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2008

Circles of Support: towards a liberatory pedagogy for community education

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Circles of Support: Towards a liberatory pedagogy for community education

by

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A dissertation submitted to the graduate faculty

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Major: Education

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Ames, Iowa

2008

UMI Number: 3307060

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Acknowledgements

First I would like to thank the community organizers, school officials, allies, and especially the participant families that shared their experiences with me. Their commitment to creating a more just society formed the backbone of this study.

I am indebted to the faculty, staff, and students at Dowling Catholic High School for their unwavering support. Thank you Dr. Jim Dowdle for encouraging me to pursue this degree; you've inspired me become a better teacher.

My dissertation committee was simply amazing. I want to specifically thank Katherine Richardson Bruna for her friendship as well as for all our conversations about negotiating our postmodern selves, Beth Herbel-Eisenmann for introducing me to discourse analysis in a way that helped me make sense of the complex interactions I observed at weekly meetings, and to Leslie Rebecca Bloom for never lowering her expectations. Leslie not only taught me about how to conduct good qualitative research, she taught me about what it means to stand for social justice. For that I am eternally grateful.

I would not have completed this dissertation without the love and support of my family. Mom and dad, thank you for always believing in me and loving me unconditionally. Perhaps my biggest fan and steadfast supporter is my grandmother, Laura Timm. We made it grandma! I wish Grandpa could have read this, but I know he's with me and proud.

Finally, and I saved the best for last, thank you to my wonderful wife and partner Andrea. No one in this world has taught me more about justice, love, peace, and happiness than you. I am a better father and human being because I am fortunate enough to stand beside you. I dedicate this dissertation to my children, Bailey, Sydney, Gracey, and Lilly. The four of you are gold to me.

Chapter 1

Introduction

During the writing of this dissertation, Chris Gardner's rags to riches story became an Oscar Nominated major motion picture starring Will Smith, titled *The Pursuit of Happyness*. The movie depicts the Horatio Alger-like story of Chris Gardner and his young son, who, as a result of a series of unfortunate events, became homeless. Often sleeping in the men's restroom of the Bay Area Transit (BART) system in San Francisco, Gardner's hard work and never give up attitude helped him pull himself up by his bootstraps. In one powerful and dramatic scene from the movie, Chris Gardner, played by Will Smith, tells his son,

> Don't ever let someone tell you [that] you can't do something. Not even me. You got a dream, you gotta protect it. People can't do something themselves, [then] they wanna tell you that you can't do it. You want something? Go get it. Period.

Now a millionaire stockbroker and the founder and CEO of Gardner Rich & Co., Gardner told *USA Today*, "It's not just my story…it's the story of a lot of people who grew up and took a lot of crap--and decided, 'I'm going the other way'" (Brooks, 2006).

Despite being a feel-good story about how hard work, personal sacrifice, and determination made dreams come true, the story's message contradicted my own research. It made me think about the two dozen families I had come to know through Circles of Support (COS), a grassroots community program that sought to help families cope with living in and eventually escaping poverty. They worked hard, cared for their children, and hoped they too could live the American dream, but nonetheless struggled to avoid marginalization, hunger, and homelessness. Seeing *The Pursuit of Happyness* helped remind me that mainstream

America missed the point about poverty. For two years I had been building community and making friendships with families who defied everything mainstream society and the dominant discourse said about the poor: they did not lack personal responsibility, they worked hard, and they desired self-sufficiency.

Stories like Chris Gardner's are presented as exemplars, reminding us that if you work hard enough you can make it. Stories like Gardner's, however, are the exception, not the rule. The means are not the exception: there are millions of hard-working people living in poverty doing everything they can to get ahead. The ends, however, are the exception. Working hard does not always, or even usually, bring family sustainability (Hawkins, 2005; Rank, 2001, 2004). While the language of welfare reform legislation and the images immortalized on the big screen lead us to believe that poor people working hard are the exception, but the success of those who do is the rule, I watched two dozen families for three years struggle to provide for their families. Not one family left poverty.

Seeing *The Pursuit of Happyness* influenced the way I approached writing this dissertation. It not only compelled me work harder to clearly articulate the ways families living in poverty defied dominant stereotypes and generalizations, it also helped me re-focus on the unique relationship between COS and the local public school district. School-community partnerships, like COS, serve as important examples of community education with the potential to help families leave poverty, improve their children's academic achievement, and challenge the dominant myths of the poor while inspiring communities to take collective social action.

<div align="center">~</div>

The pressure to create meaningful and effective school-community partnerships is greater than ever. Confronting the federal government's decision to absolve itself from directly providing aid to the poor, culminating in the 1996 enactment of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act (PL 104-193 or PRWORA), local communities are now challenged with organizing in ways to both educate about and combat poverty.

Public schools are facing their own struggle against privatization, as the unfunded mandates of No Child Left Behind (NCLB), enacted in 2001, threaten to close them down in favor of charter schools if they did not meet the legislation's proficiency requirements. Meeting the federal government's unfunded dictates to demonstrate accountability, public school districts are struggling to help their marginalized student populations meet proficiency. As a result, recent school-community collaborations are re-defining community education in the United States.

Most American school-community partnerships are representative of liberal models of community education, resting on the supposition that community collaboration with local public schools will improve communication and more easily identify student needs (Epstein, 2004). These partnerships, reflecting public education in general, operate on the assumption that working with and within existing institutional structures will foster the development of skills and abilities necessary for school success and eventual economic self-sufficiency (Brantlinger, 2003; Brookfield, 1985; Mansfield, 1992).

