stories with legislators, and the proposed law did not pass. Importantly, the majority of these women were not African American, but as Collins (2000) suggested, the matrix of domination was a way for various groups of people to define and resist oppression. I used this study as a demonstration of systemic oppression because African American women on TANF face similar challenges.

Impact on the Knowledge Base

The purpose of this study is to understand the experiences of African American single mothers who receive welfare and their views regarding their ability to advocate on behalf of their families regarding welfare reform. The tenets of Black feminist theory are self-definition, reassessment, and articulation of personal stories. By situating personal and group narratives in the center of the investigation and analyzing issues derived from the intersection of multiple constructs, one can become empowered to stand in personal truth to demand equality, and justice (Collins, 2000). The tenets of Black feminist theory assisted me in understanding the thoughts feelings and perceptions of African American single mothers on TANF regarding their ability to advocate on behalf of themselves and their families. The definition of family is central to PRWORA as are several critical elements of the law. When you use the Eurocentric definition of family as the basis for reward and sanctions, negative outcomes result. For example, two of the stated goals of the law was to promote marriage and prevent out of wedlock childbearing. (Hancock, 2000; O'Conner, 2001). This did not occur, nor did resulting marriages and pregnancies align with their hypothesis.

During much of the debate to create the law, many of the conservatives who promoted a stringent reform law mounted campaigns to curry public disdain for women on welfare by characterizing them as lazy, promiscuous, and amoral (Hancock, 2000; O'Conner, 2001). Black feminist theory is a method to help reconceptualize the

characterizations of African American single mothers on welfare by situating their experiences in the interconnections of race, gender, and class within the socioeconomic and political structure dominated by Eurocentric American men (Collins, 2000).

Another example of the effectiveness of Black feminist theory presented by Collins (2000) is the difference in the definition of community. The concept of community, in the tradition of the dominant culture in the US, is one of the tenuous relationships based primarily on domination and competition. In contrast, the basis of the Afrocentric model of community is connections, accountability of individuals to the group and care for each other.

Collins (2000) posited the connections and relationships formed in the Africentric concept of the community provide support for the women as they navigate the challenges of their lives. However, they also foster an empowering energy to the women as a result of their shared knowledge and perspectives. These factors enable them to gain a sense of power, which supports them in redefining their identities and challenges on their terms. An increased sense of self-actualization and group empowerment can lead to the women participating in advocacy campaigns. Having an understanding of the concepts of Black feminist theory helped me to develop a foundation for this study. In order for me to glean their truth, I employed a conceptual framework that makes space for their voices. Thus, I selected Black feminist theory.

Empowerment Theory

Empowerment has an ever-evolving definition (Zimmerman & Warschausky, 1998). One definition is it refers to the relationship between individual sociopolitical environment and the ability to control it (Johnson, 2010; Zimmerman & Warschausky, 1998). Rappaport (1987) posited empowerment is a multilevel construct addressing individual, organizational, and community level issues. Furthermore, its focus is both individual mastery over life and democratic participation in the issues and decision making within one's environment (Rappaport, 1987).

Empowerment theory established a framework for studying how one exerts personal control over issues and systems, as well as how one participates in the community to overcome challenges to gain a better quality of life (Rappaport, 1987). Furthermore, empowerment is a process utilized by individuals, organizations, and communities to become an expert on their environments (Rappaport, 1987). In doing so, the process may look differently, depending on the population, the skill, the issues, and the contexts (Rappaport, 1987).

Rappaport (1987) was a pioneer in the development of empowerment theory. The researcher began to work to legitimize community psychology by establishing theories to undergird the discipline. The primary focus was on psychological empowerment (PE) as a process. This discussion was an encouragement for others to continue building on the theory.

One scholar who contributed to the development of this theory was Zimmerman (2000). The researcher authored and co-authored numerous articles on the subject, as well as written chapters in textbooks. Zimmerman (2000) challenged the definition of empowerment by Rappaport (1987) by expressing that while this definition included multiple levels as part of empowerment theory, it neglected to articulate an analysis by level. In a special issue brief, Perkins and Zimmerman (1995) expounded on the definition of empowerment theory by reviewing various articles to present the concepts and challenges of the theory. Upon finding a consensus among researchers, the aim of empowerment theory was to connect individual ability with organizational and community support to engage individuals in exerting control over circumstances, resources, structures, and systems affecting their lives (Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995).

Empowerment theory was useful in changing the values orientation of the helping fields within community psychology. Previously, the focus was on addressing risk factors and victim blaming (Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995; Rappaport, 1987; Zimmerman, 2000). However, empowerment theory changed the focus to identifying client abilities and building on those abilities to engage them as participants in the process of mediating challenges affecting their lives (Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995; Rappaport, 1987; Zimmerman, 2000).

Zimmerman (2000) further articulated enhancements to the theory. Where Rappaport (1987) defined empowerment theory as a process, Perkins, and Zimmerman

(1995) presented literature to expand the definition to express empowerment theory as both a process and outcome. Their position was empowerment is a process by which individuals, organizations, and communities develop skills to address sociopolitical structures affecting their success (Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995). The outcomes would result in empowered individuals, organizations, and communities (Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995). While both the processes and the outcomes are components of empowerment theory, the basis of which individuals experienced them were based on population and the context of the situations (Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995). Thus, the process and outcomes may look different depending on the situation and the cultural influences (Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995). Outlining the way, process, and outcomes would present at the various levels was now part of the theory.

In addition to empowerment processes and outcomes appearing different based on the contexts, Perkins and Zimmerman (1995), as well as, Zimmerman and Warschausky (1998) explained how they would appear at each of the three levels, individual, organizational, and community. Empowerment processes for individuals presented opportunities for them to learn and practice the skills necessary to assume control over structures influencing their sociopolitical lives (Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995). Empowerment processes enhance individual participation in democratic decision making, which might result from their involvement in community organizations (Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995).

Zimmerman and Warschausky (1998) expressed a key component of the individual empowerment theory was participants needed to gain a critical awareness of their circumstances. This awareness was the knowledge of how to acquire and manage resources and skills to enable them to develop strategies to improve their lives. Through participation at the organizational level, individuals usually develop management skills.

Empowerment Processes by Level

At the organizational level, the focus of the empowerment process is preparing groups of individuals to develop skills and understand the sociopolitical process, as well as how to obtain and utilize community resources (Zimmerman & Warschausky, 1998). The process might include professionals working in organizations collaborating with clients, and engaging them in the process of developing strategies, sometimes as collaborators or coleaders (Zimmerman, 2000). Interventions at this level might strengthen beliefs of group members that they do have the power to effectuate change (Zimmerman & Warschausky, 1998). From the organization level, the process moves to the community level (Zimmerman, 2000).

When considering empowerment theory and the community, the approaches usually focus on a systemic level (Zimmerman & Warschausky, 1998). Individuals who share membership in a variety of organizations will join with other organizations and stakeholders to develop and implement collective strategies. The intent of these strategies

is to challenge the power structure and gain greater access to resources and influence over policies to improve their quality of life (Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995).

Empowerment Outcomes by Levels

Zimmerman and Warschausky (1998) suggested empowerment outcomes were the result of executing empowerment processes. The outcomes provided an opportunity to measure the extent of empowerment involved (Zimmerman, 2000). According to Perkins and Zimmerman (1995), empowerment outcomes also varied by population, situation, and context. Outcomes also varied by levels resembling those in empowerment processes; individual, organizational, and community.

Zimmerman and Warschausky (1998), Perkins and Zimmerman (1995), and Zimmerman (2000) posited at the individual level, empowerment outcomes are assessments of the level of perceived control, critical awareness, and resource utilization demonstrated by individuals. It also addresses the participatory behavior exhibited by individuals. Empowered individuals both gain assistance from and contribute to the empowerment of organizations.

Empowered organizations sometimes share common attributes with empowered communities. Zimmerman and Warschausky (1998) offered empowered organizations manage resources, collaborate or link with other agencies, and influence policy decisions. Likewise, empowered communities demonstrate the existence of coalitions and a capacity to influence policy. The examination of the empowerment of organizations and

communities is important. While the unit of analysis is on individual empowerment, I will examine where organizations and communities serve as the sources of help for individuals to become empowered as well.

Psychological Empowerment

The study of empowerment theory at the individual level grew from reaching for goals by an individual to one in which individuals interact with and manage their environment, termed psychological empowerment (PE) (Zimmerman, 2000; Zimmerman & Warschausky, 1998). Psychological empowerment encompasses a sense of control, critical awareness, and participatory behavior in the democratic process. Understanding social justice is a fundamental tenet of empowerment theory developing critical awareness is important in developing PE (Gutierrez & Lewis, 1999; Zimmerman, 2000).

It is necessary to understand who the power brokers and decision makers are in one's sociopolitical environment. The source of their power and the strategies to influence them are key elements (Gutierrez & Lewis, 1999). While these components comprise PE, they will vary in scope and appearance based on the issues, culture, and context in which the participants are working (Zimmerman & Warschausky, 1998).

Zimmerman (1990) suggested it is important to consider an expansive concept of PE because a more narrow focus on individual empowerment limits the scope of analysis of personal empowerment. Focusing on the individual empowerment solely limits the analysis to the skills, awareness, and abilities of an individual in isolation. This subjects

the participants to criticism and blame for the poor predicament in which they exist. It also excludes consideration of the effect of structural barriers and other external forces on keeping participants powerless to change their sociopolitical situations (Christens, 2013; Zimmerman, 1990).

Challenges to Empowerment Theory

While Zimmerman (1990) expanded the definition of PE, several researchers have expressed concerns that empowerment theory needed revising. Woodall, Warwick-Booth, and Cross (2012), Christens (2013), and Cattaneo and Chapman (2010) expressed the idea that the dilution of the concept of empowerment has been to the point of there being no consistent, clear definition of the theory across disciplines. Woodall et al. (2012) conducted a review of the literature and found several definitions of empowerment theory related to health promotion diverged from the original focus of the concept.

Originally, the concept involved powerless people joining with other, similarly situated individuals, to identify challenges common to the group, and mount campaigns to assume the power to improve circumstances in their lives. Woodall et al. (2012) demonstrated how definitions of empowerment moved away from the collective power of the group or organization working with others in the community to create social change. They posited the current definitions focused more on individuals being responsible for transformation. This redefinition neutralized their ability to garner power to alter their specific situations.

Woodall et al. (2012) contended the approach made empowerment less about social change and more about individual failings. Christens (2013) critiqued their article and challenged the quality of the current concept of empowerment. While agreeing with the authors about the concept of empowerment had less substance, Christens (2013) challenged the sources used in the study.

The referenced study contradicted the tenets of psychological empowerment, in it provided participants with training programs, and then expected them to follow the instructions. However, Christens (2013) felt one cannot impose empowerment on people by policies or programs. Rather, participants can gain a sense of psychological empowerment by actively engaging with others in organizations advocating for legislative empowerment. During these engagements, they may receive training, but the issues and solutions emanate from the participants, often in partnership with trained professionals.

Christens (2013) also raised the idea that empowerment had a greater focus on the emotional component, in which people expressed *feeling empowered*, rather than the more measurable cognitive aspect of the theory. The intellectual aspect is a critical component of the original empowerment theory. Freire (1998) highlighted the need for those seeking liberation from oppression to develop conscientization, in which they can recognize the players in their oppression and determine how to change the power dynamics to their advantage.

Zimmerman (1995) referred to the need for the oppressed to develop critical awareness about the power brokers and systems of constraint to develop strategies to assume the power to eliminate the oppressive forces while improving the quality of life for themselves and their communities. Christens (2013) shared additional insight on this component of psychological empowerment, demonstrating its measurability. The author's insight enhanced the definition and articulated, the focus on empowerment was increasingly becoming aimed at the individual (Woodall et al., (2012). However, Christens (2013) concluded such emphasis diluted the theory because it diminished the need for transactions between individuals (psychological empowerment), organizations, and communities.

The basis of empowerment theory is the interaction of individuals working with others in organizations to identify and solve problems jointly. Subsequently, interacting with other organizations within communities to mount campaigns to address common issues together challenged the power brokers to gain more power for the communities (Cattaneo & Goodman, 2015; Christens, 2013; Zimmerman, 1990). In the process of doing the work towards liberation with others, individuals learn new strategies and skills to empower them to engage further in other campaigns to gain control of their lives and those of others in the community (Christens, 2013). Christens (2013) suggested the research on empowerment theory could strengthen the theory to make it more meaningful to use.

However, Cattaneo and Goodman (2015) shared a caution in their critique of current definitions of empowerment theory. Individuals who expressed the feeling of empowerment but failed in their attempts to gain the power to effect changes in their conditions might suffer considerable damage to their sense of self. Such a failure may result in overwhelming damage to their self-efficacy and precipitate their resignation by discouraging them from trying future efforts.

In this regard, the authors point out that in the Zimmerman (1995) conceptualization of a nomological network of empowerment, omits important considerations. The nomological network includes the intrapersonal, interactional, and the behavioral components. Cattaneo and Goodman (2015) discussed how this network neglected consideration of the realworld challenges regarding power dynamics in which those in power resist yielding to the demands of those seeking social change.

Tew (2006) suggested a fundamental difficulty with establishing a consistent definition of empowerment might stem from a lack of a cohesive understanding of the concept of power. The basis of empowerment is power (Cattaneo & Goodman, 2015; Guiterrez & Lewis, 1999; Riger, 1993; Tew, 2006). Tew (2006) and Riger (1993) discussed power in a form, which individuals possessed the capacity to achieve their goals despite the opposition.

Tew (2006) also presented the idea institutions have the capacity to exert power for the common good. Oftentimes, the varied positions of power can be at odds. Conflict

may arise between the needs of individuals, groups of people, the many, and the few institutional power brokers. If left unchallenged, the power over individuals, in the hands of the few could easily become a power over the masses in which the few would exercise dominance over those with less power (Riger, 1993; Tew, 2006).

Tew (2006) presented a discussion of power in which individuals joined with others who shared some similar interests and characteristics to work to gain power for their mutually oppressive circumstances. The power, espoused by Black feminist theory, was a means of addressing the unique challenges faced by Black women. Black women experienced oppression from the simultaneous domination of racism, sexism, and classism (Collins, 2000; Rousseau, 2013). Black women experienced powerlessness in multiple ways and at various levels (Center for American Progress Fact Sheet, 2013; Collins, 2000; Gutierrez, DeLois, & GlenMaye, 1995).

The data in Figure 1 is a graphic picture of African American women's powerlessness, leaving them vulnerable to multiple levels of inequality. This data is a corroboration of the position articulated by Black and Hispanic feminists that Black women suffer oppression based on the interaction of the combination of racism, sexism, and classism (Collins, 2000; Gutierrez et al., 1995).

Historical Welfare Advocacy

It is possible the women who are the subjects of this study experienced challenges by living at the intersection of race, gender, and class as articulated in Black feminist

theory. Empowerment is necessary to equip one to be an advocate. In this study advocacy has a dual purpose, to gain public support for improved implementation of welfare reform and influence government officials to alter policies and programs regarding welfare reform. To achieve these goals, it is important to understand any historical movements informing advocacy today.

While limited literature surfaced regarding mothers receiving welfare actively engaging in advocacy, precedence does exist for such activity. In August 1967, the National Welfare Rights Organization (NWRO) officially formed to advocate on behalf of welfare families (Clawson, 2011). This organization grew out of the uniting of smaller groups fighting for more humane welfare policies. Wiley, President, and Tillmon as National Chairpersons represented the voices of the recipients on the federal level.

Wolcott and Kornbluh (1997) reported NWRO based its headquarters in Washington, DC, and boasted a membership of 250,000, consisting of 540 smaller organizations throughout the country. The members were predominantly African American women who received welfare. Approximately 10% were young White men, who served as staff and volunteers. A small portion of other races also held memberships.

The organization mounted numerous campaigns to gain equitable treatment of welfare recipients (Clawson, 2011). Wolcott and Kornbluh (1997) discussed the strategies as including marching on welfare offices and government buildings in large numbers to demand more resources. They also testified in Congress for more money

(guaranteed minimum income) and joined with poverty lawyers to ensure equitable treatment of welfare recipients when presenting their cases to the state (Clawson, 2011).

NWRO couched their demands within the framework of rights afforded by the US Constitution (Wolcott & Kornbluh, 1997). Thus, they argued the merits of their cases within the document governing the actions of the policy makers and the courts. (Wolcott & Kornbluh, 1997). NWRO modeled their strategy after previous large social movements in this country, such as those to gain full citizenship during Reconstruction, the Women's Suffrage, and the Civil Rights Movement. They based their fights on their rights as consumers (Wolcott & Kornbluh, 1997).

Welfare departments used a handbook specifying the exact type and amounts of consumer goods approved as recipient possessions. When recipients exceeded the limits, they faced penalties, such as having their benefits deducted. The items were restrictive, and the NWRO fought to get greater consumer allowances in the budget and private corporations to allow welfare recipients to get credit (Wolcott & Kornbluh, 1997). Noting credit was a driving force in this country, the organization leaders worked to force corporations to extend welfare recipients credit, the largest battle was with Sears department store (Wolcott & Kornbluh, 1997).

While the organization made significant strides, in 1975 Wolcott and Kornbluh (1997) offered the NWRO officially became defunct. Some factors contributing to their demise was the election of President Nixon who brought a more resistant government,

which was less apt to negotiate with the NWRO. At the same time, increasing public resentment toward the welfare system, particularly spending government funds on nonworking people weakened the negotiating power of the organization. Funding for the organization began to diminish, and internal fights about the correct direction for the organization fractured their structure. Long time staffers expressed fundamental differences with the leadership.

Wolcott and Kornbluh, (1997) reported Wiley tried to change the organization from being a gender based, single issue organization to one that included men and focused on issues of poverty. However, it was too little, too late. In 1970, an NWRO staffer, Rathke, went to Arkansas to establish an NWRO office, but instead founded an Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN) office because, like many others, thought the NWRO was too narrowly focused. This change left the organization politically vulnerable.

The new organization included multiple races and ethnicities and addressed a variety of issues in contrast to the NWRO, which focused solely on issues of welfare mothers (Wolcott & Kornbluh, 1997). This change emerged out of growing ideological differences between the elected leadership of the NWRO, who were predominately Black mothers on welfare and the predominately White male staffers (Wolcott & Kornbluh, 1997). The staffers thought the movement needed to broaden its views if it was to remain politically viable (Wolcott & Kornbluh, 1997). The NWRO was an example of a serious

advocacy movement headed by welfare mothers. This movement provided fertile ground for further research in this area. Perhaps I will unearth any such advocacy movements based, in full or in part, on the strategies employed by the NWRO.

Current Advocacy Research

Literature addressing advocacy by welfare recipients or poor people was limited. I did not identify any salient articles regarding advocacy among African American single mothers who received welfare. However, I did find an author who explored the question of the success of advocacy organizations who support issues related to the poor. There is a school of thought that organizations representing the poor lack the funds, sizeable memberships, and political clout to have any substantial sway with legislators, and make any significant difference in welfare reform policy (Phinney, 2016). However, Phinney found since PRWORA devolved authority to state and local jurisdictions, advocacy groups gained greater access and influence with some state and local legislators regarding welfare policies. These findings merit further research, but they offer possibilities for advocacy by recipients. It is necessary to analyze literature to gain insight related to the investigation of public opinion and advocacy.