There are, however, grassroots community based organizations (CBO) representing liberating models for community education, that recognize how advanced capitalist countries, such as the United States, are structured in ways meant to ensure class inequality (Johnson, 1992; McLaren and Farahmandpur, 2005; Rank, 2001, 2004). Liberating models of

community education contend that working within existing institutional structures, without simultaneously organizing to change them, only perpetuates class inequality.

This study describes a community-school partnership that represented the merging of a liberal institution and a liberating CBO. In the fall of 2003 Circles of Support (COS), a grassroots CBO dedicated to eliminating the structural barriers that stop families from leaving poverty, established a formal partnership with the Walden Public School System (WPSS). Although COS represented a liberating model of community education, the WPSS approached education from the liberal model. Both organizations shared a common goal: helping children avoid the marginalization of poverty. The means to achieve that goal, however, were in constant conflict. Because public school systems often perpetuate inequality and reproduce the existing social structure, the WPSS represented one of the institutional structures liberating models like COS seek to change (Brantlinger, 2003; Bourdieu, 1989; Willis, 1977). Could the tension reflected in these two organization's seemingly paradoxical means be productive? Would the WPSS' eventual assumption of the management of COS, signaling the end of the collaboration, also represent the end of any structural critique?

PRWORA

The passage of PRWORA both legitimated a thirty-year war on the poor and perpetuated an erroneous framework for understanding poverty. Affirming the prevailing notions that the poor were freeloaders abusing the system, PRWORA effectively allowed the government to absolve itself from directly aiding the poor by making states bear the responsibility through the implementation of under-funded block grants, or Temporary Aid to Needy Families (TANF). The lack of federal responsibility for the poor, in addition to the

harsh federal guidelines and penalties that regulate TANF grants, led CBOs to advocate for those suffering in this war on the poor. Occurring concurrently, NCLB attempted make public school systems nationwide more accountable. At first glance you might think that I have inadvertently and erroneously linked a bill aimed to end welfare through downsizing the federal government's role with an education bill that seemingly steps up the government's role in regulating the public school system. In fact for the purposes of this study these two bills and the dominant notions of poverty on which they operate are inextricably linked.

This study investigates what it looked like when a CBO operating in post-welfare reform America collaborated with a public school system to both help families leave poverty and ensure their children's success in school. While the CBO stepped in to help families living in poverty as a direct result of PRWORA's devolution of government responsibility, the public school system was attempting to meet NCLB's unfunded mandates aimed to reduce the achievement gap, improve standardized test scores, and achieve 100% graduation rates. Given that social class directly impacts standardized test scores and graduation rates, this link is not a stretch (Maylone, 2002).

When the federal government fails to provide adequate safety nets for those living in poverty, local communities are forced to bear the responsibility. This study details a partnership between two organizations, one private and one public, collaborating in a fascinating partnership with the greater community to aid families living in poverty.

Legislating the Dominant Discourse

Rather than initiating marginalizing stereotypes and caricatures, PRWORA actually represented the manifestation of dominant views surrounding the poor, referred to here as the dominant discourse. In the context of this study, discourse will mean "a socially accepted

association among ways of using language, of thinking, and of acting that can be used to identify oneself as a member of a socially meaningful group or 'social network'" (Gee, 2001, p. 1). Gee (2001) demonstrates how "Discourses are inherently 'ideological'" and "are resistant to internal criticism and self-scrutiny" (p. 2). Because "discourses are intimately related to the distribution of social power and hierarchical structure in a society," controlling certain discourses can result in power or status for those who define them, thus making them dominant (p. 2.). By defining certain discourses as being preferable, those in positions of power can also "marginalize values and viewpoints central to other discourses" (p. 2). Historically, the dominant discourse has characterized poverty as a personal choice and described the poor as lacking personal responsibility, individual initiative, and proper morals and values (Katz, 1995). PRWORA represented the formal legislation of the dominant discourse, complete with punishment for the individuals and states that did not comply with its mandates.

A number of important studies, while depicting the negative consequences of welfare reform, cast their net even more broadly to critique the dominant discourse surrounding class in America. For example, critical analyses of PRWORA's language and implementation demonstrate the manner in which it harms and disables women's citizenship (Mink, 1998), blames the poor without ever having to say so (Schram, 1995, 2000, 2006), assumes people in poverty are broken and need fixing (Cruikshank, 1999; Sandlin, 2003), and ignores the systemic barriers that often prevent people from becoming self-sufficient (Bloom, 2001; Bloom and Kilgore, 2003a, 2003b; Rank, 2001, 2004). In two vitally important scholarly pieces, Schram (2000) and Mink (1998) demonstrate how imperative and productive a deconstruction of dominant welfare discourse can be, uncovering the manners in which

welfare reform violates the constitution and constructs poverty as a medical malady without ever directly saying so. It is within this environment that private CBOs attempt to help the poor meet the demands of the post-welfare state.

Community Based Organizations pick up the slack

Promoting the goals of devolution and privatization, TANF allows states to privatize social services by directing funds to private organizations. This has allowed states to pay private, non-profit, CBOs as subcontractors to help families living in poverty cope with the mandates of PRWORA. As a result, non-profit, grassroots CBOs "have become critical sites for a range of supportive services for families leaving welfare across the United States" (Bloom, 2005, p. 2). While many older CBOs were forced to alter their structure and organization to cope with their new responsibilities, new CBOs emerged for the specific purpose of coping with welfare reform (Bischoff & Reisch, 2000; Reisch and Sommerfeld, 2003).

CBOs currently deliver "the majority of state-funded direct services to citizens" (Marwell, 2004, p. 266). Representative of this larger trend towards privatization, organizations like COS worked to create lasting networks of social support that fostered partnerships between government, for profit, and non-profit entities (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988; Defillipis, 2001; Dika and Singh, 2002; Portes, 1998). Additionally, CBOs attempted to foster the acquisition of both the cultural and economic capital necessary for families living in poverty to achieve and maintain family sustainability and simultaneously advocate for structural change (Bloom, 2001; Hawkins, 2005). COS, while still representative of CBOs nationwide, was remarkably unique in that it created a formal partnership with a local public schools system.

School/Community Collaboration

While CBOs organized to advocate and build community for families living in poverty, educational researchers have demonstrated the increasing importance of school, family, and community partnerships to increase student attendance, close the achievement gap, and improve graduation rates. Epstein (2004), Director of the Center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships and of the National Network of Partnership Schools (NNPS) at Johns Hopkins University, contends all schools need to create an organized planned partnership program that creates an environment which encourages families to become actively involved and contribute to their student's academic success. According to Epstein, these partnership programs must recognize that "students learn and grow at home, at school, and in their communities, and they are influenced and assisted by their families, teachers, principals, and others in the community" (p. 20).

Given that NCLB requires schools to have detailed plans for family and community involvement, supporting the law's emphasis on student achievement, schools and communities are forced to find effective ways to foster this collaboration. The National Network of Partnership Schools advocates six types of involvement that can help establish and strengthen a comprehensive program of school, family, and community partnership (Epstein, 2002). The six types of involvement are parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and collaborating with the community (Epstein, 2004, p. 22).

COS, in its collaboration with the Walden Public School System (WPSS), demonstrated an interesting way of going beyond merely individually addressing each of the

six types of involvement advocated by the NNPS by creating a partnership that addressed them all simultaneously. Research demonstrates that there is a direct correlation between student achievement on standardized tests and socioeconomic status. Research has also demonstrated that public policies centered on reducing child poverty do more to increase student achievement than "high stakes testing and accountability" (Maylone, 2002, p. 31). COS recognized that in order to effectively help families leave poverty, let alone improve academic achievement, attendance and graduation rates for their children, the systemic barriers themselves must be addressed and eliminated.

Circles of Support

In many ways COS represented a new and innovative example of community education, where an entire community collaborated to improve the future of not only children in schools, but their families at home. In many respects COS embodied the liberating tradition of community education. As Allen and Martin (1992) explain, liberating community education is:

> [Community] education about power which identifies and analyses structural inequalities, which develops the skills of exercising power, which enhances the peaceful resolution of differences and which recognizes the rights of citizens to equality of respect and treatment. (p. 147)

The primary method employed by COS was to partner a family living in poverty with three middle or upper class allies. Each ally served a specific function as either a financial, academic, or community-building ally. Community organizers hoped these cross class relationships would reduce the social isolation of poverty, help participant families acquire useful skills, and build useful social networks that would eventually, as co-founder Scott

Miller said, "End poverty in Iowa." Whether or not these cross-class relationships could actually end poverty in Iowa depended in part on the ways COS and the WPSS negotiated dominant and non-dominant discourses.

On Methodology

We are constantly bombarded with popular misrepresentations of the poor, whether it is *The Pursuit of Happyness* glorifying hard work and determination as the antidote to poverty, or the film *Good Will Hunting* depicting poor, working class kids as brutish thugs with the exceptional genius thrown in by chance (Brantlinger, 1999). These depictions don't just stereotype or misrepresent, they mask the social class inequality guaranteed by the globalization of free market capitalism (McLaren and Farahmandpur, 2005). When enacted into law, as they were with PRWORA, they act as the formal surveillance and punishment of some of America's most marginalized populations.

Desiring to illuminate the tension that exists between these popular or legislated representations of the poor and the actual lived experiences of those actually marginalized by poverty, I worked from the intersection of a number of social science traditions. These traditions included qualitative research, critical ethnography (Lather, 1984, 1986, 1991), institutional ethnography (Smith, 1987), critical pedagogy (McLaren, 1999a, 1999b), Marxist humanism (Dunayevskaya, 1991), as well as Postcolonial and Postmodern/Poststructural theory (Bhabha, 1985, 1990, 1995; Foucault, 1994).

I approached the fieldwork as an ethnography because I sought to describe how a particular group of people "went about their everyday lives" (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw, 1995, p. 1). In this case, the people were families living in poverty, middle and upper class allies, community organizers, and school officials participating in a school-community

partnership. Because "ethnography is not simply the methodological expression of anthropological field trips…. [but] the expression of history, politics, culture, and the essence of being," I crafted this ethnography with the full disclosure of my ideological positionality (Clair in Clair, ed., 2003, p. 19). My primary assumption was that oppression, whether economic, social, or political, did indeed exist. Objective poverty, injustice, and inequality are real and much of it is systemic in nature. This ethnography, therefore, began as a critical ethnography informed by critical theory. I aligned myself with critical pedagogy, and agreed with McLaren's (2003) assertion, "Critical theorists begin with the premise that *men and women are essentially unfree and inhabit a world rife with contradictions and asymmetries of power and privilege*" (p. 69-70, italics in original).