Public Opinion

Public opinion has had a significant role in the passage of the welfare reform legislation of 1996. As previously mentioned, the conservative community mounted a

major campaign to elicit public outcry, demanding significant changes to the welfare system. The public began to demand serious changes to the traditional welfare system. Members of congress used public opinions to justify their actions, completely overhauling the welfare system.

Christian (2008) used data from the General Social Surveys 1973-2002 collected by the National Opinion Research Center to examine public opinion on welfare, race, policy, education, and social security. The most notable change in public opinion occurred between 1991 and 1996 when a dramatic shift occurred away from supporting funding for welfare (O'Connor, 2001). This shift coincided with President Clinton's antiwelfare campaign and the republicans' major campaign to sway voter opinion against welfare funding (O'Connor, 2001). Thus, public opinion was useful in shaping public policy, even as a tool of the conservative politicians who guided community opinions to speak out for welfare reform. (O'Connor, 2001).

Citizen Participation

In the 1990s, the focus of poverty research changed from one in which the experts were the only ones who could provide the scientific solutions to the challenges of poverty (Ravensbergen & VanderPlaat, 2009). Participatory strategies began to develop because of changing perceptions regarding those receiving services. Experts who previously viewed recipients as dependents, changed and began to view them as capable human beings who deserved to have input on issues and policies influencing their lives

(Ravensbergen & VanderPlaat, 2009). The Black feminist movement and others emphasized to need to include the voices of marginalized populations, which assisted in changing people's views regarding causation (Ravensbergen & VanderPlaat, 2009).

Ravensbergen and VanderPlaat (2009) revealed how the inclusion of those served in the decision making was especially visible in healthcare. Patients began to participate in decisions involving their health rather than expecting others to make determinations for them. International development was another area in which the shift to include recipients in the decision making was becoming more prevalent. However, welfare reform and implementation in the United States was limited, especially involving African American single mothers who recently received TANF.

Challenges to Citizen Participation

According to Ravensberg and VanderPlatt (2009), significant challenges occurred to involve impoverished people in participating in advocacy research. Referring to people as poor, individually or as part of a group, often caused people to refrain from getting involved as they did not want to share that identity. In addition, with limited funding and resources available to train needy individuals to know when and how to advocate for themselves left some recipients unaware of how to effectively make their voices heard. Another possible barrier was recipients who remained fearful of confronting those who control the welfare programs, fearing retribution

Example of Citizen Participation by the Poor

Despite these articulated barriers, value existed in including recipients in the decision making process regarding policies affecting the poor. In their article researching barriers to citizen participation, Ravensbergen and VanderPlaat (2009) presented a project in Canada, in which poor people participated in learning circles in communities and selected cities. Within these learning circles, participants shared common goals and interests. They expressed their concerns to each other and learned how to analyze issues and develop strategies to present their concerns to leaders in their communities with the goal of effecting desired changes.

Ravensbergen and VanderPlaat (2009) reported participants in the learning circles developed methods to deliver the desired information to policy makers. Circle member representatives attended a national conference where participants refined strategies and lobbied elected officials. Additionally, participants sent the recommendations to various organizations to encourage them to apply pressure to the policy makers and asked them to support the positions presented by the learning circles. The multiple pronged approaches increased the chances of successful campaigns by the poor and increased the chances of successful campaigns. While occurring in Canada, it served as an example that structure guided advocacy among those receiving services can be successful.

Potential for Increased Citizen Participation by Poor

While the Cain and Frothingham (2016) study focused on TANF recipients, it also addresses those who left TANF and joined the workforce. Significant numbers of

those who were working and no longer receiving TANF found employment in low wage jobs, which placed them among the working poor. Living at this level often imposed barriers to the families achieving economic security. Cain and Frothingham on behalf of the Center for American Progress highlighted some key economic barriers faced by Black and Hispanic families, which limited their opportunities to achieve economic security. The researchers identified specific policies that could help to alleviate some of the hardships. However, some conservative obstructionists in the US Congress blocked votes, defunded programs, and offered inadequate alternative policies.

Cain and Frothingham (2016) used data from a four state (Colorado, Nevada, Virginia, and Florida) survey by Latino Decisions, in which Black and Hispanic women registered voters responded to what were the most challenging issues they faced. An overwhelming percentage (90%) of respondents identified the economic wellbeing of working families as a priority. Paid family and medical leave and paid sick leave were the high-ranking issues. While many working women did not have access to either, some conservatives in Congress offered alternatives, such as pregnancy 401ks or compensatory time, which were inadequate, particularly for low wage earners.

Affordable child care for infants and toddlers was another barrier for many working women (Powers et al., 2013). Cain and Frothingham (2016) documented how the cost of childcare in a center exceeded half the median income for Black families with children in 2015. Yet conservative politicians attempted to cut funding for child care. The

researchers highlighted other areas of concern, such as lack of pay equity for women, low minimum wage, and overtime restrictions, which conservative leaders also attempted to block. Traditionalist endeavored to obstruct many policies that could help Black and Hispanic women. However, Black women are increasing their participation in the political process and can express their views regarding the legislators who promote policies negatively affecting the women's lives by voting.

Lake et al. (2013) found women of color are increasing their voting bloc in the United States by focusing on issues of economic security. Since 2000, the percentage of eligible women of color increased. According to the U.S. Census (2013), Black, Asian, and Hispanic populations increased their shares of the eligible electorate and experience in the voting population between 1996 and 2012. However, Non-Hispanic Whites experienced a drop in their share of the eligible electorate from 82.5 % to 71.1%, and their share of the voting population declined from 82.5 % to 73.7 % for the same period. Lake et al. (2013) theorized President Obama won elections in 2008 and 2012 due to the support of new voters, particularly, African American, Latinos, unmarried women, and young people. Black women voted by approximately 9 % points higher than Black men, which was approximately 6 %points greater than the other races. Voters expressed concerns regarding issues such as gender, government, and social responsibility (Lake et al., 2013). As the voting bloc grows, an increasing opportunity for these women to alter

their conditions is possible by electing congressional representation to operate in their best interests and their families (Cain & Frothingham, 2016).

Summary

The 1996 enactment of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) fundamentally altered US welfare system (Fording et al., 2013; Loprest & Nichols, 2011). It changed from being an entitlement program to one stressing work requirements, sanctions, and time limits. Patterson (2012) reported PRWORA and the reauthorized DRA in 2006, administered by the federal government, required state and local governments to adhere to more stringent guidelines regarding timeframes and work-related definitions (Patterson, 2012). Many of the changes caused hardships for impoverished families.

The dearth of literature presenting the experiences of welfare recipients engaged in advocacy or their views on advocacy and influencing legislators regarding welfare reform demonstrated the need for more research. It is important to include the voices of the poor in the creation and implementation of policies affecting their lives. I intended to gain an understanding of advocacy views among TANF recipients, who are African American single mothers, to see if it is occurring, but not reported in academia. I also sought to find if the study population was engaging in advocacy efforts. In either case, using the results, would provide the groundwork for future research. I will delineate my methodology, including data collection and analysis procedures in the following chapter.

Chapter 3: Research Method

A review of the literature revealed an absence of the voices of African American single mothers who receive welfare, although this population has experienced significant challenges since the passage of PRWORA. Black feminist and empowerment theories provide the lenses through which I studied the effects that PRWORA has had on the lives of a group of TANF recipients. The purpose of my study was to investigate how these women think about advocacy and influencing local legislators in the implementation of welfare reform policies and programs.

Research Questions

The central question of this study was as follows:

RQ1: How do African American single mothers, who receive TANF, understand advocacy and influencing legislators regarding welfare reform implementation?

Qualitative Research

To help understand the central phenomenon in multiple case studies, Stake (2013) presented the concept of the quintain, defined as encompassing the entire phenomenon and associated theories, as well as any other factors that contribute to the researcher gaining an in depth understanding of the phenomenon. The quintain is what bounds the individual cases within a multiple case study. I examined and interpreted each selected case. Following the examination, I conducted within and cross-case analysis to develop

an understanding of the quintain (Stake, 2013). The following paragraphs articulate the quintain.

The quintain for this study had multiple layers. Highsmith (2016) explained how enactment of the 1996 PRWORA changed the welfare system from being an entitlement program to one that required recipients to work, regardless of recipients' barriers to employment. A central tenet of the law, as well as subsequent reauthorizations of the law, restricted families to lifetime maximums of 60 months to receive welfare assistance and, in some states, even less time. As a result, many families have experienced significant hardships.

Many voices heard throughout the literature discussed the changing welfare system. However, a notable absence from this dialogue in the scholarly literature are the views and voices of the welfare recipients. Women governed by this law have experienced significant changes in the quality of their lives. However, I was unable to find literature including their voices in the decision making regarding this policy. Therefore, I made space for the voices of these women to be heard regarding advocacy and influencing legislators regarding welfare reform.

The quintain for this study included an examination of how the PRWORA and subsequent modification affected the lives of the women and their families. In addition, I queried how the women made sense of their lives, and how they decided whether to

advocate for better outcomes from the associated implementation of the law. Using Black feminist and empowerment theories, I analyzed their views and responses.

Research Tradition: Multiple Case Studies

To accomplish the goal of answering my research question, I used a multiple case study design. According to Yin (2014), multiple case studies are useful when studying a group of individual cases involving a common phenomenon. This methodology allows a researcher to compare and contrast multiple cases using a conceptual framework (Stake, 2006; Yin, 2014). I intended to study African American single mothers who received TANF to explore their perceptions and experiences in advocating regarding the implementation of welfare reform.

The multiple case study design afforded me the opportunity to explore those who participated in advocating to improve their family outcomes to gain a deeper understanding of the factors leading to their experiences. Case study methodology allows the participants to provide the data in their words (Yin, 2014). By using this methodology, I was also able to observe the participants, documents, artifacts, and other tools to enrich the data (Stake, 2006; Yin, 2014).

Role of the Researcher

As the primary tool in this study, I was solely responsible for ensuring the integrity of the study (Yin, 2014). Unique skills are necessary for conducting a successful multiple case study. Yin (2014) articulated responsibilities of the researcher in case

studies. Specifically, I had to develop clear substantive questions and actively listen, so I could interpret the answers fairly and follow up with subsequent questions to solicit greater detail from participants (Yin, 2014).

Yin (2014) stated that as the researcher, I must have a thorough understanding of the topics in the case study, so I can explore the issues from various approaches. It is also imperative for the researcher to avoid biases by demonstrating sensitivity to evidence, even if it is contrary to my beliefs. Throughout the entire process, I maintained the highest standards of ethics (Yin, 2014).

Researcher Bias

All participants were unknown to me, and I had no professional or personal relationships with any of them. My intent was to engage participants as coresearchers in this process. Therefore, without power differentials, I managed other biases.

My interest in this topic of research evolved from my experience as a former welfare recipient and from my work with many welfare recipients. The value of my experiences in the research process was becoming knowledgeable about the subject prior to conducting the study. In fact, were it not for my experiences with this subject, I possibly would not have pursued this line of research.

Having noted my experience as valuable to this study, I recognized the need to take great care to manage any biases. I was a welfare recipient many years before the enactment of PRWORA and spent a significant portion of my career and volunteer

experience assisting welfare recipients in improving the quality of their lives. In addition, my experience teaching in urban schools, serving many students from homes with single mothers on TANF, causes me to have a practical sensitivity to these families.

To address some of these possible challenges, I took steps to mitigate as much bias as possible. I practiced my interviewing techniques by interviewing colleagues to manage my body language and avoid any actions that may signal approval or disapproval of participant statements. My committee members also reviewed my questions to confirm objectivity.

Another level of accountability for my managing any bias was my audio recording of each interview. When analyzing the data, I identified and recorded any instances of bias after each interview. I developed an alternate plan to eliminate the occurrences in subsequent interviews and remained vigilant to avoid tainting my research.

Methodology

Participation Selection Logic

Participant's ability to contribute unique perspectives on the quintain determined whether I included them in the sample population (Stake, 2006). I conducted a purposeful sampling to identify potential participants who met the criteria (Stake, 2006; Yin, 2014). To be eligible to participate in the study candidates self-identified as African American and single mothers who had at least one child residing with them. Women 21 to 50 years

old were eligible to participate. The age range was purposeful. Teen mothers who receive TANF have a different set of guidelines, outside of the purview of this study. Thus, the youngest age for eligibility was 21 years old with the expectation they completed high school and had sought employment opportunities. The maximum age of 50 years old was to make it possible to hear the views of someone with a long history with welfare, and life before PRWORA.

Once I contacted potential participants, I had a brief discussion with them either via phone or in person to further explain the research and ask them preliminary questions. I asked those who met the criteria and agreed to participate to sign a consent form and provide demographic information.

Participant Identification and Recruitment

My recruitment plan was deliberate. I asked at public libraries if I could place my flyers in their locations and I passed the flyers out in areas near grocery stores, laundromats, and public health clinics. I utilized social media to post flyers to recruit participants. In addition to distributing flyers in public places and online, I also employed snowball sampling to locate potential participants. As I interacted with potential participants, I asked them to give my flyers to others whom they thought might meet the eligibility criteria and have some expertise regarding the subject of this study (Yin, 2014). This method of sampling yields double benefits. Participants who had the desired experiences are usually in communication with others who have similar backgrounds

(Ulin, Robinson, & Tolley, 2005). Additionally, prospective participants recommended by informants were more likely to trust me and share their stories (Ulin et al., 2005). The combination of sampling methods helped me recruit participants.

When conducting a multiple case study sampling logic and saturation are not applicable. Rather, replication logic of the theme and process allows the researcher to make comparisons across cases to identify common themes (Yin, 2014). Interviewing four participants allows the researcher to treat each participant as a single case and compare them with the others to identify any replicated patterns (Yin, 2014).

Instrumentation

I was the primary instrument and the sole researcher to collect data (Yin, 2014). I employed such research strategies as participant and environment observations (London, 2015; Stake, 2016), demographic surveys, interviews, and document reviews. The combination of the tools and strategies were to elicit answers to essential questions.

After completing the necessary documents, informed consent, demographic questionnaire, and agreement to record the interactions. I started the interview using the semi structured interview guide (Appendix B). The demographic information included items such as age, race, location, family composition, education, and TANF involvement. Respondents selected between face-to-face interviews or utilizing an electronic method, such as Skype or GoToMeeting.

After gaining consent to record the data, I used a digital tape recorder and a pen that also records information such as Echo Smart Pen (LiveScribe) as a secondary recording device (Bryant, 2013). The pen records the dialogue while also allowing the user to write manual notes. I used the pen to write field notes and complete an observation sheet. Having both recording devices increased the reliability of the data, as I was able to compare both recordings.

I will ask if they have any documents to share. If they do, I will photograph the items and add them to my study (Ulin et al., 2005). Available documents or artifacts were data sources, which added richer context to the study.

The combination of research strategies and tools armed me with a strong, well planned method of gathering rich data. I took great care in planning to ensure reliability and validity of the data. I employed additional steps to protect the integrity of the study, which I explain in greater detail later in this chapter.

Researcher Developed Instruments

The interview was necessary to guide the study and ensure consistency across the interviews of all cases (Stake, 2016; Yin, 2014). The protocol included questions to ascertain the participant's experiences with TANF and their views about advocating and influencing legislators regarding welfare reform. I also designed the questions to investigate any involvement the women may have had in advocacy regarding any aspect

of living on TANF. By using semi structured, focused, open ended questions, I could engage the participants to share their subjective experiences regarding welfare reform.

Per Yin (2014), I developed Level 1 and Level 2 questions to help organize the data as I collected it throughout the interviewing process. I color coded each of the Level 2 and accompanying Level 1 series of questions. During the interview, I noted all responses by color codes in my field notes, so I had the beginnings of a coding framework to evaluate the data. I used this technique to remain focused on the research as opposed to veering off on tangents. Yin (2014) cautions researchers to avoid this pitfall. I included my level 2 questions, as well as potential follow-up questions in the interview protocol.

During the analysis of cross-cases, I anticipated the emergence of Levels 3 – 5. For Level 3, I sought to identify patterns across cases and consider the data analysis level evaluation of the patterns that emerged in the context of previous scholarly work, theories, or other foundational data as Level 4 content. I posed Level 5 questions to address the research findings considered in totality, generating conclusions and recommendations to affect the policy (Yin, 2014). Pre-interview coding, color coding, and the structure of the questions with probes enhanced the data collection and analysis.

The basis for instrument development centered on three primary sources of information, two theories, and a study regarding civic and political involvement by low income participants in means tested programs. The first theory, Black feminist theory

provided a framework to allow African American women to articulate their life experiences from their standpoint (Collins, 2000). The interview questions allowed the women to articulate their situations from their perspectives. Using the answers to help me, I established a foundation, and follow-up with additional questions to assist me in understanding how these life experiences influenced their ability or willingness to advocate for systemic changes.

Hence, empowerment theory acted as a guide to developing questions exploring advocacy. Perkins and Zimmerman (1995) purported empowerment theory is both a process and an outcome in which individuals join with other organizations within communities to develop ways of exercising control over circumstances, resources, and systems for their good. The definition guided the formation of questions in this instrument exploring the women's thoughts about advocacy or influencing legislators regarding welfare reform.

Bruch, Ferree, and Soss (2010) explored of empowerment among a similar population of women and analyzed the experiences participants had in three means tested social welfare programs. The goal of the study was to determine whether the structure of the program affected the decisions by participants to engage in civic and political activities. Authors considered three schools of thought about how to engage low income citizens. Specifically, democratic engagement of the participants in the process (Headstart), a paternalistic structure in which participants received dictates and incurred

punishments for not following the rules (TANF), and a combination of the two (public housing).

Bruch et al. (2010) analyzed the three types of programs and analyzed TANF programs from different states to compare results between stringent paternalistic programs and those with flexibility. After controlling for selection bias by taking direct measures to mitigate factors distinguishing TANF recipients from those of other public assistance programs, (substance abuse, domestic violence involvement, material hardship, criminal convictions, etc.) researchers discovered interesting effects. Programs, which are paternalistic, depressed civic and political involvement. Furthermore, public housing programs had a null effect on civic and political involvement, while Head Start had a positive effect on civic and political involvement. Head Start engaged parents to serve on councils, attend meetings, and assist in the management of the programs, which often served as training grounds for advocacy efforts. Public housing programs offered tenants the opportunity to attend resident meetings, which provided guidance in civic and political engagement. However, TANF focused more on getting people to work with strict guidelines and consequences and not much focus on civic and political activities.