Consequently, I entered this research already believing in the existence of asymmetries of power, most often the direct result of advanced industrial capitalism. A critical ethnography made sense, after all, since "The act of critique implies that, by thinking about and then acting upon the world, we are able to change our subjective interpretations and objective conditions" (Thomas, 2003, p. 47). A critical ethnography, I hoped, would allow me to demonstrate the manners in which a group of people made meaning in their natural environment, to uncover asymmetries of power as well as real and potential oppression, and to influence current thinking and policies regarding welfare reform and community education.

Shortly after I began fieldwork, I realized that I needed to extend my understandings beyond critical ethnography because although I began as just a participant observer, I eventually became a member of an organization that overtly and consciously collaborated with, and then was managed by, a public institution. Furthermore, my interest in social class

reproduction, the work of Bourdieu (1989, 1996, 2001), and my opposition to the culture of poverty thesis (Lewis, 1966; Payne, 2005) led me to problematize dominant and non-dominant discourses as they were negotiated by participants, allies, community organizers, and school officials. Essentially, I attempted to conduct a critical ethnography of an institution, in the spirit of qualitative researchers like Smith (1987), by making the every day world of those involved in COS problematic and "Not just describing, but using the everyday experiences of individuals to see how local organizations of the every day world are connected with relations of ruling" (Smith, 1987, pgs. 157-161). Despite my commitment to critical institutional ethnography, I nonetheless struggled with, and was informed by, reflections on my own positionality and potential perpetuation of regimes of truth. At these moments I used Post-structural/Postmodern theorizations to inform and deepen my theorizations.

On Theory

Conducting a critical institutional ethnography allowed me to collect rich, thick, ethnographic descriptions and interview narratives. During analysis of the ethnographic and interview data, the primary theme that emerged related to the manner in which participants, allies, and community organizers negotiated the dominant discourse. Although I began analyzing this negotiation with the work of Bourdieu (1985, 1996, 2001), I eventually sought to build on, and challenge, existing theory and formulate new understandings through complex interpretations. Utilizing Bourdieu allowed me to contextualize the manners in which community organizers and allies attempted to help participant families become middle-class by transferring dominant social and cultural capital. Analyzing the ethnographic descriptions and interview data, however, uncovered the exchange of other,

non-dominant, forms of capital. Participant families within COS possessed this capital, which was not recognized or valued by dominant society. With this knowledge, I relied on Carter (2003) and Yosso's (2005) critiques of Bourdieu to uncover the ways participants confronted community organizers and allies with their lived experiences in ways that challenged the dominant discourse. Because both during and outside the weekly meetings allies, participants, and community organizers exchanged dominant *and* non-dominant forms of capital, I contend that a liminal, Third Space existed in which a new form of capital emerged. Delpit (1992, 2008) has similarly problematized this Third Space, one between dominant and non-dominant understandings, although without the direct link to cultural or social capital. Thus, I take Bourdieu, Carter, and Yosso a step further, construct a bridge to Delpit's work, and contend that while negotiating the dominant and non-dominant, a new, liberatory capital, emerged.

On Method

All of the names in this dissertation, with the exception of COS' co-founders Scott Miller and Lois Smidt, are pseudonyms. Because Scott has initiated the circle's concept in more than 35 communities nation-wide, and because neither he nor Lois wanted to remain anonymous, they were not given pseudonyms (www.movethemountain.org). Pseudonyms were also used for the city, and the collaborating school district, in which COS functioned.

COS operated in the Midwestern, urban municipality of Walden, with a city population of 200,000 and a greater metro population of 500,000. Although the program's middle or upper-class volunteers came from all over the city and surrounding metro suburbs, COS relied on school social workers in two neighborhood elementary schools, Washington and Lincoln, to identify and recruit participant families. These elementary schools, located

just north of downtown Walden, served an ethnically diverse population with high unemployment and poverty rates. For example, although 63 percent of the Walden Public School System's (WPSS) 30,683 students were Caucasian, 67.2 percent of Washington and Lincoln's students were ethnic minorities. Additionally, 93.19 percent of Washington and Lincoln's students qualified for free or reduced lunches compared to 55.5 percent district wide. This neighborhood became COS' home due to its high poverty rates and because it was named a *Making Connections* neighborhood by the Annie E. Casey foundation, one of COS' institutional funders.

The foundation of this study rests on three years of fieldwork conducted between 2003 and 2007 at COS' weekly meetings, multiple ally training sessions, ally and participant focus groups, and more than a dozen formal and informal interviews with participants, allies, community organizers, and school officials. Informed by Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw's (1995) implications for ethnographic and participatory research, I took detailed field notes focusing on "indigenous meanings and concerns of the people under study" (p. 11). Immediately following each meeting, focus group, training, or interview, I wrote my personal reflections in a journal, believing it is "critical for ethnographers to document her own activities, circumstances, and emotional responses as these factors shape process of observing and recording others' lives" (p. 11). Equally as important as the three years of fieldwork were seventeen formal interviews with school officials, community organizers, allies, and participant families. In addition to dozens of informal, unstructured interviews, I deliberately identified two specific participant families and their allies and conducted lengthy formal interviews. The narrative data from these interviews comprise the majority of Chapter 7, where I describe two specific circles of support. My reflective journals, field notes, and

interview narratives, along with other artifacts that included electronic correspondence,

formed the bulk of the data I relied on for analysis.