Bruch et al. (2010) suggested the need for further research to understand how participant experiences with government authority affected their involvement in civic and political activities. Future researchers should consider the ages of the participants, as the average age of the participants was 30 years old. The authors questioned whether the

results would be different if participants were older and had more life experiences with the programs or with multiple types of programs. Furthermore, Bruch et al. suggested the need for additional research to understand whether depressed civic and political engagement, resulted from paternalistic programs, TANF for example. My research used the voices of women who were recent TANF recipients.

Procedures for Data Collection

In this study, I used a personally constructed interview protocol as a guide for conducting interviews. Theoretical concepts supported the development of the questions, which grew out of my experiences with the study population and from the literature review. I conducted 1 – 1 ½ hour individual interviews with recruited African American single mothers who met the selection criteria to generate the data.

Throughout the interview, I conducted checks to be sure I was recording and understanding the participant's ideas as they intended. At the conclusion of the interview, I checked with the participants to be sure they were comfortable with the information they shared and made any changes they request. When the respondents and I agreed, they answered all of the questions and I accurately recorded their responses, I conducted a short debriefing. During this time, I reiterated the purpose of the study, the value of the participant's contribution, and how the information contributes to the study. I requested permission to contact them later, if needed, for clarification or follow-up. I also offered the participants my phone number and email address, so they may contact me if they have

any further questions. Once the participants had no further questions, I offered them a resource list and my expressed appreciation.

Data Analysis

Before conducting any interviews, I established a preliminary framework for analyzing the data. Using the framework as a basic plan for guiding the interviews, I will develop a plan to ensure sufficient questions to develop the quintain research (Stake, 2006; Yin 2014). However, Stake (2013) cautioned researchers to remain flexible and make room to include new learning in the study.

Following each interview, I used manual coding to dissect and organize the data. I identified any assertions made addressing specific concerns in the quintain and categorized them for eventual comparison with other cases in this study (Stake, 2006). After reading the entire transcripts through multiple times, I began to identify significant data and place it into specific categories (Yin, 2014). Shortly after completing the interview, I categorized the collected data, to make the field notes and interview nuances easier to recall (Ulin et al., 2005).

Next, I explored the relationship between the cases. After conducting a thorough analysis of the data for each case, I implemented a cross-case synthesis and created an array to analyze the data, identified cases sharing similar profiles, and considered them instances of replication (Yin, 2014). My analysis of such an array also revealed whether discrepant cases appeared and generated additional valuable information (Yin, 2014).

Conducting these multiple levels of analysis yielded a multiple case study to contribute significant information to the scholarly literature. I took great care to ensure the work was of the highest quality.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Credibility

To present a high-quality study, I attended to matters of credibility and reliability. I employed a combination of strategies, such as triangulation, member checking, peer review, and rich descriptions to ensure credibility (Stake, 2006; Yin 2014). Using the Yin (2014) approach, I:

1. Analyzed any documents presented by interviewees or that I could collect that further explained the participant's views.

2. Used member checking, consulting with the participant to assure I captured their thoughts accurately.

3. Consulted with my dissertation committee members as they reviewed my analysis of the data and offered alternative interpretations on the data, which I documented in my data analysis.

4. Supported the narrative findings with rich descriptions, including actual quotes from participants to demonstrate the accuracy of data.

Transferability

As a qualitative study, with a specific target group of low income African American women who resided in specific areas of the targeted region, limited opportunities for transferability to other populations. The questions collected information about the participants' individual experiences, which, varied from person to person. However, patterns of similar responses appeared within groups of urban African American women on TANF. As such, these patterns may be helpful in their search for equality. However, generalizing beyond this population is improbable.

Dependability

Miles and Huberman (1994) combined their discussion of reliability, dependability, and audibility. Grouping these measures of trustworthiness provided consistency to the process over the life of the study. It also addressed the ideas regarding grounding the study in theory and ensuring the questions, methods, and interpretations of data connected in a reasonable manner (Yin, 2014). The primary strategy I utilized to ensure reliability and dependability was member checking and an iterative process to assure I presented the data and my interpretation without bias, representative of the information the participants wanted to relay. I also offered a robust discussion to demonstrate how I grounded my data analysis in both Black feminist and empowerment theories. Adding to these strategies, detailed field notes and my inclusion of research thoughts and explanations of bias supports the dependability of the study.

Confirmability

The need for confirmability relates to the integrity of the research. Stake (2013) and Miles and Huberman (1994) explained every person brings their biases to the research. Managing biases assures they do not taint the data and research (Stake, 2006; Yin, 2014). As the researcher, I acknowledged my biases and identified them throughout this study, while also working to ensure the findings reflected the views of the participants. Capturing my thoughts in field notes and memos during data analysis helped me to remain vigilant about honoring the words of the participants (Vagle, 2014). Readers of this study are able to see I included direct quotes to assure the thoughts belonged to the participants. These steps demonstrate accountability, which addresses the concept of confirmability (Vagle, 2014).

Ethical Procedures

To ensure high ethical standards, I completed multiple steps to prepare. I completed and received certification in training offered by the National Institutes of Health (NIH), which educates researchers on best practices to ensure the protection of human subjects (Appendix D). I planned how to adhere to the guidelines within the Code of Ethics presented by the National Organization for Human Services (2015). These guidelines provide instruction on best practices to ensure research participants receive respectful, culturally appropriate treatment.

Additionally, I monitored my research ensuring I worked within the prescribed guidelines as approved by Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB),

including the requirement not to perform research until I received the board's approval. IRB evaluates research plans to ensure the protection of all human participants (Yin, 2014).

Research Ethics

In this study, I took care to ensure confidentiality of all information provided by the participants including their identity. I did not anticipate any power differentials, as I did not have any management, supervisory, or leadership roles in the lives of the participants. Sutton, Erlen, Glad, and Siminoff (2003), however, presented excerpts from the Belmont Report in which racial minorities, the economically disadvantaged, and the very ill were especially vulnerable. The participants in this study have the potential to fall into at least, two categories classified as vulnerable, racial minority and economically disadvantaged (Sutton et al., 2003).

I assured the recruitment flyers were succinct and clearly articulated the recruitment and study information. Holding a preliminary phone or face-to-face conversations with prospective participants, I explained the study, their participation, and the usage of the information they shared. I conducted fact checks in the conversation to ensure the potential participant understood the information. Additionally, I reviewed the consent form with each participant and stressed their ability to discontinue their

participation at any time. To neutralize possible power differentials, I viewed and approached them as experts on the discussion topics (Yin, 2014).

I did not offer any incentives or rewards to avoid influencing participation in the study. To ensure I was protecting participants and treating them ethically, I adhered to all the above guidelines. Such considerations informed my developing the criteria for inclusion in this study, which I detail below.

Beneficence, Justice, and Respect for Subjects

The NIH (2014) and the IRB are specific regarding the ethical treatment of research subjects. Primarily, they stress three areas, beneficence, justice, and respect for research subjects. Beneficence means securing the maximum benefit of the research while causing no harm to participants. Justice refers to the legal protections afforded to every research subject to be safe and whole during and after participating in the study. Respect for subjects requires the researcher to treat all participants with dignity and considerate treatment, honoring their position as coresearchers (NIH, 2014).

I constructed a research protocol, which respectfully included the participants as research partners. The open ended questions supported them expressing their views as they choose, without undue pressure to respond. I recruited a purposeful sample of participants via flyers and referrals from colleagues who work with low income, African American single mothers in the target area. I provided my contact information on all recruitment materials so potential participants could get in touch with me to have a

confidential conversation regarding their possible involvement. To further protect their identity as a participant in the study, I assigned aliases, which are the only identifier through the entire process. The exception will be their signature on the consent form. Due to the sensitive nature of the questions, I offered an information sheet directing the participants to social services if they express a desire for such information. Additionally, I provided the participants with a copy of the letter of informed consent, written in clear terms, which we reviewed together before beginning the interview. I developed the form, explicitly explaining the nature of the study, their roll, and their rights to discontinue participation at any time during the process, my contact information, along with Walden University's IRB contact.

Using an EcoSmart pen, I recorded the interviews. An EcoSmart pen records audio while allowing me to write notes. In using these electronics, I ensured I captured the views of the participants, verbatim, which protects them from misrepresentation. Additionally, I member checked with the participants to verify my record of their interviews and ensure I captured their thoughts as they intended (White, Oelke, &Friesen, 2012). Finally, I consulted with my committee and received feedback regarding any biases they believed negatively affected my collection and analysis processes.

Post-interview Protections

I will continue to protect the participants after the interview. Per IRB and Walden University requirements, I secured all study related materials in a locked file for five

years post-study. I informed the respondents that I would be the only person who uses the cabinet and computer. I made them aware of my requirement to make the information available upon request from the IRB or my committee members. At the end of five years, I will place ads in local newspapers that I intend to destroy the data and barring any objections; I will shred the written data and erase the electronic devices.

Summary

In this chapter, I explained the research design and the rationale for selecting multiple case studies as the research tradition. I also presented a detailed account of the methodology including participant selection logic, criterion, and recruitment procedures. An explanation of the researcher developed instrument preceded details of procedures for participation and data collection. I also documented my plan for analyzing the data and presented strategies I employed to ensure the trustworthiness of this study. The chapter concluded with a discussion of ethical procedures my role as the researcher, including how I avoided researcher bias. In Chapters 4 and 5, I will present the findings and conclusions respectively.

Chapter 4: Findings

My purpose in this multiple case study was to explore how single African American women recipients of TANF think about advocacy and influencing local legislators in the implementation of welfare reform policies and programs. I collected data by conducting individual face-to-face interviews with four women who receive or received TANF to understand the essence of their TANF experiences, advocacy involvement, and perceptions of their ability to advocate regarding TANF. I developed an open-ended interview protocol to address the main research question: How do African American single mothers, who receive TANF, understand advocacy and influencing legislators regarding welfare reform implementation?

In this chapter, I present the results of this multiple case study. I used Black feminist theory and empowerment theory as the conceptual framework for this research. Throughout this chapter, I discuss the setting, participant demographics, and data analysis, and I conclude by presenting my findings. I did not conduct a pilot study, and the results reflect the data collection and interpretation stages of the study. In analyzing the data, I discovered one discrepant case, which I detail later in the chapter.

Setting

I conducted interviews in public libraries. Once participants agreed to join me in this research, we determined the library location that was most convenient for them. I reserved private study rooms in which there were a table and two chairs. One library the

room was semi-soundproof and the others were completely sound proof. All rooms locked from the inside. These settings provided security and protection of the participants' confidentiality. There were no apparent personal or organizational conditions influencing participants or their experiences at time of study nor where there any interferences during the interpretation of the study results.

Demographics

All four participants who volunteered to participate in this study met the study criteria. I initially stated participants had to be aged 21 to 50 years and their TANF experience should have begun no later than 2014. I experienced an unusual circumstance when I had to change the age requirement based on Walden University's IRB direction to include anyone from 18 years old. Therefore, the youngest participant was 18 years old and began her TANF experience in 2016, which she continues to receive. The oldest participant was 51 years old and no longer collects benefits. Both contributed valuable information to the study. Three participants self-identified as Black and one as African American. All stated they were single mothers who have, at least, one child living with them who is younger than 18 years and received TANF benefits. One is a current recipient, one recently left the system, and two left approximately 2 years ago. None of the women received generational public assistance. All had high school diplomas and some form of postsecondary education. Two have one or more technical certifications, one had some college education, and one holds a bachelor of science, and she is currently

completing a master's degree. Two of the women work full time, one is self-employed part time, and one is an unemployed student (see Figure 1).

Participant Profiles

The following are participant profiles. All are identified with pseudonyms:

- Nyla is an 18-year-old current TANF recipient. She has one infant child and lives with her grandmother where she pays no rent or utilities. As the daughter of employed, college-educated parents, she had no experience with the welfare system prior to having her baby. She is a high school graduate and diligently pursues the training offered through the TANF program. She has the vision of owning a small business and has devised a 2-year plan to navigate through TANF programs and community college to achieve her goals.
- Sandra, a 35-year-old mother of two small children, recently left the TANF rolls and joined the workforce. After returning to TANF four times in 4 years, and is now working in a field where she received certification approximately 10 years ago. Sandra is also a high school graduate. Although her family had received government housing assistance, she is the first to receive cash assistance from the welfare programs.
- Kimberly, age 37 years, is a former TANF recipient who has sustained employment for more than 6 years. Four of her six children live with her. She was

unfamiliar with the cash portion of the public assistance program until she needed help.

- Kalilah, 51 years old, has the experience of having been a recipient of both the pre-reform welfare system, AFDC, and the postreform program, TANF. Her 15-year-old child and 17-year-old child live with her, whereas her older two children live independently. She is caring for an older relative and so is unable to work full-time. Kalilah has a part time, home based business.

Data Collection

I found securing participants for this study challenging. For several weeks, I disseminated the IRB approved flyer widely and talked with many people, yet few people agreed to participate. I placed flyers in public libraries and gave them to people on the street, at bus stops, and at grocery stores. IRB policy prohibited me from disseminating flyers at locations where people were waiting outside of government assistance agencies. Using social media, I shared my flyer on my general Facebook page. I belong to several Facebook groups, where I also posted my recruitment information. One page has more than 7,000 members in the geographic area that was the focus of the study. In addition, I contacted many of my Facebook friends and volunteers who interact with women who could meet the qualifications for participation in my study. I also shared the flyer on LinkedIn.

Finally, after approximately 3 weeks, I was successful. The first participant volunteered from my conversation with her on a city bus. The second responded to my flyer on Facebook. Acquaintances referred the other two women by sharing my flyers with them. There were no others who expressed interest.

The women contacted me on my cell phone, per instructions on the flyer. Once we conducted a preliminary screening, I emailed them a copy of the consent form in advance of our meeting with instructions for them to carefully review and contact me if they had any questions or concerns. None contacted me in advance with any concerns. I also encouraged them to bring any documents or artifacts they would like to share. No one did. At our meeting, we discussed the consent form and having all questions or concerns satisfied, they signed. I signed two copies, retained one, and gave one to the participant. I also provided each with a resource list. We then proceeded with the interview.

I reminded them that they could stop the interview at any time, for any reason. All participants agreed to participate in the interview and gave consent to audio record our meeting. After I set up the recording devices, digital tape recorder, and an Echosmart pen, we began the interview.

During the first interview, the participant seemed guarded and controlled. I shared with her my history of receiving benefits. I noticed the participant seemed tense, and her responses seemed short and brief. I assured her that there were no right or wrong answers

and guaranteed protection of her identity. She smiled, relaxed, and then comfortably shared her story. Noticing similar wariness in subsequent participants, I shared my public assistance participation as a part of my introduction to the study. Each time, after my self-disclosure, the participants relaxed and spoke openly.

I began the interview using the IRB approved interview protocol and posed the open-ended questions while actively listening to participant responses (Yin, 2014). When appropriate, I asked probing and follow-up questions. Respondents shared stories to explain their views. I recorded field notes on the protocols and in a notebook to manage my thoughts and note follow-up questions. Periodically, I reviewed the responses with the participants to ensure I had correctly captured their thoughts. The review process encouraged respondents to add or correct any statements they chose.

The first interview lasted approximately 40 minutes but each of the others lasted approximately 60 minutes. After reviewing the transcript and my field notes from the first interview, I identified areas within the interview protocol where additional probes were appropriate to elicit deeper meaning. The additional probing lengthened the time of the interviews.

Following each interview, I had the audio recordings transcribed. I hand transcribed the first interview. The process proved to be extremely time consuming, and I subsequently hired a professional transcription company to transcribe the other three. The

HIPPA compliant company signed and sent me a confidentiality agreement. When they completed transcribing the interviews, I moved forward with data analysis.

Data Analysis

Data analysis began with me reading each transcript several times. Initially, I made no notes. However, on subsequent readings I made notes. Eventually, I began manually coding each transcript.

Coding

I used an inductive process to arrive at my themes. After reading the first transcript multiple times I coded the data using open coding in which I read the transcript line by line and assigned codes to chunks of data (Saldana, 2014). Based on questions from the interview protocol, I prepared a list of a priori codes but the codebook grew significantly as I coded the first transcript using an open coding method. Next, I reviewed the transcript again by creating a matrix with color bands to represent the various codes that emerged during the line-by-line coding. Listed codes down the first column and I placed the participant pseudonyms along the top of the matrix in individual columns. I inserted the selected text from the transcript in a box next to the appropriate codes and repeated this same process with each subsequent interview, comparing, and contrasting data from each transcript with the others; modifying codes and text selection, as needed. Upon completion of this process with all the participants, I reviewed the data across all cases to identify any patterns that emerged across cases. I also evaluated the codes, grouping data

into common themes, addressing any differences within the themes. For example, all participants spoke of turning to welfare due to serious financial need and having no other source of income (TANF-desperate no income). They also were adamant about TANF being a temporary situation for them (TANF-temporary). Additionally, they all discussed the desire to utilize the training opportunities provided by TANF to develop skills to get off TANF (TANF-opportunities). These codes combined to become theme, Means to an Independent End. However, through discussions with my committee, I revised a few themes to represent the essence of participant views more accurately.

Codes	Themes
TANF: Pro-welfare reform TANF: Disgusted with cheaters TANF: Disappointed with stagnant participants	Support welfare reform
TANF: Desperate—no income TANF: Temporary TANF: Opportunities	Means to an end
TANF: Not enough money TANF: Caseworker disrespect TANF: Caseworker incompetence TANF: Reaction to caseworker disrespect	Challenges
TANF: Against family values TANF: Hard to seek help	Feeling dispirited
TANF: Determined—get job TANF: Determined—get off	Motivation
TANF: Empowering Prospective advocacy	Empowerment
Black feminist views	Black feminist views

Policy: Limited knowledge of policy change	
Policy: Limited knowledge of legislative actors	Limited awareness of legislative process and actors
Policy: Limited knowledge why policy change	
Policy: Limited knowledge of how to influence policy change	
ADVOCACY: No shame	Not interested in TANF advocacy
ADVOCACY: No not interested	
ADVOCACY: No fear of retaliation	
If ADVOCACY: Who	Prospective advocacy
If ADVOCACY: What	
If ADVOCACY: How	
If ADVOCACY: Diff	

Figure 1. Identification of themes.

Discrepant Cases

Nyla was the only participant who is a current TANF recipient. She is the one who plans to utilize the college opportunities offered by the program. She also does not incur bills (housing, utilities). She lives with older family members who provide housing, utilities, and major support for her and her son. After completing the analysis, this information did not represent content, which would significantly change the emergent codes or themes.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

To present a high-quality study, I took several steps to ensure trustworthiness. I addressed the areas of credibility, confirmability, transferability, and dependability. Attending to these issues strengthened the multiple case study.

To ensure the credibility and confirmability of the cases, I employed a combination of strategies such as member checking, triangulation, peer review, and rich descriptions (Stake, 2013; Yin 2014). Specifically, I employed member checking by contacting participants at three access points. First, at the conclusion of each interview, I reviewed each question and their responses with each participant to ensure I accurately captured their thoughts. Secondly, I emailed a copy of the transcript to each participant, requesting they review it for accuracy, followed by either a phone conversation or email verification. Finally, upon completion of coding and drafting the findings, I emailed a document containing the individual's comments to each participant for approval. All participants approved of the information I present in this study.

Additionally, I triangulated the data by intersecting the literature, collected data, and analyzed the data using two theories. My dissertation committee serves as my peer review team. I also present direct quotes from participants, adding rich, confirming data to this research. These steps enhance the trustworthiness of this study.

As stated in Chapter 3, transferability of this work to other populations is not possible because the qualitative study explored the lived experiences of low income African American women who reside in a specifically targeted region and received TANF. This study is not transferable to other populations because the sample is small and homogenous. It specifically seeks the experiences of these African American single mothers who live in this urban area in the Mid-Atlantic. One may possibly gain

comparable results from African American single mothers who receive TANF and live in urban settings, but it is highly unlikely that one would obtain similar responses from other ethnic groups or races. Patterns of similar responses may emerge from other groups of urban African American women on TANF. Hence, I provided detailed information about the participant demographics, interview settings, conceptual framework, and methodology to guide future studies. However, generalizing beyond this population is not possible.

I established dependability by using a variety of strategies. During interviews, I utilized two audio recording devices to ensure the accuracy of data collection, verified transcription and conducted member checking to ensure accuracy. I generated an audit trail, illuminating the iterative process I employed as I analyzed data and presented a discussion of findings, grounded in theory, ensuring I collected the data from the questions in a consistent and ethical manner (Yin, 2014).

Results

Because of several reviews of each transcript and two cycles of coding, eight major themes, and one subtheme emerged. Figure 1 presents an overview of the outcomes. To establish a context for TANF advocacy decision making, participants first shared their experiences as TANF recipients. Analysis of the data revealed the following themes: Support Welfare Reform, Means to an End, Challenges, Successes, and Motivation. I used Black feminist and empowerment theories as conceptual frameworks.

The final themes addressed a foundational element of legislative advocacy and how it directly effects how these women understand legislative advocacy. The theme, Not Interested in TANF Advocacy, directly addressed the past decisions of these women regarding advocating for TANF. Prospective advocacy provided the participants the opportunity to consider TANF advocacy based on their current knowledge and beliefs. It makes space for them to consider voicing their views, even though they had not in the past. It further addresses the research question by allowing them to share their views about TANF advocacy.

Themes	Summary
Support welfare reform	All four participants support the change in welfare to one of training recipients and supporting them to go to work.
Means to an end	All participants were adamant about learning what they needed to move from TANF to work expeditiously.
Challenges	All participants expressed challenges they faced as a result of systemic issues within the TANF; some which caused personal challenges for them.
Feeling dispirited	All participants reported stories of times when they encountered challenges to their self-esteem.
Motivation	Participants spoke of being motivated while on TANF. Two shared how the support from training programs motivated them to continue to learn to help them develop skills to find employment. Two others discussed how the limitations and restrictions on the program motivated them to leave TANF.
Empowerment	All participants expressed appreciation of the empowering nature of the training programs offered through TANF. However, only two took advantage of the opportunities to propel them forward. The other two women faced challenges to their participation and thus did not reap the level of rewards as the other two.

Black feminist views	Although I did not pose any questions that solicited responses highlighting Black feminism, all participants spoke passionately about TANF related concerns from their perspectives as African American, poor, women.
Limited awareness of legislative process and actors	One participant had moderate knowledge of legislative processes and actors. The others possessed much less knowledge.
Not interested in TANF advocacy	Three of four participants expressed they had no interest in advocating regard TANF. One participant had any experience with TANF advocacy.
Prospective advocacy	While one participant had any experience advocating regarding TANF, when asked to think about engaging in such advocacy, all participants offered ideas about how to advocate and what to advocate for.

Figure 2. Summary of themes.

Support for Welfare Reform

There was unanimous support for welfare reform across all cases. All participants shared the view, which required recipients to pursue work rather than remaining on assistance indefinitely as positive. They expressed thoughts indicating people should not continue to be a tax burden while being unproductive, having multiple children, and making no effort to improve their circumstances. However, one participant who agreed, voiced strong objection to some of the restrictions involved and the punitive implementation of the policy. The participants spoke definitively on this subject. Nyla expressed concern about people having multiple children in order to remain on TANF. She stated:

I think it is good. A lot of people think they keep having babies . . . They think oh, I'm gonna keep having babies; they think you have more babies, it's more money you get. You get like \$1,000 on TANF if you have like four kids, so I do think that, if they look at that; oh this is my job. This is what I'm doing, keep having babies. I think it's good they're requiring it. A lot of people are like, Oh my God, I have to work. I have to find something. I have to do something.”

Sandra explained that the welfare policy changed to include a work requirement because recipients lacked the motivation to improve their lives on the previous program. Her view was:

[The policy changed to welfare-to-work] because a lot of people were using that [public assistance] as a crutch. A lot of people were abusing it . . . Just applying for welfare and staying on it as long as they could just to get a first of the month check. I think that it breaks the monotony of people being lazy basically. It gives you a sense of self-worth and belonging and being a part of a civilization; being just a modern citizen, feeling like you have a place in the world, so I think that's why they did it.

Kimberly expressed her support for welfare reform, raising concerns about people endlessly draining tax dollars. She commented:

I mean, to be honest, I think it's a good program, especially to enforce the training program because I do think it's unfair that taxpayers pay into this program for

individuals to sit at home all day or whatever it is they do or run the streets. I think the training part is really good. I personally think the drug testing is good only because some people aren't using the money to take care of their families; they are mostly using it to take care of themselves. So, to be honest, I think that five years is an adequate amount of time, but for some, it may not be, so it should be certain circumstances that allow them to get an extension for a year or two. I think the program is; I mean it treated me good.

Kalilah supported the reform but has some concerns. She agreed that people should not remain on assistance indefinitely and she felt the generational cycle of welfare living needs to change and that all capable people should work to support themselves rather than living off the taxpayers. Kalilah believed that the training and support to help recipients go to work are valuable, but she is disapproving of the punitive measures. She explained:

I support changing the welfare system to provide all the necessary support: education, training, etc., like the current local college program, but without its strict requirements to participate more open enrollment, but strict goals, objectives, and targets to keep participants moving forward. So basically, I support positive changes in welfare to not encourage and support generational poverty, increasing welfare recipients, teen pregnancy, and single parenthood. The change from AFDC to TANF was the right idea with the wrong motives,

punitive rather than supportive. That said, I believe in a case by case basis, some people would be best helped by sink or swim approach. But you have to hire people who care enough to examine each case and make a thoughtful, informed and compassionate decision how to deal with each individual case.

Means to an End

All the participants emphatically declared that for them TANF was a means to an independent end. They supported the change in welfare from entitlement program to welfare-to-work as demonstrated by their determination to find employment and leave the system. They all shared stories of how they became involved with TANF as a last resort due to serious financial challenges. Three participants expressed ignorance of government financial assistance, initially, while Kalilah expressed an awareness of such a program because she had received welfare many years prior. Sandra stated that she was without work and had an infant the first time she applied for TANF, on the advice of an acquaintance, “When I first had my son, I was out of work for three months without pay or leave, so I had to take care of him, so I filed for TANF. My son’s grandmother told me about TANF”. Kimberly lost her job due to an illness and was ineligible for unemployment compensation. Having four children, she had to recertify her eligibility for food stamps and Medicaid. The caseworker informed her about the TANF program:

You might want to look into receiving TANF.” I said, “What’s that?” So she expressed that it was TANF and that they allot you a certain amount of money based on

the number of kids you have a month, which would be loaded onto the EBT food stamp card, which I already had; and that I could go the ATM and get cash. Kalilah experienced public financial assistance many years prior to receiving TANF. She shared:

Well I made some bad decisions when I was younger, and I got two beautiful babies out of the deal, but the family of their father told me I could get some free money. Prior to meeting him, I did not know that there was a thing such as welfare. This is back with AFDC (pre-welfare reform program, Aid to Families with Dependent Children). More recently, I knew there was such a thing because I had used it with my previous children, my first set of children. I got on TANF because I lost my job.

Her TANF experience began when she lost her job due to downsizing when a new administrator restructured the agency:

When she came in, all the probationary teachers were fired. Many people got their jobs back, but there's a group of about 300 of us who did not... My unemployment had run out... My two sons were 15 and 19. The 19-year-old was cutting up. The 15-year-old was beginning to. At that point, I got on TANF. I knew about it because of my earlier experience ...

Nyla moved in with a relative who told her about TANF because she needed child care, so she could continue her education. She explained, "I'm only doing this because they will pay for daycare. Daycare is very expensive, and I'm trying to do school..."

The participants expressed their determination to use TANF as a way to sustain their families until they could go to work. Sandra explained that she had no plans to remain on TANF:

I looked at it as a temporary situation. I didn't want to get stuck in that box, and it's easy to get stuck in that box because you minimize your livelihood. However, me personally, I wanted to get out of it. I wanted resources to get out of it.

Kimberly shared a similar sentiment:

I set in my mind I was not going to be on this forever. So, I attended the program, to see what I could gain from it and outside of that I was doing my outside searching. Luckily, I went on the outside and was able to find employment.

Kalilah spoke of her determination to use the program for the time she needed. Her statement articulated her intention to make it temporary, "...because I just wanted to get out of that situation where I didn't have money, and I had to be on TANF and move on".

Nyla had a specific goal and time frame in mind for her TANF tenure. She stated:

TANF, I mean, it's helped a lot ... It's not something I want to be on for a long time. Once James (Not his actual name) gets in a school like when he turns three, I'm off this. I can't do it. I'm only doing this because they will pay for daycare. Daycare is very expensive, and I'm trying to do school, and by the time he turns three, that's when I'll just be graduating from school, from hair school, in two years, so I'll be fine. I'll be working and stuff like that.

These participants all made it clear that they viewed TANF as a temporary vehicle. They each had serious circumstances that motivated them to use it. All expressed a clear vision that they were going to use the program to help them prepare for independent futures. Having such clear goals about leaving a situation could influence the likelihood they would be less likely to engage in advocacy activities.

Challenges

While participants support the welfare reform, they did express challenges with TANF. Here participants discuss both challenges they encounter with the system. They also addressed concerns of a personal nature.

System Challenges. Sandra felt that the system was impersonal; that there was no follow-up from social workers especially considering glitches in the system:

No. They just want to make sure you're a local resident, you have all your documentation, and they hit the button, and then you get your first check. It's no follow up with social workers. I've never had a follow up with any social worker o my duration with TANF ever. They do mail re-certification forms to recert, but there's no personal phone call as a reminder for re-certification. So, if you miss your mail, mail is misplaced, or they have a bad address, you're depending on that monthly check, and you don't get it because they say you never re-certified. I think the follow up behind the program and process needs more improvement.

Kimberly's concern was how the system required recipients to participate in their employment searches but the jobs they offered paid wages that were insufficient to raise a family.

I wanted to work, but the jobs they had weren't paying enough for the number of kids I had. My educational background; I don't have a lot. I did finish high school and have some college, but I needed something that paid just a little more.

Kalilah expressed concern regarding systemic challenges she encountered as a TANF recipient. Among her concerns was the length of time required to interface with the office personnel for any service concerns. She commented:

I guess the worst parts of TANF are not that bad, but still, they shouldn't be for a tax-paying program. One is it takes a whole day. If you're out working, trying to find a job, and you have to go into the TANF office, then it takes your whole day. If you have to fix any problem; if you have to apply; if you have to re-apply; different reasons, rarely if ever is it a time where you can just go in and state you have a problem and they have any kind of efficient way. It's almost as if the workers don't care about your time. It's as if you are on TANF and your time doesn't matter. It belongs to us.

Kalilah also expressed frustration about the glitches in the system, some of which cause embarrassment to the recipient:

The application process, any kind of glitch in the system, which happens a lot, where you turned in something they asked you to turn in, and they lost it, they didn't get it for whatever reason. You find out because you go to the grocery store and you're in line, and your card doesn't work. There's nothing on your card when there should be. That's the only way you know.

She was the lone participant who could compare and contrast the pre-reform welfare system (AFDC) and TANF as she received both.

One thing I know is that I don't recall having any glitches on AFDC. It was pretty regular. My check was there. My stamps were there. There may have been a couple of times where I had to go in. It was still the same long time waiting, but I think that is not as ... I don't ever really remember having to go in. I'm sure I did though. Let me just say it like this. There were a couple of times that I had to go in, but they were few and far between, fewer than on TANF. The times that I had to go in, I remember sitting ... That was so long ago. ABC Street, that's where it was. There were a million more workers, and it didn't seem to take as long. You would ask to see your worker, your worker would see you, and you would leave. Now you see anybody, and you will be there all day. They tell you; TANF tells you, you just have to come at 6 o'clock and stand outside the line. Then they cut it off at 3 when the line is still out the door and tell people y'all gotta come back tomorrow.

Nyla shared her frustration about the system as she discussed challenges she faced getting started in required TANF training. She explained that she submitted all of the necessary paperwork in a timely manner, but the workers did not give her necessary information in time for her to begin classes on the first day.

I was given the run around for like two weeks. I was like, what do I need to do? School starts in next week. I've been calling and calling, like where do I go? What do I wear?

It's then like a day before the class the lady called me, and she was like, "Nyla, I'm so sorry. I tried to get in touch with you," and I was like, oh my goodness. I was going crazy trying to figure out all about my classes. I had everything. I got everything in on time and everything. So, she finally called me, and she made a way for me to come because the day she called me was the first day of class, actually. So, I came the next day. That kind of pushed me behind too, taking the class for food handlers, because they already started at first day of everything you have to know for the test. But I could pass too with it. It's just a matter of how determined I really was to take the class and finish it.

Caseworker Disrespect and incompetence

All participants had stories to share about TANF caseworkers disrespecting them. Their complaints include caseworkers speaking rudely and their providing poor customer service. Sandra discussed her frustration with the treatment by some caseworkers. She

presented her views about workers being rude and their withholding training opportunities from her:

Some of the employees are very rude, and they really don't give you a lot of resources to go by to get off of TANF. If you don't ask questions, they won't give you any answers or resources for programs. The majority of the times, the case workers are ..." I'm bothered." It's really offensive sometimes because I know that they do have training programs where they do train TANF recipients to do their job, the job that they're doing so I sometimes; I'm like well you've been in this situation, and you're acting as if you're above the next person.

Kimberly shared her experience with both helpful and disrespectful TANF workers and how demeaning the rude treatment was:

You wouldn't always get a social worker that was willing to help; some looked down on you so when you found that good social worker you said ok they make the process smooth and made everything; answered any questions you had. I know they see hundreds of people a day but sometimes it was kind of like my pride really wasn't in the way of me applying for benefits; another social worker had recommended I do it but the case worker that handled; she was um; she would make sarcastic comments like, "I wish I could get food stamps." I had this puzzled look on my face like, "Why are you saying this to me?" Like everybody who is here is not trying to get a handout. I had my letter of denial from

unemployment. I had worked previously before this. I always had a job. It's just, medically, I was not able to work, and it was like she was just labeling everyone who received benefits as they didn't want to work, or they just wanted a free ride; I mean I was like, I let her talk cause I didn't want to have no words.

Kalilah offered the following response to the question of why TANF recipients do not advocate for themselves. She spoke of retaliation from some caseworkers:

They might not get their food stamps. They might make it hard. Some of the workers, I've seen it... You need to be nice to them. They have lost your papers and some of the workers do not treat people the way they want to be treated. They don't treat people like human beings. They treat people like I got the power. Some of them, you know who the worst ones are...the ones that have been on welfare themselves.

She shared a personal encounter she had:

I just remember this one lady. I was telling her something about my tax dollars, and she said, "Oh no. Not you. You don't have tax dollars." I was like ... She didn't know. She was a worker. I said, "Ma'am everybody has tax dollars that works, and my money went into this system, so this is just my money coming back to me. You're not giving me anything."

Nyla expressed her frustration with the treatment she received from TANF vendor caseworkers. Recipients are assigned to specific vendors who contract with the city to provide workforce development training. Nyla stated:

...no, but at the vendors and stuff. They talk to you like you're anything because you know, you're on TANF and stuff. You gotta turn in work every Friday by a certain time. They give you attitude because you're on the system. They look down on you.... It's just a lot.

She further elaborated:

Those are their vendors and stuff. People that work there. Like she just ... like, oh, you need us. We don't you. You know how people will do when they have high authority, or they have some kind of, you know, place over you, because they all was like that. It doesn't get to me like that, but it's not something I want to keep doing.

Personal Challenges

Participants also shared personal challenges they faced on TANF. The most commonly shared areas of challenges resulted from the low amount of money they received on TANF; which they stated was insufficient to sustain their families. They all told how much of a struggle it was to maintain the basic necessities of life on the limited income. Sandra tearfully explained her frustration with trying to make ends meet:

Well my children at the time when I was on TANF, my children were five years apart, so I had a 5-year-old and a baby, so I had to try to find daycare. It was a whole lot of responsibilities on my shoulders, so I had to try to prioritize my spending because I only got \$498 a month and that's not a lot of money a month with three people that have to take care of toiletries. You're stressed because it's just not enough money to take care of two children, diapers, toiletries, field trips stuff like that so you always try to have another side to make more money, but because my children were at such a young age, I wanted to stay with him as long as I could. However, it gets you in a funk. It will get you stuck. You will get caught up in it. When I was on TANF, I would get more food stamps than I did my first of the month check and that kind of threw me off because I guess they calculated three months to feed, but \$498 to survive off a month trying to pay rent, thank goodness, I still was living in a co-op, so it's according to your income.

Kimberly shared that she would tell the powers that be how insufficient the TANF allotment is if she could address them.

The downfall was the amount of money they was giving just wasn't enough. So if you had a family of five young children, they would give you \$300 a month. Even though you were receiving food stamps and Medicaid benefits, how do you make that stretch? It was like clothes and shoes and entertainment; it was just not

enough. So, I would tell them that the benefit should increase a little, not too much, but just enough. It should increase with the cost of living

Kahlila stated that the money was too little and the requirements for receiving it were too great, so she elected to reject TANF after a while. She said that she could do some sort of work that would exceed the 300 dollars per month TANF allotment:

I knew I was going to start doing some things on my own and I knew I didn't want to be limited by how much money I make, so I told them I'd just get the food stamps and the Medicaid. I don't want the money I don't want the money. The little bit of money they were paying, it wasn't worth the trouble. It wasn't worth the trouble and the limitations of getting 300 something dollars a month when I could make that a week. That's at a minimum. I didn't want to be hindered.

Nyla expressed her frustration with the insufficiency of the TANF monthly allotment. She previously had a part time job, which caused her to have a reduction in her TANF allotment, which continued after she was no longer working. The job continued to report that she was still working there for months after she left. She stated that the full TANF allotment was insufficient and the reduced amount caused even more of a challenge.