Organization of the Chapters

My goal in writing this dissertation is to describe a unique attempt at community

education. I attempt to elucidate what it looked like when a grassroots, non-profit CBO

aimed at eliminating poverty partnered with a public school system seeking to improve

marginalized student's academic achievement. Few researchers have addressed emerging

partnerships such as this, particularly how the manners in which public and private

collaborations change the nature of the organizations themselves (Johnson, 1998; Reisch and

Sommerfeld, 2003). In order to present the themes that emerged thoughtfully and coherently,

I organized two general sections followed by a conclusion. The first section is dedicated to

describing how PRWORA reflected and perpetuated the dominant discourse, the history of

the partnership between COS and the WPSS, and how the collaboration functioned. The

second section analyzes how this partnership impacted families living in poverty and

operated as a form of community education. Finally, in the conclusion, I encourage

educators to avoid utilizing prescriptions for helping low-income students that are rooted in

notions of a culture of poverty, provide reflections on my research, and restate my attempt to

build on the theorizations of Bourdieu (1985), Carter (2003), and Yosso (2005).

In Part One, Chapter 2, I recount the history of welfare reform, which culminated in

1996 with the passage of PRWORA, in order to establish the context in which COS

originated. Moving away from PRWORA as a piece of federal legislation, I deconstruct the

language of Iowa's TANF bill, demonstrating how the dominant views of poverty have been

institutionalized and enacted at the state level, especially given that COS' participant families

receiving subsidies were bound by TANF's regulations. Evaluating the marginalizing potential of the legislation's mandates, therefore, helps to establish the context in which the collaboration operated.

Chapter 3 traces the first three years of the collaboration, describing the formation of this partnership and how two distinct phases evolved. Some of the questions I address are: Where did the concept for COS come from? How did the WPSS get involved? What was the philosophy on which both partners operated? For example, in phase one of COS, from the inception of the program in the fall of 2003 to May of 2005, the WPSS played an important role in linking participating families with the school system and formal human services, but COS was independently operated and funded. During phase two, from June 2005 until the fall of 2007, the WPSS took over management and fiscal responsibility for COS. Why did this change occur and how did it impact the families participating in the program?

The purpose of Chapter 4 is to begin elucidating the tension that exists between organizations that work to eliminate institutional barriers that perpetuate injustice and equality, while simultaneously working with and within those very institutions. I rely on community education literature to illuminate the differences between community education that is liberatory and works to eliminate systemic failings, and community education that is liberal and works within the current paradigm. I contend COS, on a programmatic level, constantly negotiated this tension during the first phase of its operation. I also argue that while COS navigated this tension, its participants were confronted with working for systemic change and concurrently being "taught" the hidden rules of the middle class (Payne, 2005).

The first chapter in Part Two, Chapter 5 is an ethnographic description of COS' weekly meetings. Weekly meetings played an integral role for COS: participants and allies came together to build community and organize for collective structural change. During the first phase of operation, between November 2004 and July 2006, each COS meeting focused on one of four themes: finances, academics, community building, or structural change. I chose, therefore, to provide an ethnographic description of each of the four types of weekly meetings.

In Chapter 6, I analyze the themes that emerged when analyzing the ethnography of the weekly meetings. Chapter 6 is split into three analytic sections. In the first I examine how dominant and non-dominant cultural capital was transmitted during the educational portion of the meetings and how this transmission fostered skills development, empowerment, and structural critique. I then seek to understand if and how the negative discourses of PRWORA were mobilized in the meetings and what relationship social and cultural capital transmission played in this mobilization. Finally, I analyze the real and potential liminal space created in the meetings that valued and encouraged the creation of a new, liberatory form of cultural capital.

Through the careful recounting of eight formal interviews, two specific circles of support are described in Chapter 7. The first half of the chapter describes Elizabeth and her three allies, Richard, Steven, and Mary. Elizabeth, a single mother of two teenage boys, was one of the first participants to join the program. Elizabeth's story is vital because she reached PRWORA's five-year eligibility cliffs. No longer collecting cash assistance, Elizabeth worked more than 40 hours a week but still could not meet her family's basic needs. The second half of the chapter describes Amy and Mike Johnson and their allies,

Erin, Lori, and Thomas. The Johnson's, a married couple with four children under the age of 13, had also been a part of the program since its inception. The Johnson's story is important because, according to the dominant poverty discourse, they should not have been poor. Mike and Amy were married, both employed, did not collect welfare, yet still lived in poverty.

In Chapter 8, I present analyses of the two circles' interviews. The first analytic section describes how both participant families defied the dominant discourse upon which PRWORA rests. I then analyze how each participant family's relationship with their allies helped them move closer to leaving poverty. Finally, I interrogate the manners in which these individual circles served COS' goal of community education.

I conclude this study in three parts. In the first part, I return to the community education models described in Chapter 4 and explain how COS, after the WPSS took over management, no longer reflected liberating community education. Additionally, I also address the tension between becoming middle-class and working for structural change, discussed in Chapters 6 and 8, and analyze how the emphasis on structural change diminished after the change in management. The new management's reliance on the work of Ruby Payne (2005), I contend, disrupted the goal of structural change and perpetuated the dominant discourse.