I'm still trying to prove to them that I stopped working at the daycare five months ago. That's just too much. My son's Pampers are like \$48.99, and so I've got like two boxes of them. So, there's that, and then I go up there to daycare to pay off the bill. I've gotten wipes, stuff like that. I had some money to the side. Then I get

my phone bill, and then yeah ...It's just, you know, the money with going back to school... I spent \$80 last month get back to school to my CNA class, and so, it's just that. I spent like \$60 on buying breakfast and lunch during the day, two dollars, two dollars, \$2.50, but it adds up. It's just convenient because I get there like 6:30 am.

All the participants had different stories to tell, but all found the amount of money provided for their families to be inadequate. The frustration with the limited amount of money contributed to their expressed determination to leave the system. This was one area of possible advocacy.

Feeling Dispirited

Each of the four participants articulated feelings related to challenges to feeling dispirited while on TANF. Having such feelings can, potentially, cause recipients to feel powerless to advocate. Sandra was very emotional, to the point of tears, as she shared her feelings about the way she felt as a TANF recipient:

It was points were I really didn't ... Well, I'm not going to say that I really didn't feel I deserved more money but you know it takes a lot to ask for help number one. I'm sorry, I'm getting filled up.

When asked how she felt when she received negative treatment from TANF caseworkers she replied:

Lower than I already felt. Having to ask for help from the government you know what I mean? Like I said, it takes a lot, especially when you're independent, and you're used to working and stuff like that. It does something to your confidence. That really, really; I ain't going to say it broke me down, but it humbled me really quickly. It really humbled me, and I had a respect for people who receive it and can still maintain. Sometimes a lot of people that do work, they never been with TANF. They don't know how it feels to be on TANF; they don't know the emotional feelings behind it; physical because you get depressed ... I was at a point where I just didn't want to get up. I just didn't want to get up. I'm just like I'm just going to be on welfare. That was it. Nobody called me. My social workers never called about the kids or stopped by-

She also shared the hurt she felt as a mother on TANF:

That's not something that you want to live off of. You want your kids to see you working every day; happy, not waiting on a check. Or I mean I never... my kids never knew that I was on TANF, and I've been around kids, and their parents and they'd be like, "Mom when the first of the month coming? When are you getting your first of the month check?" That's just so stagnant, and it just puts you in a box when you really feel like oh this is all that I can do or accept.

Kimberly told how she felt worthless as a result of a worker's treatment of her when she applied for TANF.

Once I left from applying, I felt kinda; she made me feel a little worthless but then I thought about it, and I said but this is for my kids so she can view me however she sees fit but I need to take care of my kids.

Kalilah expressed the shame of betraying her cultural values that she felt while on TANF, "... my generation is like ashamed. In my upbringing, it was like a shame. My grandma was like we never asked nobody for nothing. She ain't forgive me for that or for getting pregnant." Nyla shared her being uncomfortable with the treatment she received from some TANF workers or being on TANF. She stated that it did not quite affect her, but she emphatically stated that she does not want to stay on it as it is against her family values.

Like she just ... like, oh, you need us. We don't need you. You know how people will do when they have high authority, or they have some kind of, you know, place over you, because they all weren't like that. It doesn't get to me like that, but it's not something I want to keep doing. I'm not really comfortable with it. It's like I said. It's beneficial. It helps out. That's what I'm appreciative about. Not something that I want to stay on soon as it helps me out. I rather work for what I have to have for my son. Like I said, I wasn't raised on the system, so it's still new to me now, a year later. It's like, oh my god, I have do this by Friday. It's just too much. I rather say I gotta go to work on Friday and say I gotta turn in a time sheet in.

Motivation

Participants discussed how the TANF program helped them to feel motivated to achieve financial independence. Some felt the supportive training program helped them to develop skills to strive for employment. Others expressed the motivating influence their displeasure with the rules and regulations, low income, as well as the program limitations, had on them. Both the positive and negative motivating aspects of TANF provided opportunities for advocacy. Nyla found the program to be motivating due in large part to the vendor assigned to her:

I'm glad that I got the [XYZ] vendor. So, they had a lot to offer, which I took advantage of all of them. A lot of people complain about different vendors and stuff. I hear, oh my god, they don't offer as much as [XYZ] does. So, I'm appreciative of it, and I'm looking to take advantage of the stuff that they brought out to TANF.

Nyla further explained that XYZ offers both incentives and punishments to motivate recipients:

I have to report to XYZ, my vendor, to show them I did something. You have to get to them Friday and be there by like 10:00 in the morning to turn your stuff in. But the deal, they pay you too. They pay you, well, you get a stipend. And they pay you ... They paid me \$75 a week. If I do not, they will sanction me for 90 days, and I have to have documentation stating that I've been doing this [attending

classes] for the past weeks or months... If I do not do that, then I will not get my stipend every week, and I will not be able to get TANF again.

TANF also offers a wide variety of training and educational opportunities through partnerships with local businesses and educational institutions, which have motivated Nyla to develop a specific career goal and a long-range plan to accomplish her goal. She expressed that her goal is to own a beauty salon. Her plan is largely motivated by the courses offered by the program:

That's another thing that's good. I'm going to go to school. But I'm gonna take advantage of it. So, during the summertime, I was looking at some classes at the local state college to get my associate's in business, so I can have something things. I want to own my own business. I want my own shop, so that's starting next summer, while I'm going to start cosmetology school. I start at a local high school continuing education program in August this year. Then summertime comes around, we're going to go on break, and during that summer break, I'll be going into take my classes at the college. I'll do that until the summer after next, and then I'll be finished with that. I'll be finished with the high school in 2019...

Kimberly found the challenges of being a TANF recipient motivating enough for her to find employment. She shared:

Uh-uh, I stayed on it for 8 months, but I didn't like it because like I said it wasn't enough money and I was like, Uh-uh I gotta do better and I don't like being

allotted an allowance, and that's what it felt like, and I was determined...I didn't care if I had to sweep floors, clean up dog poop, whatever, as long as it was paying decent money and had benefits; I was determined. Luckily, I went on the outside and was able to find employment

Much the same as Kimberly, Kalilah also found the small amount of money paid by TANF and the restrictive requirements motivation to leave the program. After a while, Kalilah decided she could pursue other avenues to earn money. She explained:

I don't want the money. The little bit of money they were paying, it wasn't worth the trouble. It wasn't worth the trouble and the limitations of getting 300 something dollars a month when I could make that a week. That's at a minimum. I didn't want to be hindered. I didn't want them cutting my food stamps down and telling me I made too much money for this or made too much for that. I just said nope y'all keep the money.

Sandra, too, used the limitations of TANF as motivation to leave the rolls. Her frustration was the workers did not offer her training resources to improve her skills so she could qualify for work and the low amount of cash assistance would keep her stuck.

TANF is like I say is temporary and they creating it where me as a single African American woman is stagnant because you're not giving me resources. I didn't want to get stuck in that box, and it's easy to get stuck in that box because you minimize your livelihood like you're really, really robbing yourself because you're

only working with a little bit of money. However, me personally, I wanted to get out of it. I wanted resources to get out of it. I put in applications. I walked into places looking for a job because TANF was not my last resort.

Empowerment. Kimberly excitedly shared her thoughts on the empowering nature of the training program offered through TANF:

... once I applied and was approved they sent me for a training program... The program was pretty much like a structured program; you had a time that you were due to arrive and a time that you were let go; which I think it was about four hours... and during that training program they did resume building, showed me how to use a keyboard, they gave you a little software background. They would teach you how to dress; your hygiene; and helped you find jobs and at that time I was unemployed.

Kalilah discussed her positive views about the training program TANF offered. She explained that as a TANF recipient she began in the training programs, which were prerequisites to continuing education opportunities that led to career development as opposed to simply getting a job:

I saw the value in the program. On one of them, I could have gone to law school. I was thinking about that. The one at the local state college, well I could still attend the paralegal because that's through the unemployment services. There was a path that if you could show you had a degree or something, anything at the local state

college was open. I was on that path. I was like okay what do I need to do. First, you gotta take their test and go through their basic programs, and then you talk to your counselor, and your counselor is the one that says, "I think you'd be good for this. I think you'd be good for that. I think you can do that."

TANF had their own little requirements, and you meet those requirements and then you train and you pick something and then when you complete it there was a career path. That's where going to the college would have come in.

Having had a positive outlook on the training program, Kalilah also expressed her regret for losing the opportunity to continue in the training program. She discussed how she felt too restricted on TANF, the money was inadequate, and how her family value was not to take handouts. The combination of reasons propelled her to reject the cash benefits. Her choice to eventually decline the TANF portion of her assistance package led to TANF denying her training. She explained her decision and the subsequent consequences:

I knew I was going to start doing some things on my own and I knew I didn't want to be limited by how much money I make, so I told them I'd just get the food stamps and the Medicaid. I don't want the money. I just said nope y'all keep the money. My generation is like ashamed. In my upbringing, it was like a shame. My grandma was like, 'We never asked nobody for nothing'. There's nothing wrong with me. I know how to generate money. I can do something, and whatever I do

I'm pretty sure it'll be adequate to take care of my needs. I could afford to do that too because I had moved back home.

Once I said I didn't want the money, I had to leave the program. They said, 'Nope, you have to be a TANF recipient to be in this program'. I said, 'But I am receiving these government program benefits'. He said, 'But you have to be getting the money. If you're not getting the money you can't participate in the training programs'. Almost made me want to go back and get the money.

Nyla articulated her views on the empowering nature of the TANF programs. She discussed some of the classes she has taken and how they have developed her skills to provide her with career options:

I think it is good because it helps build against excuses... Like you know how people will be like, I don't know how to do this, or we don't have this, or I can't work there if I don't have any experience, or I have or don't have that. It helps out, like with CPR. CPR helped me get my way into the daycare faster. The green cleaning helped me ... It will help me with CNA, and with doing hair... It's what you can or cannot mix with different stuff, so when you clean certain things, you need to know that. People don't think about that, or they don't know what green cleaning means. I didn't either until I started the class. I thought it was for gardening, to be honest. So, when I got to the class, I was like what is this chemical stuff? What's up with this? So, yeah, I mean I think it's really good. I

also have a job search and readiness certification. It's like saying that I went to a class. I know how to properly do a resume. I know how to properly go to an interview. If I wanted to teach it to somebody I could.

She stated even though she had to pay for some of the classes and had to purchase supplies for the classes, it was well worth it.

It's out your wallet. It's \$55 for the customer service. One is \$36 for the food handling one, and it's \$15 for the green cleaning. I took all those classes. I bought stuff for those classes. I mean, whatever money you have to pay for it is worth it.

Sandra's view of TANF was the government implemented it in a disempowering manner.

She stated:

That's the things that's falling between the cracks as far as the TANF situation too. You have the resources, but you're not allowing people to utilize them, and you're not telling them about it. You're keeping them stagnant, and then you're mad because there's 100-200 people at the office applying for food stamps and TANF. Maybe if you give them the resources, you won't have such a busy day. Maybe they might have the person that you gave the resources to, to be one of your coworkers to help out with the work. I think they should like, with the work program, they could give people the opportunity to start working with the DC government, but I think that I really, really think that they need customer service training like serious customer service training.

Among the four participants, all were motivated to Improve their circumstances motivated all four participants. All found value in the training offered by TANF. However, because they were not privy to the full training experience, two become discouraged.

Another empowering aspect of this research, which surfaced related to my inquiry regarding advocacy. When asked about any history of advocacy related to TANF, three of the four participants voiced their disinterest in advocating about TANF. However, when asked to think about advocating regarding TANF, each participant thought about it for a short time then shared their views on who they would tell and what they would tell them about TANF. Full presentations of both advocacy and prospective advocacy appear below. It appeared my asking and having space, made it easier for them to speak, thereby feeling empowered to use their voices.

Black Feminist Views

A fundamental element of this research was understanding the viewpoint of African American single mothers who received welfare. Black feminist theory provides a framework to understand the marginalization and historic vulnerability of Black women and other disparaged groups in America (Cooper, 2015). Black women to articulate how race, gender, class, and sexuality intersect to affect situations in their lives (Collins, 2000, Cooper, 2015). At no time in any interviews were any questions posed that directly ask the women's views regarding the constructs involved in the theory. However, each of the

participants addressed some variation of the intersection of race gender, class, and sexuality as they responded to questions during the interviews.

Sandra expressed concern that she, an African American woman, did not receive resources that could prepare her for work and allow her to leave TANF. She offered a view on how employees intentionally withheld training to keep her dependent on the government. She stated:

TANF is like I say is temporary and they creating it where me as a single African American woman is stagnant because you're not ... Like I said, it's a lot of people who have been generational TANF recipients, and that's all they know so if you're not giving them the resources on it or anything like that, they don't know how to come out of it. They don't know how to come out of it, and they get stuck.

Kalilah and Kimberly articulated their views about changes in the public assistance system. Kimberly suggested changes in the system resulted from increases in African Americans' enrollment. She felt this moved those in control decided to make policies more stringent. When Kimberly discussed discrimination on the basis of race, gender, and class, she shared her views on these changes offering:

I don't want to seem racist, but Caucasians normally were the ones who initiated; they were the ones who were primarily on welfare, and once African Americans found out about the program and how it works, we all started utilizing it, and we abused it. So when they came up with these new laws it was because of African

Americans; because we would abuse it, and we wouldn't want to work; I mean, not saying that Caucasian race didn't either, but it was more of us applying for it once we saw how easy it was and what came with it you were like, ok. The way society feeds it now it's like all of us African American women and men are having all these multiple children, so we don't have to work and that's not the case for everybody. Some people just need the extra assistance.

Kalilah shared a similar viewpoint. However, she expressed strong views when outlining a chronology of how and why the policy changed. Her argument highlighted her perception of discrimination, as generated from the intersection of race, gender, and class. She discussed the concerted campaign to sway public opinion, to incite the public to demand changes to the system:

During that time when it was the angry white man, they were talking about welfare queens. There was a concerted effort to vilify welfare recipients in the media and as a political benefit. It was the welfare queen example of somebody who is milking the system for millions. I don't even see how that could be done at \$300 a month, but anyway. That story came out, and people were just really angry about welfare. Welfare, welfare; it was all these Black people on welfare

They got everybody good and hot and angry over nonexistent welfare queens and black people on welfare, when white people really take more of the budget ... It takes more of the federal budget to dole out welfare dollars to whites than blacks. ... Once they got

people all riled up, they said the politicians we're going to do something about this. We're going to fix this problem. These people are going to have to work. That's when it changed to TANF.

Okay, so this was a republican tactic. To win the elections or gain people to their side, they use the same tactics that we see in use today. Dividing people up and making one people feel superior, another group inferior, and pitting the two against each other. And to appease this sentiment that they had riled up, they changed it. This is what we're going to do about it.

Nyla expressed concerns about White people in charge being indifferent to her concerns if she were to advocate regarding TANF. She shared:

You gotta go in there with an open mind, and you know, just try to get your point across but not sound too aggressive, and not sound too passive. So just be assertive when you go in there and stuff. It might [make a difference] ... It depends on who I'm talking to. If I'm talking to the Caucasian people, then maybe not. You know I don't get along with those kinds of people. They say, "Yes, I agree, I agree", and then they'll be like, "Next". It just depends on how stern you are, and how much you believe in what you're trying to get across... They won't listen...I mean, some of them might, but it's very rare. Like if they're up there, on that level of some kind of authority, then like I already said, I'm not gonna waste a breath with them, to be honest

Each of the women passionately expressed concerns about their lives on TANF, highlighting the intersection of race, gender, and class.

Limited Awareness of Legislative Process and Actors

The TANF program is the result of a major policy change. As a part of this study, I queried participants to understand what they knew about the formation and enactment of the related policies. Sandra was unsure about the creation of the policy, PROWRA, which includes TANF. When asked about creation, implementation, or possible modification of the bill she responded:

Somebody had to say something. I don't know. I really don't know who did it. I'm assuming the government.... Department of Employment Services? I don't know.... Child and Family Service I think because children they watch what their parents do...[it changed] because a lot of people were using that as a crutch. A lot of people were abusing it; just applying for welfare and staying on it as long as they could just to get a first of the month check. I think that it breaks the monotony of people being lazy basically. It gives you a sense of self-worth and belonging and being a part of a civilization being just a modern citizen, feeling like you have a place in the world, so I think that's why they did it.

I think the rules can be changed by the community. I think that if the community came together as a whole like a long time ago when my mother and them were young... it takes a village so, in order for things to progress, I think that the

community needs to come together and maybe have certain advocates that just brainstorm. Give ideas, throw stuff out, and then maybe invite TANF recipients to give their opinions. Just make it a whole collaboration. Therefore, everybody won't feel like they're being shortchanged or taken advantage of because they feel like they've had a voice in the whole process.

Kimberly replied:

No, I'm not aware of how it was changed. If I'm not mistaken, it was Bill Clinton who revised the welfare plan. I think it became mandatory that everyone who received assistance was required to go to some form of training. They had like a variation of training faculties for people to go to.

She responded to the question of why the policy changed by explaining that Caucasians were originally receiving welfare but when African Americans began using the system, and some abused it, and then the government changed it. She stated:

So, when they came up with these new laws it was because of African Americans because we would abuse it and we wouldn't want to work; I mean, not saying that Caucasian race didn't either, but it was more of us applying for it once we saw how easy it was and what came with it you were like, ok. The way society feeds it now it's like all of us African American women and men are having all these multiple children, so we don't have to work and that's not the case for everybody.

In response to the question of how can the policy be changed she said, "I'm not sure because I never wanted to be in the program.

Kalilah's position was the policy changed when Republicans publicized a false narrative that welfare recipients were predominately undeserving African American women who were creating a tax burden on the public because they did not want to work. She explained that angry White men orchestrated and promoted this narrative and successfully convinced the public that welfare had to change, drastically.

During that time when it was the angry White man, they were talking about welfare queens. That story came out, and people were just really angry about welfare. It was all these black people on welfare. So then when they got everybody good and hot and angry over nonexistent welfare queens and black people on welfare when white people really take more of the budget the politicians said we are going to do something about this. We are going to fix this problem. These people are going to have to work. That is when it changed to TANF. I think it was President Clinton at the time.

She continued:

Okay, so this was a republican tactic. To win the elections or gain people to their side, they used the same tactics that we see in use today; dividing people up and making one people feel superior, another group inferior, and pitting the two against

each other. And to appease this sentiment that they had riled up, they changed it. This is what we're going to do about it.

She also added that recipients and local citizens can affect policy changes by speaking up:

We can change them. TANF recipients and well any residents of any city; the government is supposed to be by the people, but a lot of times when people are living in poverty and focused on day to day survival, they don't get involved in politics because they're focused on survival. They don't see the connection between if you get involved you can change things and it will better your situation, and you won't have to be so focused on survival.

Kalilah continued, explaining what recipients and residents need to do to effect change:

Well, the first thing you have to do is unjust or not right, you have to write. You have to voice it to the supervisors, the managers, and go all the way up the chain and then you have to have people ... It has to be done together. Just one person doing it won't change anything. It has to be a unified effort. Sadly, we don't have that unified effort. You can send petitions around and have people sign them. You'll see it every once in a while in the office. People get tired of waiting and say, "Hey I want to talk to a manager"; and then everybody else will step up. This is ridiculous. This is wrong. And then they'll come out. They call it calming the crowd down. It's really just wasting more time because the crowd isn't wrong.

According to Kalilah, the Mayor and department heads determine how to implement TANF. She stated the program is implemented by local government; “The mayor, working with the heads of the departments. I guess the department heads really decide, but the mayor has to approve. I don't know the exact process.”

Eighteen-year-old Nyla stated she does not know much about the creation or implementation of this policy. She decided not to get involved but felt the reformed policy was needed. She explained, “I don't get to the nitty gritty and all that. I just know that I think it's good because you can get on that and you can't just lay around doing nothing all day”.

She was unaware of who changed the policy and was not quite sure of who can change it going forward. Her response to who changed welfare to TANF was: “I don't know. Was it Obama? Michelle? I don't know”. When explaining why the policy was changed, Nyla based her argument on people's need for childcare. In her opinion, once the children of recipients reach school age the recipients no longer need TANF. She explained:

Because people take advantage of it, and try to stay on it forever. After five years ... A lot of people on TANF require child care assistance, so there's no daycares after five years for one. I've never heard of a daycare that's six years old. That's the only reason why. So, you can get comfortable, and people ... You don't need it anymore. You don't need TANF anymore. You don't need help paying daycare, none of that.

So, people lose that path for a while, and I'm not sure, but yeah that's what I think. It's because people don't need childcare anymore.

When responding to the question of who changed the policy, she had no idea. She responded:

Someone of high authority. I'm not sure. Trump? He's y'all's President. He's the one ... He wants to change a lot of things. He's moving to stop the system and stuff ... He's going to stop food stamps and all that stuff. . . He has the authority of that; it's gonna take a lot of voting and like that, but he got money so. Voting against it, right? That's how law gets passed. You have to vote for things, right? People have to vote on the law to get passed? No, the Republicans all they're going to sit around and make a vote, say yes, aye, no, to which we agree to change this. We agree with stopping this. Put an end to this.

Not Interested in TANF Advocacy

Participants expressed varied responses when asked about advocacy experience. Three of the four participants stated that had not advocated regarding TANF and they were not interested in advocating regarding TANF historically. Neither Kimberly nor Nyla reported any involvement in advocacy. Kalilah had engaged in advocacy but not related to TANF. Sandra was the one who had any experience with advocacy related to TANF. When asked to share any experiences with advocacy Kimberly and Nyla responded similarly; Kimberly replied, "I wouldn't say that I had any. In Nyla's response,

she shared that her workforce development vendor had a council of recipients who discussed issues and advocated for the group. When I asked her if she joined the council she responded,

It was like a little council meeting that we had at (vendor name), you know. My dad told me not to get too involved with that. Just turn in my time sheets and go home. I don't really care about that much, about getting involved in all that stuff.

Kalilah discussed how she advocated on behalf of her son in an education situation. She spoke of her ability to advocate.

I know how to advocate because I went through a situation where I really had to advocate, and I was not welcome... it was just me fighting for my son as opposed to other parents getting together and saying this policy is wrong.

When asked about TANF related advocacy she responded,

I don't and you know it's not an issue that I would like openly ... It wasn't one of the issues that I would openly advocate for only because like I said I just wanted to be off of it, out of the system, name off the rolls.

Sandra was the outlier for this portion of the research. Although she did not have experience with legislative advocacy regarding TANF, she did advocate with human services personnel regarding TANF. Sandra shared that she advocated regarding poor services and to assist another family in securing TANF. She stated that while in the TANF office, she observed a young girl crying, with her baby in her arms, who was

begging for food stamps. The workers told the girl they could not help her. Sandra said she gave the girl her last five dollars and told her to come to her house the next day. She continued the story,

I told her to call the TANF office and ask to speak to a manager and let them know your situation. Get their name. Then I said, "Call the director. Tell them who you spoke to because when I take care of business I write names down, I write the time, the date, who I spoke to and stuff like that because people like to retract on things that they say..." Anyway, we advocated, we advocated, and she ended up getting a social worker, and the social worker ended up getting her food stamps and her TANF, but just that situation alone is ridiculous and sad.

Sandra stated that on occasion she felt driven too aggressively pursue helping people or to achieve her goals. Sometimes it was about poor service or her check being late. She shared some of the strategies she used to contact people she perceived to be in power:

I would Google people's ass quick and fast in a hurry... They had their emails and all that stuff so... I'm not going to say threaten, but yeah I had to drop some names in order for things to be done because it's really, really ... This is an ongoing problem... Yeah so I've made phone calls, but the thing is, my follow through ... I feel like I can do it by myself, but I feel like it will be more powerful with a group. I left messages on the director's voicemail because I've had experiences where workers will hang up the phone and mean conversation... I got

one phone call back. It was I called about my first time my check was late, so they say something about the system, so they immediately fixed that because I started to get the names of people that I knew.

Since there was such limited advocacy participation, I asked the participants' views on recipient participation. All thought it would be a good idea for recipients to advocate. I followed that with further questions to gain a deeper understanding of the perspective on advocacy.

Prospective Advocacy

Since there was limited TANF advocacy participation, I added a series of questions to ascertain participants' perspectives on advocacy. The questions, coded *if advocacy*, asked the same questions as I asked about advocacy experience, but stated them as hypothetical questions. All recipients paused, considered, and had more to say.

Sandra said she would address her concerns to the Director of Human Services. Her strategy for reaching out, was, "I would first do an email because I'm one to do a paper trail. Then I would try to make a phone call to set up some type of meeting via phone or person, and then I would write a letter". Some of the ideas she would share for improving the system were:

There should be more outreach. Give those resources outside the doors of (Human Services). Have the resources available for people to see, and you could even have a person that hands out information to give to people for resources because I

think that would cut down a lot of TANF if people worked because people will feel better of themselves. Monthly meetings like at certain wards. Inviting TANF recipients and like I said giving their ideas, and how they feel and thoughts because as a TANF recipient, you're part of the process as well... you're getting a certain amount from the government so I think as a recipient you should have some type of voice and give ideas. I'm not saying making laws or anything like that, but I think that ... Because sometimes a lot of people that do work, they never been with TANF. They don't know how it feels to be on TANF, they don't know the emotional feelings behind it, physical because you get depressed.

Additionally, Sandra would share the importance of having more follow-up. She spoke passionately about the need for a human being to check on recipients periodically. Sandra felt a call from a social worker just to check would be encouraging. When asked if she thought she would make a difference she replied,

I have faith so I know that at least if they don't consider everything that I express; I know something that I might have said might have sparked something that might change something. It might not be big, it might be small.

Kimberly was vague about the target of her advocacy, simply stating, "Whoever oversees, who makes the rules and regulations." Her method of contact would be a suggestion box in the TANF office for current and former recipients. In response to what she would tell them, Kimberly said,

I would probably tell them the program is good because you send them out for training to see what they need to get employment, but also the downfall was the amount of money they was giving just wasn't enough... So, I would tell them that the benefit should increase a little; not too much, but just enough. It should increase with the cost of living.

Kalilah's prospective advocacy would be to address people all the way up the chain of command, including the mayor and the president. Her major points for advocacy are the unfair practice of deducting any child support paid by the absent parent from the TANF allotment. Her contention was to require the absent parent to pay taxes when earning money. Some TANF recipients worked, thus paid taxes, and when the government deducts the support payment from the TANF payment, then the government is essentially double or triple dipping. Her other point is that the aforementioned practices keeps families in poverty and prevents them from building any income to eventually move off of assistance. She complained:

That's what I told them. You can keep that money because I'm not paying into the system through my taxes and then their father is paying into the system through their taxes and then the money that you send him, you want to tax? You're taxing the child support. Then you want to take some more and pay back TANF

Nyla proposed advocating with whoever is in charge, with power, to make changes.

Although she did not know who, she asserted the system needed to be stricter. She would

advocate for allowing recipients to receive TANF until their children no longer needed childcare because they would be old enough to attend public schools. Nyla also would recommend requiring recipients to take classes to prepare for work within six months of enrolling in TANF.

Although the participants had limited TANF advocacy experiences and expressed that they, historically, had no interest in TANF advocacy, when asked to think about engaging in such activities, they all shared ideas about which they would advocate. Each of them expressed different topics about which to advocate. They offered strategies from suggestion boxes to sending emails and letters, to holding community meetings to allow recipients to voice their concerns directly to human service agency leaders. However, there was little awareness of or focus on engaging in legislative advocacy.

Summary

In this chapter, I reported findings from in depth interviews with four African American single mothers who received TANF. The interviews focused on exploring their experiences on TANF, their awareness of the creation and implementation of the TANF policy, and their perceptions about advocacy to address the central research question: How do African American single mothers, who receive TANF, understand advocacy and influencing legislators regarding welfare reform implementation?

Manually coding the data, I conducted two cycles using structural, emotion, and values coding. As a result of the inductive data analysis, eight themes and one subtheme

emerged. The themes are Support Welfare Reform, means to an end, challenges, motivation, Black feminist views. awareness of legislative process, advocacy, and prospective advocacy. The subtheme was empowerment. In Chapter 5, I will further elaborate the data, explain limitations, recommendations for further study, and social justice implications. Additionally, I will discuss the connections between my findings and my research question.

Chapter 5: Introduction

The purpose of this multiple case study was to explore what African American single mothers who received TANF thought about advocacy and influencing local legislators in the implementation of welfare reform policies and programs. I accomplished this by using an exploratory multiple case study in which I interviewed four women to understand their experiences as TANF recipients. In addition, I sought to document their understanding of the legislative process regarding PRWORA and advocacy. Multiple case study methodology supported gaining deeper insight into the issue, because I had to evaluate each participant as a single case and then compare and contrast the cases (Yin, 2014). In exploring my topic, I assessed three segments of the participants' experiences and knowledge. Examination of their experiences revealed areas of TANF advocacy opportunities. Participants' TANF experiences established a context for exploring advocacy decision making and legislative awareness to learn about their understanding of the processes used to create and modify policies. The results revealed participants supported the modification of welfare from an entitlement status to a welfare-to-work program.

They also shared challenges they personally experienced while receiving TANF benefits. One interviewee discussed being involved in any advocacy efforts directed toward TANF regulations, but her activities did not involve interactions with legislators. The others reported they previously had no interest in TANF advocacy. I discerned that

the participants have much to learn about the legislative process related to policy development. Although the recipients had not engaged in legislative advocacy, they were vocal about what they would share with those in power, once I queried about prospective advocacy. The following interpretations of findings provide more detail about the outcomes of the study.

Interpretation of the Finding

TANF Experiences

Findings in this study contribute to the literature regarding TANF experiences of African American single mothers and advocacy perspectives. Perhaps the most surprising finding was that all four participants expressed strong support for a meaningful change in welfare reform. They agreed on the requirement for recipients to participate in training and go to work, rather than remain on public assistance indefinitely, was a move in a positive direction. It is interesting how their rhetoric was similar to what conservatives purported when they attempted to curry favor from the public to change welfare to workfare. They condoned the stereotype of recipients as lazy Black women who do not want to work and have more babies to continue to receive a check at taxpayers' expense (Dagueere, 2008; Johnson, 2010; Katz, 2012; Morgen et al., 2010). Kimberly stated the following:

I think it's a good program, especially to enforce the training program because I do think it's unfair that taxpayers pay into this program for individuals to sit at

home all day or whatever it is they do or run the streets. I think the training part is really good.

Nyla's thoughts mirrored points of the Welfare Queen narrative regarding recipients having multiple babies. She stated, "I think it is good. A lot of people think they keep having babies. They think oh, I'm gonna keep having babies; they think you have more babies, it's more money you get." Sandra's views reflect those held by conservative leaders. She responded, "[Welfare changed] because a lot of people were using that [public assistance] as a crutch . . . Just applying for welfare and staying on it as long as they could just to get a first of the month check." Kalilah supported changing the program to one of training to go to work but she thought it should focus more on encouraging recipients instead of punishing them by applying sanctions. Hearing these women speak in such similar terms as the conservatives who intentionally denigrated African American single mothers receiving TANF corroborates findings in a study conducted by Broughton (2003). I could find no more recent studies in which recipients voiced their opinions of people similarly situated as them. The author conducted an ethnographic study of women in a welfare-to-work program and found them accepting and repeating pejorative stereotypes about their classmates, while not referring to themselves in the same terms. The participants in this study also expressed disappointment regarding other TANF recipients while objecting to the stereotypical characterizations by the conservatives. The significance of this finding suggests the

inculcation in the psyche of many TANF recipients, which may negatively affect their belief in their ability or right to improve their lives. It might significantly influence the level of achievement by recipients in moving from welfare to work, permanently.

Having worked with this population, I thought there would be some objection to the insistence for all recipients going to work. The fact that all participants in this study are first-generation welfare recipients and appear to possess an inherited work ethic might account for their strong stance in support of the work requirement of PRWORA. It is also possible the Welfare Queen narrative was so pervasive that the recipients believed it. Many of the women with whom I worked experienced generational poverty and welfare, and they often lacked a strong work ethic. Several former clients also had multiple barriers to work as articulated in the research (Blank, 2007; Bloom et al., 2011; Butler et al., 2013). Although I did not focus on all possible barriers to employment the participants might possess, I did address some challenges, so it was significant that all four staunchly supported workforce even though they experienced multiple challenges navigating the TANF system.

Educated Participants

Numerous researchers identified having multiple barriers such as mental and physical illness and being victims of domestic violence significantly impede this population from successfully obtaining employment within the prescribed time frame (Bloom et al., 2011; Fording et al., 2013; Haney, 2013). A significant barrier highlighted

in the literature was low educational attainment, which hampers women from successfully moving from welfare to work (Bloom et al., 2011; Fording et al., 2013; Haney, 2013). Bloom et al. (2011) surveyed welfare recipients in six states and Washington, DC. The researcher revealed four of 10 TANF recipients did not graduate from high school, which significantly reduced their ability to qualify for jobs with wages high enough to lift them out of poverty. All four people who responded to the interview invitation for this current study were high school graduates and had some form of postsecondary education. Their educational backgrounds ranged from technical certifications to one who was nearing completion of a master's degree. The youngest participant holds three certificates and is currently working towards attaining a certificate in cosmetology. Her future plans include obtaining an associate's degree in business administration in preparation for owning a beauty salon. Bloom et al. (2011) concurred with the experiences that I encountered in working in several housing projects, community centers, and workforce development programs when fewer than half of the former TANF recipients had earned their high school diplomas or GED. However, it is possible that the women without high school diplomas had no interest or understanding the need for them to participate in research.

Katz (2012) suggested that increasing education potentially enables women to earn higher wages, significantly increasing economic mobility. BLS (2012) revealed the annual median income for people with a high school diploma or equivalent is \$34,700;

some college but no degree, \$35,100; associate's degree, \$57,590; and bachelor's degree, \$67,140. The 2017, poverty level for a family of four was \$24,600 (Poverty Guidelines, 2017). Researchers found that educated women have the income potential to support themselves and families; three of the four experienced multiple cycles of work and then return to receiving TANF. Kalilah received AFDC and TANF. Kimberly and Sandra received TANF, returned to work, and then went back to TANF at least three times in their history. During interviews, participants reported they had no long term health challenges, nor did their children, which are potential impediments to sustained employment (Bloom et al., 2011; Fording et al., 2013; Haney, 2013). Although three of these participants work, they continue to receive food stamps and Medicaid. This trend confirms literature found in Chapter 2 regarding how recipients experience increased job loss as they encounter challenges in the workplace, including having inadequate skills to perform required tasks in a changing labor market, demanding high skilled workers with proficient technology skills (MacLeavy, 2015).

Untrained workers exhaust their unemployment benefits and seek TANF to sustain their families because of the limited availability of low wage, unskilled opportunities (MacLeavy, 2015). Contrary to the continued perception of the lazy, uneducated Welfare Queen, the women in this study had strong work ethics, yet faced challenges to sustain adequate employment to keep them from returning to TANF. Their stories signal the need for legislators to consider further revisions to portions of

PROWRA as the practical application does not achieve the intended goals of moving families from welfare to work (Patterson, 2012). Those receiving benefits continue to be dependent on government assistance (Patterson, 2012). The cycle of moving from TANF to work and back, as well as reliance on food stamps and Medicaid while working, warrants further investigation with populations like those in this study, to facilitate understanding what other factors prevent them from establishing permanent self-sufficiency. It is possible the profound changes in the labor market advance the need for advocacy to drive legislators to reconsider TANF requirements and training. The women who volunteered to offer their stories, along with others with similar experiences, underscore the need to include their voices in these efforts.

Means to an End

The participants all had some postsecondary education, and previous work experience, which could account for them insisting receiving TANF was a temporary means to an end for them. They stressed how unexpected circumstances such as severe financial need, usually due to job loss, the need for childcare, and short-term personal health crisis led them to apply for assistance. Their experiences confirm findings from MacLeavy (2015), who explored how restructuring in the labor market, replacing low-skilled jobs with jobs requiring higher level proficiencies, especially in technology, resulted in labor force reductions through layoffs, freezes, and outsourcing. The author

also indicated the influence the changes had in increasing the number of people seeking public assistance. Katz (2012) shared, a decline in employment opportunities for poor mothers left many with no alternatives but to apply for public assistance. Three of the four respondents availed themselves of the training programs hoping to develop marketable skills to prepare them for lasting employment. However they also cycled between work and public assistance. Nyla expressed appreciation for the classes offered by her workforce development vendor through TANF. Because she has not rejoined the workforce, she is unable to test her employment sustainability using the skills she learned in the program. Researchers must wait to see if she and others like her, meet the challenges of the emerging labor market based on their preparation using available job training programs (MacLeavy, 2015). While Kimberly expressed gratefulness for the training classes, she was frustrated with the salary levels of the jobs offered in the TANF programs. She found them inadequate to sustain her family. Kalilah lost her opportunity to continue training when she opted out of TANF because she thought child support would provide her with a higher monthly income. Kimberly also left TANF for the higher paying child support.

These stories help to enlighten readers about the financial hardships, which drive some women to apply for TANF. They can also inform policymakers, program managers, and the public about how the evolving changes in the labor market create challenges for low skilled workers to secure viable employment. Contrary to the Welfare

Queen narrative, these stories demonstrate how women use TANF to provide for their families when they are desperate and cannot maintain stable employment. They demonstrate how some recipients pursue training to develop skills to, secure jobs leading to upward mobility. It is important to share these stories, so those in authority and possible allies understand there are recipients who want to work but need different training to accomplish employment goals.

Insufficient Funds

Of significant concern to all the participants was the meager income provided by TANF. The National Welfare Rights Organization (NWRO) testified before Congress in the 1960s and 1970s, advocating for increasing the amount of welfare allotments (Clawson, 2011). Yet in 2017, recipients continue to complain about receiving nominal monthly disbursements. Current participants shared the frustration of prior recipients who tried to care for their families on limited welfare funds. Some participants spoke of having to find other ways to make money, such as, hair styling or selling their food stamps. They continued to struggle, unable to survive solely on the monthly check, which included those living in income based housing or with relatives who provided moderate support.