A discussion and critique of Ruby Payne's work is particularly important at this historical moment, as she has taken the national educational community by storm. Her aha! Process, Inc. consultants deliver thousands of trainings each year to teachers, administrators, and school social workers. In these trainings, her *A Framework for Understanding Poverty* is used to help educators uncover what Payne refers to as the "hidden rules of poverty." If educators know the hidden rules of poverty, Payne claims, they can help low-income

students overcome the cognitive, social, and intellectual deficits caused by living in a culture of poverty. I agree with Bohn (2007, 2007), Gorski (2006), and Osei-Kofi (2005), whose critiques of Payne demonstrate the manners in which her work operates on false assumptions and perpetuates demeaning, exaggerated, and marginalizing caricatures of the poor.

The second section of the conclusion includes my own reflections on qualitative research methodologies, becoming an ally in COS, and a reflexive statement about the methodological journey represented by this research. Finally, the third part of the conclusion briefly addresses the relevance of this study for those interested in community education and school-community partnerships.

PART ONE

Welfare Reform, Circles of Support, and Community Education

The goal of Part One is to establish a context to support later analyses. Circles of Support (COS) represented a unique attempt at community education and operated within the climate of welfare reform. Therefore, Chapter 2 describes the mandates of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) of 1996, how the state of Iowa utilizes its Temporary Aid to Needy Families (TANF) block grants, and how welfare reform legislation represents the institutionalization of the dominant poverty discourse. By uncovering the ways PRWORA and TANF reflect and perpetuate the false, demeaning, and marginalizing stereotypes of the poor, I aim to demonstrate the tension that existed between the dominant discourse and the lived experiences of COS' participants.

Chapter 3 is a biography of COS' collaboration with the Walden Public School System (WPSS), and explains how the collaboration originated and functioned. This partnership represented the collaboration of a private, grassroots, community based organization (CBO) and a public school system. As a result, the philosophical foundations of each organization often conflicted. Chapter 4 describes community education models in order to demonstrate how the critical goals of each organization reflected a different approach to community education. These competing goals, I contend, placed low-income families between accepting the dominant paradigm and becoming middle-class, and challenging the dominant paradigm and organizing for structural change.

Chapter 2

Hidden in Plain Sight: Welfare Reform and the Dominant Discourse

> One centerpiece of a working-class pedagogy is engaging in ideology critique
> in light of understanding the unseen grammar of commodity logic that serves
> as the regulatory lexicon of everyday life. Such a pedagogy involves struggle
> over the production of meaning, a struggle that would enable marginalized
> social groups to name, identify, and take initial steps to transform the sources
> of their oppression and exploitation

> -McLaren and Farahmandpur, 2005, p. 178

As a result of blatant, systematic, and malicious attacks on public assistance in recent

years, both liberal and conservative assaults have nearly achieved their goal: the complete

devolution of the public welfare system. This attack culminated with the passage of the

Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (PRWORA, PL

104-193), and as a result the federal government no longer takes direct public responsibility

for providing aid to some of America's most vulnerable citizens. Individual states are instead

allotted block grants, or Temporary Aid to Needy Families (TANF), whereby they administer

welfare within the guidelines established by PRWORA. The most punitive anti-welfare

legislation in recent decades, essentially signaling the end of welfare, PRWORA represents

the manifestation of thirty years of dominant views of the poor.

The purposes of this chapter are to explicate the federal social policy enacted through

PRWORA, describe how the state of Iowa implements its mandates, and analyze the

dominant discourses that perpetuate the current demeaning public image of the poor. This

explication and analysis is vital given that the focus of this study, the collaboration between

Circles of Support (COS) and the Walden Public School System (WPSS), represented a local

community's attempt to help the poor in light of PRWORA's mandates. This chapter will, therefore, briefly illustrate exactly what the federal government requires in order for states to receive aid. Some of the questions I will address regarding the federal legislation include: What exactly does PRWORA mandate? How is it enacted through TANF? Regarding local legislation, I address some of the following questions: What has the Iowa done to meet TANF's requirements and how has the state utilized TANF's limited flexibility provisions? Furthermore, linking both federal and state implications, how does the 2005 Deficit Reduction Act (DRA) re-authorizing TANF affect states' ability to implement its policies?

Given that one of the purposes of this study is to elucidate and expose the tension between organizing to eliminate structural failings and simultaneously helping families living in poverty become middle-class, this chapter will also reveal the manners in which PRWORA represents a manifestation of dominant society's view of the poor. One central question I will address from a macro perspective includes what *is* the dominant discourse and how did it become institutionalized through welfare reform legislation? Focusing on specific examples, how does Iowa's response, through TANF, actually perpetuate the dominant discourse and potentially do more harm than good? While this chapter centers on federal policy and how it is enacted at the state level, future chapters will demonstrate how these tensions are manifested in inter-personal interactions through close readings of ethnographic and interview data.

<div align="center">Welfare Reform Legislation</div>

At the Federal Level: PRWORA and TANF

In 1996 Congress passed and President Clinton signed into law PRWORA, eliminating the 1935 Social Security Act's federal cash assistance program, Aid to Families

with Dependent Children (AFDC). PRWORA replaced AFDC with TANF, a state-level

block grant program administered by the Office of Family Assistance (OFA). The version of

the bill that went to the president's desk, H.R. 3734, presented Congress's assertions about

the causes of poverty and outlined TANF's requirements, which states like Iowa must follow

to receive its block grants.