Once Kimberly and Kalilah began to receive regular child support, they declined the TANF check. They found the practice of withholding the child support to pay back TANF unfair. TANF confiscated part of their child support payments to pay

back prior monetary distributions. The repayment policy left the custodial parent and child(ren) with a minimal monthly check. Because their child support check was higher than the TANF allotment, they both dropped the cash portion of assistance. Kalilah became disappointed to learn when she refused the TANF payment; she unknowingly became ineligible to participate in the training program.

Stronger enforcement of child support is another component of the welfare reform strategy to remove people from government assistance (Plotnick, Glosser, Moore, & Obara 2015). Plotnick et al., (2015) reported findings stating women who leave TANF for child support are less likely to return to TANF. Two of the women who left TANF in this study currently work full time, and one has a part time home-based business. One of the full time employed and the part time entrepreneur receive child support. However, the combined income from work and child support remains insufficient to care for the families without government assistance. They continue to receive food stamps and Medicaid and continue their dependence on government assistance. The benefits supplement their incomes from work or child support, although they emphasized their desire to live independent of government assistance. Corroborating research conducted by Katz (2012), who referenced data from the US Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics 2011 report, it underscores women with high school diplomas have an average annual income of \$28, 236. The low income makes them eligible for supplemental safety net programs (Katz, 2012). The researcher stated women with children need, at least, a

bachelor's degree, the average annual salary of \$51,272 to earn adequate wages to care for families. Kalilah, Kimberly, and Sandra felt the requirements of TANF, and the low payments were keeping them stuck and unable to move out of poverty, which was antithetical to the stated goal of PROWRA (Fording et al., 2013; Patterson, 2012; Phinney, 2016;).

Lobbying for increased TANF income would be an issue for advocacy. These findings contribute to the policy debate by further amplifying flaws in the TANF system regarding the meager income provided and the adverse effect on recipients the combination of TANF regulations yield. Paying low monthly allotments, enforcing child support payments to move families off TANF but using collected funds to repay TANF rather than recipients; and penalizing recipients for leaving TANF for child support by denying them training are all points for considering whether advocacy efforts would yield positive results. These stories are important to include in the literature to assist policy makers in reevaluating TANF to investigate strategies to provide more significant support to help recipients with high school diplomas and education beyond high school to increase their skills to move into jobs with upward mobility in new labor markets.

Caseworkers

Participants also expressed concern about treatment by caseworkers. While they mentioned some caseworkers worked hard on their behalf, each participant discussed challenges they had with inept or rude workers. The fact they all shared welfare workers

posed challenges for them is important. They shared caseworkers lost their paperwork or did not share necessary information with them in a timely manner impeding them from fulfilling their obligations, demonstrates the need for greater accountability and quality assurance. TANF Requirements (n.d.) stated the government modified local TANF programs to include caseworker development of individual responsibility plans (IRP) for each recipient. At the conclusion of their assessment recipients received a combination of job skills training and education to prepare them for work. If the recipients fail to meet the obligations of the IRP, they could receive sanctions or elimination from TANF. These modifications to the program increased the significance of caseworker actions. Sandra complained caseworkers did not inform her about training programs, even when she asked. In Nyla's case, she attempted several times to reach her caseworker to learn when and where to report for training as well as learn what attire was appropriate. Nyla became frantic because she did not get a response until the day the class started. The caseworker granted her permission to enter the class a day late, but Nyla commented how she missed significant information provided on the first day of training. Nyla shared:

I was like, oh my goodness. I was going crazy trying to figure out all about my classes. I had everything. I got everything in on time and everything. So, she finally called me, and she made a way for me to come because the day she called me was the first day of class, actually... that kind of pushed me behind too, taking

the class for food handlers, because they already started at the first day of everything you have to know for the test

In addition to experiencing poor customer service from caseworkers, participants also revealed how caseworkers mistreated them. They all shared how caseworker mistreatment caused them to feel dispirited. Kimberly addressed an encounter with a caseworker:

...but the caseworker that handled; she was um; she would make sarcastic comments like, "I wish I could get food stamps." I had this puzzled look on my face like, "Why are you saying this to me?" Like everybody who is here is not trying to get a handout...

Nyla shared, "No, but at the vendors and stuff. They talk to you like you're anything because you know, you're on TANF and stuff." Caseworkers are the street level implementers of PRWORA and can be the determining factor in participants' success or failure navigating TANF (Taylor, 2014). They possess knowledge of the program and decide daily what to share with recipients. How they speak to recipients can have a significant effect on recipient experiences, at a time when recipients are already feeling frustrated. The requirements on the state and local jurisdictions can cause caseworkers to do what supports the position of government authorities rather than the clients, so they keep their jobs (Taylor, 2014). Caseworkers must decide between providing services to improve recipient lives and policing recipients ensuring they follow all rules, with a goal

of reducing caseloads (Taylor, Gross, & Towne-Roese, 2016). Questionable caseworker abilities, scarcity of low wage jobs to which to refer clients, and caseworker overload all influence quality of services to clients (Taylor et al., 2016). The voices of recipients inform about the precarious position they are in as their success on TANF is largely dependent on the caseworkers (Taylor et al., 2016). The effect of caseworkers' behavior on recipients will help legislators and program managers to further research customer service by these frontline workers.

Motivational

Participants described their TANF experience as motivational from several vantage points. They were either encouraged by positive gains made from completing training classes or frustrated with the welfare system. Nyla found the training offered by TANF motivating and the knowledge she gained in her classes encouraged her. She stated, "I'm glad that I got the [XYZ] vendor. So, they had a lot to offer, which I took advantage of all of them." Kalilah, Sandra, and Kimberly were motivated to move off TANF rolls out of frustration with the system. Sandra was frustrated that she did not have the opportunity to take classes to help her prepare to leave TANF for work because her caseworker did not provide her with information. This may have been due to a shortage of approved programs in the target area, which created long waiting lists for recipients to begin training (Economic Security Administration, n.d.). Sandra did not know why she did not receive information, which caused her frustration. Kimberly appreciated the

opportunity to take classes but was disappointed with the low wages of the jobs offered by the program.

Participants also expressed frustration with increasing restrictions imposed within the TANF system. McKay (2012), Patterson (2012), and MacLeavy (2015) presented research detailing increased restrictions imposed under the DRA of 2005, which reauthorized PRWORA, including increasing hours devoted to work activities, stricter limitations on educational pursuits, and narrowing definitions of acceptable types of work. Danziger et al. (2013) found post-recession, 77% of former TANF recipients reported the program did not meet their needs. Kimberly, Sandra, and Kalilah wanted higher incomes and a life void of mandatory restrictions. Kalilah shared:

I don't want the money. The little bit of money they were paying, it wasn't worth the trouble. I didn't want to be hindered. I didn't want them cutting my food stamps down and telling me I made too much money for this or made too much for that. I just said nope y'all keep the money.

TANF's practices regarding child support motivated Kalilah and Kimberly to leave TANF due to frustration. When they realized the non-residential parent paid the child support, but TANF confiscated the money to repay the system rather than pay them, they declined TANF payments. They thought this was unfair and decided to leave TANF as they thought the child support payment provided more money for the family.

Whether from a positive or a negative perspective, all participants desired to live without depending on income from TANF. All the participants stressed how TANF was temporary and they had a fervent desire to work for a living, which directly contradicts the narrative of the Welfare Queen promoted by conservatives (MacLeavy, 2015; Johnson, 2010; Katz, 2012; Morgen et al., 2010). The participants lamented how asking for help from the government caused them to encounter disrespectful caseworkers, which challenged their self-esteem. However, they understood because they had no other options at the time, they had to turn to TANF. Kalilah, the oldest participant, shared how receiving government assistance was against her family values. She stated, “My generation is like ashamed. In my upbringing, it was a shame. My grandma did not want to ask anyone for help.” This amplified findings by Kent (2016), who shared many welfare recipients experience shame because they rely on welfare. That shame became part of the motivation to get off TANF for several women in this study. Additionally, participants revealed how some of the challenges they experienced related to being TANF recipients also drove them to do what was necessary to leave TANF.

These stories contradict a familiar narrative; that is, welfare recipients lack the motivation to stand on their own. There is a cadre of women who had never experienced welfare before, but now find circumstances necessitating they apply for assistance (MacLeavy, 2016). The independence recipients previously knew, continues to drive them to do what is necessary to stand on their own to care for their families, However, as

shared in these stories, finding independence through employment is challenging at best in an emerging labor market (MacLeavy, 2016). These findings can inform policymakers and program managers adjustments to TANF could prepare this population for stable and predictable employment.

Conceptual Framework

Black Feminist Theory

I selected Black feminist theory as part of the conceptual framework for this study because it establishes a mechanism for African American women to articulate their life situations from their worldview, expressing the unique way race, gender, class, and sexuality intersect (Collins, 2000; Hamilton-Mason, Hall, & Everett, 2009). Using this theory as a tool, these women reevaluated their lives, gaining new knowledge from their assessment of their individual history, community, and culture to redefine their identities by their standards and using this information to empower them to improve their lives (Collins, 2000; Hamilton-Mason et al., 2009). In this study, I did not ask direct questions regarding this topic. However, all participants spoke openly about the oppression they experienced related to TANF. Kalilah was perhaps, the most vocal, sharing her Black feminist view when discussing why and how welfare changed from being an entitlement program to one requiring recipients to work:

During that time when it was the angry white man, they were talking about welfare queens. That story came out, and people were just really angry about

welfare. It was all these black people on welfare. There was a concerted effort to vilify welfare ... that's why it changed from welfare to TANF because the attitude of most people was these people need to get off their butts and work. It's my tax dollars. They said it was a real big problem. I can see that it was a big problem in the Black community but not the problem that they said it was.

She went on to speak of the how the welfare regulations historically destroyed Black families. The *man in the house* rule is one of a group of *suitability rules* created during the inception of AFDC used to disqualify families from welfare (Lawrence-Webb, 1997). Used primarily to disqualify African American women and their children, the man in the house rule penalized women whose social workers suspected they had a man living with them while receiving welfare. Kalilah felt the government now blames these same families they destroyed earlier because they did not marry. A major goal of TANF is encouraging marriage among recipients (MacLeavy, 2014). Kalilah continued:

There was no familial support where it should have been, but that wasn't the whole story, but that's where the breakdown, how it really hurt Black people, the black family. It was used to kind of pull us apart by the regulations. Early regulations said that no man could be in the house. Those policies tore the family apart.

By understanding the historical significance of intersectional oppression and its effect on families, Kalilah challenged the narratives of the Welfare Queen and identified

how past policies keep African American women, children, and families living at or below the poverty level. As was the case with the creation of AFDC, PRWORA was created by White men who based the rules on their Eurocentric definition of family, which differed from the many configurations of family experienced in the African American community (Collins, 2000; O'Connor, 2001). As a result, African American families suffered penalties for not conforming to Eurocentric definitions of acceptable lifestyles. The more these women understand the importance history and politics have on creating their situations, the more empowered they can become to challenge policymakers to fight for improved policies and programs to enhance their lives (Collins, 2000).

Kimberly also shared her understanding of how history shaped current conditions when responding to the question of why the program changed in such a profound way: She shared:

Due to the fact that, I don't want to seem racist, but Caucasians normally were the ones who initiated; they were the ones who were primarily on welfare, and once African Americans found out about the program and how it works, we all started utilizing it, and we abused it. So, when they came up with these new laws, it was because of African Americans because we would abuse it and we wouldn't want to work; I mean, not saying that Caucasian race didn't either... The way society feeds it now it's like all of us African American women and men are having all

these multiple children, so we don't have to work and that's not the case for everybody. Some people just need the extra assistance.

Understanding the history of bias perpetrated against African American people, Kimberly analyzed the narratives and debunked the ones she felt were incorrect and designed to subjugate African Americans. Sandra spoke to what she perceived was blatant racism, designed to keep her and her family in poverty. She posited:

TANF is like I say is temporary, and they are creating it where me as a single African American woman is stagnant because you're not ... Like I said, it's a lot of people who have been generational TANF recipients, and that's all they know so if you're not giving them the resources on it or anything like that, they don't know how to come out of it and they get stuck.

Sandra continued to struggle with her caseworker to get information to enroll in the classes offered by TANF. Her frustration surfaced as she shared the above comment. She remarked she always heard statements depicting recipients as lazy African American women who choose to sit home collecting taxpayer dollars. Sandra knew she was trying hard to advance herself and therefore her family. Nyla expressed her Black feminist views as she explained how she would make herself heard if she were going to advocate. Nyla expressed her distrust of European Americans, stating:

It depends on who I'm talking to. If I'm talking to the caucus people, then maybe not. Caucasian people. You know I get along with all kind of people, but to them,

oh my God! [They will say], “Yes, I agree, I agree,” and then they'll be like, Next, it just depends on how stern you are, and how much you believe in what you're trying to get across.”

It is significant that without any prompting, each participant raised points, which reflected their awareness of how race, gender, class, and sexuality intersect in their lives. They addressed their challenges with TANF through the lens of Black feminist theory. By examining their life situations, participants developed the skills to analyze their circumstances and articulate their circumstances but also their search for solutions. This research adds testimony to the literature highlighting the connection between race, gender, and class entrenched in welfare policy and its effect on the daily lives of these women. Including these narratives serves to enlighten other recipients, allies, and policymakers of the practical influence policies have on vulnerable families.

Empowerment Theory

Utilizing empowerment theory to explore this topic yielded conflicting results. Empowerment theory is a process in which individuals, organizations, and communities develop the skills to exert control over issues and structures to improve their lives (Rappaport, 1987). The theory includes the intended outcomes of empowering individuals, organizations, and communities (Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995). Human service scholars use the theory to shift the paradigm in helping fields from addressing risk factors and victim blaming to focusing on identification of client abilities to engage

clients in improving their lives (Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995; Rappaport, 1987; Zimmerman, 2000). Conservatives used victim blaming and shaming to generate public support to change the welfare system significantly. Several participants mentioned it, but Kalilah spoke directly to this issue, stating:

There was a concerted effort to vilify welfare recipients in the media and as a politician to benefit politically. I don't know who it benefited, but that's why it changed from welfare to TANF because the attitude of most people was these people need to get off their butts and work.

In contrast, part of the reformed policy, TANF training programs included an empowering component. All the participants recognized the empowering benefits of training offered. Two participants, Kimberly and Nyla, took advantage of the training and discussed the beneficial outcomes they experienced. Sandra and Kalilah struggled with caseworkers to try to gain access to training opportunities. All four participants expressed the training would assist them in securing employment.

Daily interaction with line workers sometimes jeopardized efforts to empower recipients. All the participants in this study discussed how maltreatment and disrespect from caseworkers left them feeling dispirited. Sandra shared, "I've seen caseworkers completely be nasty and raise their voice at clients." When asked how she felt when caseworkers spoke to her rudely she responded:

Lower than I already felt. Having to ask for help from the government you know what I mean? Like I said, it takes a lot, especially when you're independent, and you're used to working and stuff like that. It does something to your confidence.

This type of conflict between policy intentions versus reality implementation demonstrated a gap in research and therefore substantiated the need for this study. People view the lack of follow through by participants as laziness when, in fact, disrespect and misinformation by frontline workers may be the reason participants do not show up and participate fully. These stories illuminate the need for legislators and program managers to reconsider the strict penalties recipients experience for non-compliance. Their lack of participation may result from systemic challenges.

Advocacy

When exploring the perceptions of the participants regarding advocacy an interesting phenomenon occurred regarding empowerment. Three of the four participants stated they had no previous interest in advocating regarding TANF. While Kalilah shared experiences advocating for some matters, she stated she had no interest in advocating related to TANF because she just wanted to get off it. She stated, "...it wasn't one of the issues that I would openly advocate for only because like I said I just wanted to be off of it, out of the system, name off the rolls."

Kimberly and Nyla also had no interest in TANF advocacy. In their interviews, all the participants indicated they experienced shame about having had to ask for help from

the government. They, at times, were visibly uncomfortable discussing their discomfort when asking for help and about feeling worthless or less than as they navigated the TANF system. Kalilah, Kimberly, and Nyla all stated they had no interest in advocating for TANF. They wanted to sever their relationship with the entitlement system.

Ravensberg and VanderPlatt (2009) shared part of the challenge of engaging indigent people in advocacy is their reluctance to being identified as poor. Their resistance to speak up regarding TANF confirms findings by Kent (2016), which describes how the media hardens and amplifies the public views against welfare. Increasingly restrictive social welfare policies appear to silence the voices of recipients as they experience shame and stigmatization. The shame of being unable to provide the basic needs as well as items society deems as normal symbols of success leads to social isolation and exclusion (King, 2016). Indigent populations fear others will discover their plight and ridicule them. Thus they have no interest in sharing their stories. The limited voices in the poverty discussion deprive policymakers, program managers, and the public of gaining an accurate understanding of poverty, welfare, and social policy (King, 2016).

While the other three participants shrank from TANF advocacy, Sandra is an example of the shift made in the 1990s in which research moved from addressing the weaknesses of recipients to shifting the paradigm to view recipients as co-experts (Ravensberg & VanderPlatt, 2009). Researchers engaged recipients in participatory

research to support their contributions to discussions leading to the development of policies affecting them (Ravensberg & VanderPlatt, 2009).

In the target area, community based organizations began to provide leadership in getting recipient voices heard. Several nonprofit organizations train the working poor as well as TANF recipients in techniques of grassroots advocacy (MacLeavy, 2016). Sandra was an outlier in this study as she had experience with TANF advocacy, which she learned by being part of community-based organizations. She recounted her experiences, sharing how she contacted various personnel within the Department of Human Services to advocate for better customer service from caseworkers. She also shared her advocacy on behalf of a young mother and child who needed services:

I told her to call the TANF office and ask to speak to a manager and let them know your situation. Get their name. Then I said, "Call the director. ..." Anyway, we advocated, and she ended up getting a social worker, and the social worker ended up getting her food stamps and her TANF, but just that situation alone is ridiculous and sad.

Sandra's behavior represented the tenets of Black feminist and empowerment theories as she shared developing empowering skills to advocate from participating in a housing coop when residents jointly made decisions for their community (Collins, 2000; Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995). She also shared how she learned advocacy skills, to retort TANF's practices regarding child support, from working in community groups. She

learned how to analyze issues and develop strategies for advocacy. When asked how TANF can change she responded:

I think the rules can be changed by the community... but we had a community meeting, and we were talking about because we have a lot of teenagers and kids around our neighborhood, but they don't have resources, and they don't have anything to do when they wake up. I think that if the community came together as a whole like a long time ago when my mother and they were young, it takes a village so, in order for things to progress, I think that the community needs to come together and maybe have certain advocates that have ... Just brainstorm. Give ideas, throw stuff out, and then maybe invite TANF recipients to give their opinions. Just make it a whole collaboration. Therefore, everybody won't feel like they're being shortchanged or taken advantage of because they feel like they've had a voice in the whole process.

When asked why recipients do not advocate, both Kimberly and Kalilah explained how fear of retaliation and loss of benefits were significant deterrents for recipients.

When I posed questions about their past TANF advocacy experiences, they stated they had no previous interest in TANF advocacy. However, I posed the same questions as I did in the advocacy experience query, but this time as potential advocacy, which I coded, *if advocacy*, I received different responses. It was as if simply asking for their viewpoints freed them to express their views. While they did not know to whom they would direct

their advocacy, they each had something to say. It is significant that these women did not know to whom to direct their concerns regarding this policy. MacLeavy (2016) informed that devolution to state and local governments increased the opportunity to address issues regarding TANF with local legislators who are accessible. They are all visible in local communities, and they have social media presence offering several access points for constituents.

Additionally, there are grassroots organizations purporting to address TANF policy issues. Gathered under the national umbrella of ACORN, various community-based organizations claim to represent the interests of TANF recipients and the poor (MacLeavy, 2016). The majority of these organizations offer membership to those served by social policies. In conjunction with other nonprofits, they train community members in advocacy and leadership. Additionally, they claim to engage legislators on behalf of TANF recipients and others (MacLeavy, 2016). However, several factors jeopardize the work of these organizations as being truly representative of TANF recipients and the working poor. MacLeavy (2016) explained how organizations may be beholden to their funding sources and community partners, which often do not want to be associated with radical change. The researcher also explained how in their effort to represent the poor, their message focusing specifically on TANF becomes diluted because of too many other interests (MacLeavy, 2016). The organizations located in gentrified cities where the highest population of people are African American and poor. Other communities

experience economic growth based on higher skilled, technology jobs. Minimal advocacy takes place on behalf of TANF recipients and their fight against the strict work requirements of low skilled workers (MacLeavy, 2016).

Sandra would tell those in power to do more outreach to the community. She emphasized the need for workers to hold regular meetings in surrounding communities to hear from TANF recipients regarding what is or is not working. Positive human contact with workers whom follow-up and check on recipients with phone calls produce, better results. She stated:

Because sometimes a lot of people that do work, they never been with TANF.

They don't know how it feels to be on TANF; they don't know the emotional feelings behind it, physical because you get depressed ... I was at a point where I just didn't want to get up. I'm just like I'm just going to be on welfare. That was it.

Nobody called me. My social workers never called about the kids or stopped by

Kimberly said she would tell them how good the training program good is but add the need to increase the amount of the monthly check. Eighteen-year-old Nyla would tell them they need to be stricter on the regulations and three years is enough time to be on assistance. She felt at three years old the children could go to preschool and no longer need more costly childcare. Kalilah would tell them it is unfair to take child support paid by the noncustodial parents to pay back welfare, which is a tax funded program. She proposed when the noncustodial parent earns the money he or she pays taxes. Often the

TANF recipient has worked and paid taxes, which pays for TANF and when the government withholds the child support payment, they require the family to pay multiple times for the same program.

Each participant articulated strategies to get their points heard by those in power from writing letters, making phone calls, sending emails, or joining with others in the community to lobby for change. While there are community-based organizations claiming to help, none of the participants in this study expressed knowledge of any such organizations. I did not know of them prior to conducting this research, which is curious because I have worked with the poor for many years. Perhaps they need to conduct more outreach and distribute advertising, so the poor know of their existence and how to connect with them. Unfortunately, this requires funds to broadcast TANF's practices regarding child support (MacLeavy, 2016).

Advocacy is a critical strategy for changing policy. In this case, advocacy on behalf of PRWORA is a bit more challenging. To be successful, one must have defined issues with clear outcomes directed at those who can make the desired changes. In the target area, a primary challenge exists as PRWORA has driven an individualist approach, which impedes recipients from coalescing around a specific issue (MacLeavy, 2016). Forming alliances and gaining supporters to assist in advocacy is challenging due to the city becoming increasingly gentrified leaving a smaller group of TANF recipients and working poor (MacLeavy, 2016). Advocacy primarily is successful when you attract

large numbers of participants, but a key is to organize recipients and leavers, train them, and use various mediums for them to use their voices. These findings contribute the ideas of four African American single mothers on TANF and their views of advocacy. While they did not feel led to advocate in the past, they now find value in exercising their voices. Their contributions to this study provided data for grassroots organizers, legislators, and other recipients to identify the challenges of engaging TANF recipients, leavers, and allies in plausible advocacy. Their contribution provides data for other researchers to build upon and further explore and design advocacy campaigns on behalf of TANF recipients.

Feeling Dispirited

Of significance from these findings is the emotional effect of recipients' experiences on the individual and their families. Participants in the study shared several aspects of life on TANF, which challenged their self-esteem. Having experienced job loss, forcing them to resort to applying for government assistance, created negative emotional responses. Hearing constant negative comments about welfare recipients both from family members and in public added to the attack on participants' sense of self. It also compounded the frustration participants articulated resulted from their awareness of their oppression connected to their race, gender, and class. The outcomes aligned with research conducted by King (2016), explaining how negative public discussions and antipoverty policies significantly affect recipient's self-doubt and esteem. Participants

shared how disrespect from caseworkers, as well as receiving inadequate services caused undue stress and feelings of low self-esteem. These factors also related to recipients failing to meet TANF requirements and suffer significant penalties. Participants reported struggling to make ends meet due to inadequate monthly allotment and referrals to low wage jobs, which are inadequate for recipients to care for their families also causes them to feel dispirited. Finally, participants stated some TANF policies left them feeling trapped, particularly policies leaving recipients with insufficient incomes. As an example, when recipients receive any child support, TANF used the money to repay the system. Families in low income neighborhoods, which participants said make them feel trapped in poverty, have little hope of achieving a self-sustaining future. This potentially renders them impotent and limits their ability to succeed in moving from welfare to work. The results of this study offer significant insight for influencing social change, which I will articulate later in the chapter.

Limitations

The most significant limitations involve the sample of participants volunteering to contribute their insights. Although Yin (2014) stated an appropriate sample size for multiple case studies was between 4 and 6, the fact that I used a small sample size (4) limits transferability to any other population. The facts are none of the participants experienced generational assistance (GA), and all had high school education and beyond. I extracted information from respondents who shared the desire for a better future.

Perhaps, had some of the participants experienced GA or had not completed high school, responses might be more varied.

Using open ended interview protocol to guide the interview, promoted the range of responses. There were significant similarities among the participants, even though they shared their stories independent of the other participants. While parts of stories were similar, there were also divergent thoughts expressed.

I used two recording devices to capture the exact words of the participants. This helped mitigate my biases, as I transcribed the interviews verbatim. I conducted member checking at three access points to ensure I accurately captured the essence of their thoughts. All the participants approved of my translations during the various points of the review.

Recommendations

This research opens the door to conduct similar research on distinctive populations. Duplication of this same research with participants meeting different criteria would add rich content to the scholarly literature while confirming or controverting existing findings. Researchers previously related low educational achievement as a significant barrier to employment for many TANF recipients, which also impedes their working to stay out of poverty (Bloom et al.,2011; Haney, 2013). Therefore, the recommendation is for replication of this study but with recipients who have not completed high school. Another confounding finding arose regarding education levels.

Poverty, literature researchers, suggested having a high school diploma and post-secondary education increases a person's success in employment (Bloom et al., 2011; Haney, 2013). However, the fact all the participants in this study had high school diplomas and some form of post-secondary education, including three who have cycled on and off welfare and continue to receive some form of government assistance, warrants further investigation to understand what other factors prevent them from living independent of government assistance.

None of the recipients in this study lived in a family with a history of receiving governmental assistance. Thus, as the first generation to receive welfare, their family work ethic might account for them supporting the change in welfare-to-work. It would be interesting to see if the results changed when the participants experienced generational welfare participation.

This study did not delve deeply into the background of the participants. Perhaps conducting a single case study involving multiple interviews would generate a deeper understanding of the experience. Conducting a phenomenological study would address broader, underlying issues, contributing to a greater understanding of the daily life experiences on TANF and the decisions to or not to advocate. Such a study could add significant knowledge to the life implications of welfare policies.

While this study was to focus on legislative advocacy, it became clear from the findings, focusing on any level of advocacy regarding TANF could be helpful. Several

issues affecting recipient success did not require legislative advocacy but support at the agency, department, and even local office level. It is possible that addressing issues at the levels of daily interaction with recipients may significantly improve experiences and outcomes for recipients. Therefore, I recommend conducting a study to explore recipient TANF advocacy targeted at multiple levels of investigation.

Finally, as Sandra suggested, having caseworkers and recipients meet to discuss issues might provide interesting results. A research study collecting information from interviews with caseworkers and recipients or a joint group discussion, with researcher as an observer, could provide a wealth of research contributing to understanding power dynamics between participants. This is significant because all the participants in this study spoke of rude treatment by caseworkers. Having both viewpoints can contribute to improving relationships moving forward. A myriad of studies could evolve based on the information contained in this document.

Implications for Social Change

The original intent of this research was to hear the stories of African American single mothers who received TANF regarding their experiences on TANF and ultimately, their perceptions of their ability to advocate regarding improving the public welfare system. The primary goal was to contribute to the body of scholarly literature regarding the gap in empirical evidence on this subject. This is quite significant because legislators, think tank researchers, policy analysts, program developers, and many other human

services providers often conduct research to inform their deliberations regarding policies and programs affecting the lives of these recipients. Stories touch people in much more profound ways than do statistics (Newman, Deschenes, & Hopkins, 2012). Sharing these stories has the potential to inspire those seeking research to delve further into the thematic outcomes. Increasing interest can potentially move the researchers to invite recipients or clients of services into the discussions regarding policy and program development.

Secondly, as I researched the literature in preparation for this study, I was unable to find salient articles presenting the voices of these women, telling their stories. The current study seeks to correct the oversight. Moving forward, researchers will have a point of reference on which to build and continue expanding empirical evidence based on the recipient's voices. The significance rests on a few reasons. First, it signals to other researchers it is a worthy cause to undertake. It also provides a model for future such researchers, as it establishes a point to establish future investigations.

Using this study, I contribute to positive social change by documenting methods to approach other women with similar experiences. Hearing the untold stories of women sharing their experiences and reading how they would advocate can inspire others to do the same. The hope is other women gain confidence from the examples set by these women, and they will use their voices to advocate for themselves and others who share their journey. As more women receiving TANF share their stories in various places and

on various platforms, public opinion can potentially change to create more allies to help them make their voices heard, thereby inspiring others to pursue positive social change.

Finally, the study has significant implications for the human services and other helping professionals. As legislators and program staff consider policy decisions, they can consider the critical roles mental and emotional health play in the implementation of policies. I presented the results of this study to illuminate several policy requirements based on the results of the implementation of PRWORA and TANF. Recipients highlighted the threat to their self-esteem, which served as impediments to their successful movement through the entire TANF experience from their entrance, during their time on TANF, and after leaving. Feeling dispirited or hopeless can severely inhibit a person from fully participating in their own liberation from poverty to success. Therefore, making emotional health an integral part of researching human services policy can improve policy outcomes.

Conclusion

In 1966 President Clinton signed the PRWORA, which a Republican dominated Congress passed, changing welfare from being an entitlement program to one which required recipients to become employed (Highsmith, 2016; Loprest & Nichols, 2011). To sway public opinion to demand a notable change to welfare, degrading African American single mothers who receive welfare, conservatives in Congress campaigned to make African American single mothers the face of welfare and described them as highly sexed,

lazy, bad mothers who laid around having more babies instead of working. I was a teen mother on welfare, and I knew this description did not apply to many of my clients or me. When searching the literature, I could not find stories of these women, as told by them. Thus, I decided to research their stories.

When executing this research, I found women who wanted to work and who did all they could to avail themselves of the training offered by TANF to develop the skills to prepare them to find and maintain employment. Though they endured challenges resulting from system failures, other structural issues, as well as some personal challenges, these women persevered. They took different routes, but three of the four participants left the TANF rolls while one continues her training. I was unable to locate empirical evidence reflecting what I learned while conducting this study. During the review of scholarly literature, I did not identify articles revealing personal stories.

I also discovered having a high school diploma and some post-secondary education does not ensure recipients will secure jobs, which enabled them to raise their families independent of government assistance. In this study, three participants cycled between work and welfare, at least three times each. Three left TANF, but all continue to receive food stamps and Medicaid, even though they are working. The outcome of this study underscores the need for further research to unveil what other dynamics impede their total independence from welfare and what happens to them once they exceed their 5-year, lifetime limitation for receiving monetary benefits.

Having engaged in individual and community development, I understood the value of advocacy. In this study, I explored the advocacy experiences and perceptions of these women. In interviewing the participants, I found few of them had a previous engagement in advocacy efforts. However, once I asked them to think about advocating regarding TANF, they shared ideas on what they would say to whoever is in power. I felt they found their voices. The experience demonstrates when those who previously felt powerless have the space to reassess their power, they can find meaning in their words. Thus, legislators, policy or program developers, and other human service providers would be wise to include recipients in deliberations about policy and programmatic development. They are experts in their reality.

What is evident from this study is these recipients lack awareness of the legislative process. They knew little about politicians or their roles in enacting laws. This lack of awareness highlights the need to teach TANF recipients lessons in civics to empower them to analyze issues, develop plausible solutions, and advocate with the correct actors to improve their quality of life. Workforce development vendors could offer classes on these topics. An informed citizenry helps society grow.

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Appendix A: Demographic Information Form

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

1. What is your age? _____

2. What is your sex?

Female Male

3. What is your marital status?

Single Married Separated Divorced Widowed

4. With which racial or ethnic category do you identify? _____

5. What Truncated do you live in? _____

6. How many of your children have lived with you for the past two years? _____

7. Are you receiving TANF? _____

8. How long have you been receiving TANF within the last 6 years? _____

9. Are you currently employed?

Yes No

10. How long were you employed in the last two years? _____

11. What is the highest education level you completed?

No high school diploma or GED High school diploma or GED

Some college Community/Technical Certification

Associate's Degree Bachelor's Degree

Master's Degree

Professional Degree (Ph.D., Law Degree, Medical Degree)

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Appendix B: Interview Protocol

Time of Interview:		
Date:		
Place:		
Interviewer:		
Interviewee:		
Position of Interviewee:		
Demographics		
Gender		
Age		
No. of years on welfare		
Were you on welfare before welfare-to-work?		
Number of children in home		
Questions:		
1. How has your life changed since you became part of welfare-to-work (TANF)? (What are lived experiences of the women since they were placed on Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)?)		
Have you found a job?		
Did you keep your job?		

Have you attended training?	
Did you get your GED?	
Did you get a job?	
<p>2. Do you know who made welfare change to welfare-to-work? Who decides the rules about TANF? (What are the women's understanding of the political power structure that governs their lives through this law?)</p>	
<p>a. Who came up with making people having to go to work in order to get welfare?</p>	
<p>b. Who decides what rules you have to follow in TANF?</p>	
<p>c. How are changes made to the rules?</p>	
<p>3. Can you do anything to change TANF or how it is run? (What are their perceptions of their power to impact the implementation of the law in their lives?)</p>	

a. Can you tell anyone how TANF rules and regulations impact your life?		
b. Do you know whom to tell?		
c. What would you tell them?		
d. Will it make them think or about the rules and maybe change them?		
<p>4. Have you ever done anything to let the people who enforce the TANF laws know about how their rules affect your life? (What is their participation of their ability to advocate for themselves and their families with local lawmakers who are charged with implementing the law?)</p>		
a. Did you tell the people who can make a difference?		
b. Whom did you tell?		
c. How did you tell them?		
d. Did it make any difference?		
e. Did you join with others in telling the legislators?		
f. Did it make any difference?		

Appendix C: Certification of Completion

**Certificate of Completion**

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) Office of Extramural Research certifies that **Linda Scope** successfully completed the NIH Web-based training course “Protecting Human Research Participants”.

Date of completion: 01/23/2009

Certification Number: 139810



Appendix D: Request to Post Flyer

date

Dear Dr. Librarian,

I am a doctoral student at Walden University, and I am seeking participants to be interviewed for my dissertation study. The title of my study is *Perceptions of African American Women Receiving Welfare in Advocating for Welfare Reform*. I would like to invite African American single mothers who are currently or have recently been receiving Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) to participate in my study. My goal is to interview 4 women to understand their lived experiences as TANF recipients and inquire about any involvement they might have had with welfare reform advocacy.

It is my hope that you will grant me permission to distribute my flyers at your facility to make contact with mothers to solicit their participation. I look forward to talking with you about this possibility. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Linda Scope

Appendix E: Recruitment Flyer

**Perceptions of African American Women Receiving Welfare regarding
Advocating for Welfare Reform**

Are you or someone you know an **African American single mother**, between the ages of 20 and 61, **and a TANF recipient**? If so, please consider participating in a confidential interview to share your experiences.

Participate in a confidential 60-90 minute in-person interview

Participation will be voluntary - No compensation will be offered.

Do you want to tell your story?

Contact the Researcher: Linda Scope, Walden University

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Appendix F: Resource List

Multiple Services

Call 211
Gives information on
Multiple Services

Virginia Williams Family
Resource Center Social
Services Organization
920-A Rhode Island Ave NE
(202) 526-0017

Catholic Charities
924 G Street, NW
Washington, DC 20001
(202) 772-4300

Bread for the City
1640 Good Hope Road, SE
DC
202-561-8587

Anacostia Community
Service Center 1649 Good
Hope Rd. SE Washington,
DC 20020
202-610-5900

Southeast Family Center
2812 Pennsylvania Avenue,
SE Washington, DC 20020
(202) 338-3100

Calvary Women's Services
1217 Good Hope Road SE
Washington, DC 20020
(202) 678-2341

Food

Capital Area Food Bank
Address: 4900 Puerto Rico
Ave NE, Washington, DC
20017
Phone:(202) 644-9800

St. Phillip the Evangelist
Episcopal Church 2001 14th
Street, SE Washington, DC
20020 Phone: (202) 678-
4300.

Mental Health

DC Department of Mental
Health
64 New York Avenue, NE
Washington, DC 20002
Phone: (202) 673-7440

National Center for
Treatment of Anxiety &
Depression
2423 Pennsylvania Avenue,
NW Washington, DC 20037
Phone: (202) 363-3900

Domestic Violence

DC Safe
PO Box 7412
Washington, DC 20044
Phone: (202) 879-8740

DC Rape Crisis Center
PO Box 34125 Washington,
DC 20043 Phone: (202) 232-
0789 or Hotline (202) 333-
7273

Housing

SOME Main Offices
71 O Street, NW
Washington, DC 20001
202.797.8806
some@some.org

Calvary Shelter
928 5th Street, NW
Washington, DC 20001
Phone: (202) 783-6651

DC Housing Authority
1133 North Capitol Street, NE
Washington, DC 20002 Open
to DC Residents Phone: (202)
535-1000

Covenant House of
Washington 2001 Mississippi
Ave SE Washington, DC
20020
(202) 610-9600