According to Congress's assumptions about poverty, presented in the first pages of

H.R. 3734, "Marriage is the foundation of a successful society…an essential institution of a

successful society which promotes the interest of children…[and] promotion of responsible

fatherhood and motherhood is integral to a successful child rearing and the well-being of

children" (Congressional Record, 1996, H.R. 3734). Their "findings" section asserts that the

causes of poverty began with the high frequency of out of wedlock pregnancies and births,

claiming that historically the number of children receiving AFDC correlated directly with the

number of children born out of wedlock. Furthermore, H.R. 3734 claims that single

parenthood leads to increases in juvenile delinquency, truancy, and the likelihood children

would fail in school. As a result, PRWORA states, "In light of this demonstration of the

crisis of our nation, it is the sense of the Congress that prevention of out-of-wedlock

pregnancy and reduction in out-of-wedlock birth are very important Government interests

and this policy…. is intended to address the crisis" (Congressional Record, 1996, H.R. 3734,

Sec. 101).

Seeking to address these claims, Section 401 of H.R. 3734 calls for the creation of

TANF, which has four stated purposes worth quoting in their entirety:

Provide assistance to needy families so that children may be cared for in their own

homes or in the home of relatives; end the dependence of needy parents on

government benefits by promoting job preparation, work, and marriage; prevent and

reduce the incidence of out-of-wedlock pregnancies and establish annual numerical

goals for preventing and reducing the incidence of these pregnancies; and encourage

the formation and maintenance of two-parent families. (Congressional Record, 1996,

H.R. 3734, Sec. 401)

Subsequently, emphasizing work, personal responsibility, time limits on cash assistance, and

the formation of two-parent households became PRWORA's stated objectives.

In order to receive yearly TANF block grants, a state must document how it intends to

address PRWORA's objectives and comply with its provisions, which include creating

programs designed to "provide assistance to needy families with (or expecting) children and

providing parents with job preparation, work, and support services" (Congressional Record,

1996, H.R. 3734, Sec. 401). Reflecting PRWORA's work-first philosophy, TANF's

requirements demand that recipients work as soon as they are "job ready" or no later than

twenty-four months after first receiving assistance. As of 2005, to avoid the reduction of a

state's block grant, 50 percent of all single parent family cases and 90 percent of all two-

parent family cases must be participating in work activities. Single parents must participate

in work activities at least 30 hours per week while two-parent families must work between

35-55 hours per week depending on the family's specific circumstances. Core work

activities, as defined by TANF, include unsubsidized or subsidized employment, on-the-job

training, work experience, community service, job searching not to exceed six total weeks

and no more than four consecutive weeks, vocational training not to exceed twelve months,

job skills training related to work, satisfactory secondary school attendance, and providing

child care services to people participating in community service ("TANF Fact Sheet," 2004, para. 8).

Addressing the theme of time-limiting cash assistance, under TANF, families are not allowed to receive cash assistance for more than sixty months, although states are allowed to shorten the time limit at their discretion. States may extend assistance, however, beyond sixty months, although to no more than 20 percent of its caseload. States choosing to extend assistance beyond sixty months, disregarding the 20 percent rule, must do so using state-only funds ("TANF Fact Sheet," 2004, para. 10).

TANF also requires a state to indicate whether and how it intends to provide aid under the program to those who are not citizens of the United States, to operate a child support enforcement program, a foster care and adoption assistance program, and to delineate the manner in which the state will prove assistance to "Indian Tribes" within its borders (Congressional Record, 1996, H.R. 3734, Sec. 401). Finally, each state has a Maintenance of Effort Requirement (MOE), whereby the state must annually contribute funds of its own in ways consistent with TANF's mandates.

While states are required to meet TANF's guidelines or risk financial penalties, they are also allowed "limited flexibility" in implementing some of its policies. For example, states may define eligibility rules, such as the maximum assets an applicant may have in order to receive assistance and whether or not the state will disregard a percentage of earned income when defining eligibility. States also set their own time limits for aid not exceeding sixty months, loosely interpret "work activities" as defined by TANF, decide whether or not to establish a family cap, and determine exceptions to the minimum hourly work

requirements such as being ill or incapacitated, pregnant, elderly, or caring for a young child This limited flexibility, however, was recently restricted (Rowe and Giannarelli, 2006, p. 5).

The Deficit Reduction Act of 2005 (DFA) re-authorized TANF through 2010 with "a renewed focus on work, program integrity and strengthening families through healthy marriage promotion and responsible fatherhood" ("Reauthorization of TANF," 2006). According to the DRA, the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) must address the issue of limited flexibility, which it did by publishing its interim final rule on 29 June 2006 maintaining much of TANF's original structure but specifically tightening the focus on work and state accountability. The DRA required HHS to specify what exactly constitutes a work activity, as "The flexibility provided to States to define work activities for themselves has led to inconsistent definitions across States as well as inconsistent measurement of work participation" ("Reauthorization of TANF," 2006). As a result HHS painstakingly defined each of the core work activities initially outlined by PRWORA, thus preventing states from flexibly interpreting them. Additionally, HHS strengthened state accountability by requiring that all work activities be supervised in order to count towards the participation rate, called "Work Verification Plans," and implemented a 1 to 5 percent reduction in a state's grant for non-compliance (Parrott, Schott, & Sweeney, 2007). Given the recentness of these changes, the impacts on state implementation have yet to be measured.

At the State Level: FIP and PROMISE JOBS

Important welfare reform in Iowa began in 1993 when the state legislature allowed the Iowa Department of Human Services (DHS) to seek and obtain federal waivers from AFDC to considerably reform its welfare system. In fact, few changes were necessary in

Iowa with the passage of PRWORA in 1996, as many of them were placed in effect by 1993 (State of Iowa, 2004). Iowa's state welfare program, the Family Investment Plan (FIP), addresses TANF's mandates by providing cash assistance to low-income families to help them become "self-supporting." Reflecting PRWORA's heavy emphasis on work, personal responsibility, and two-parent households, Iowa's TANF Plan (2004) lists the following as FIP's goals and objectives:

> Provide an incentive to work and make work pay to lead families to self-sufficiency; Encourage family stability and the formation of families; Provide clients with the opportunity and expectation to take personal responsibility to become self-sufficient and also provide them with the necessary tools to move out of poverty; Provide for consequences for those who do not comply with program requirements; Empower clients to take advantage of options by making real choices; Remove policies that present barriers to families reaching economic independence. (State of Iowa, 2004)

In order to receive FIP an applicant must first complete a Family Investment Agreement (FIA), which is a contract between the Iowa Department of Human Services (DHS) and the family intended to address the family's needs, coordinate DHS services, and decide the "actions the family will take in the time frame to be met by the family to attain self-sufficiency" (State of Iowa, 2004). While Iowa's FIP program fulfills all of the federal mandates, the manner in which it is implemented also reflects Iowa's use of limited flexibility. For example, while the length of time a family receives FIP is determined by individual family circumstances, as outlined in the FIA, Iowa recognizes the federally mandated sixty-month limit on cash assistance. Families may receive a hardship extension, however, past sixty months, if they meet the hardship criteria as determined by the state.

Although some states extend assistance to children of individuals who reach their eligibility limits, Iowa does not (State of Iowa, 2004).

Furthermore, upon application Iowa does not require candidates to be actively applying for jobs, disregards 20 percent of current gross earnings and the value of one vehicle when determining benefits, and allows an asset level for eligibility of $2000 upon application and $5000 to continue receiving benefits. Additionally, Iowa has not implemented a family cap that penalizes families for having additional children while collecting aid, although approximately one-half of states have (Rowe and Giannarelli, 2006, p. 5). Families that do not complete and sign an FIA or do not comply with its requirements are considered choosing the Limited Benefit Plan (LBP), which results in complete termination of cash benefits for the entire family until an FIA is signed. Subsequent instances of non-compliance result in a six-month termination of all benefits until an FIA is signed and twenty hours of employment and training activities are completed (Only 14 states have 100 percent reduction for first sanction). Finally, Iowa allows Individual Development Accounts (IDA) for those receiving assistance. The state limits IDA deposits to $50,000, some states have no limits, and matches 15-20 percent of the contribution. This money can be used for Post-secondary education, first home purchase, business capitalization, and medical expenses (State of Iowa, 2004; Rowe and Giannarelli, 2006).

In order to receive FIP, participants must fill out an FIA and cooperate with PROMISE JOBS, or Promoting Independence and Self-Sufficiency through Employment, a program that "provides work and training services for people in families eligible for FIP cash assistance" (Iowa Workforce Development, 2007, para.1). According to Iowa's TANF plan, PROMISE JOBS provides "employment, post-employment, and training activities." The

FIA requires that each adult and child older than sixteen not attending school full-time immediately participate in work activities after an orientation and assessment, although there are some exemptions such as single mothers with children under the age of six. Iowa also complies with federal TANF guidelines that require 50 percent of a states' single-parent caseload be engaged in work activities for a minimum of thirty hours a week, or 129 hours per month (State of Iowa, 2004).

PROMISE JOBS, in flexibly interpreting TANF's core work activities, requires its participants to participate in one of the following activities: full or part-time employment, job seeking skills training or individual job search, classroom training, family development programs, work experience placement, on-the-job training, unpaid community service, parenting skills training, mentoring program services, post-employment services, and family planning counseling services (State of Iowa, 2004). Other services and activities PROMISE JOBS provides are life skills workshops, job seeking workshops, job search, work experience programs, monitored employment, post-secondary classroom training, family development services, family planning services, entrepreneurial training, and basic education including assistance with completing high school, Graduate Equivalency Degree (GED), Adult Basic Education, and English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction (Iowa Workforce Development, 2007, para. 3).

Families receiving FIP and identified as having "multiple or severe barriers to self-sufficiency" are enrolled in the Family Development and Self-sufficiency program (FaDSS) (State of Iowa, 2004). This program, funded by the state as part of its MOE requirement, is designed to help "at-risk" families through "intense personal interaction with trained staff to move to emotional and economic independence" (Iowa Department of Human Rights, 2008,

para.1). Some of the barriers FaDSS attempts to address are domestic violence, sexual abuse,

child neglect, substance abuse, mental health issues, having a child with special needs, and

lacking a high school diploma/GED or literary skills (Iowa Department of Human Rights,

2008).

While PROMISE JOBS and FaDSS address TANF's statutory objective encouraging

work, Iowa administers a number of other state funded programs tackling TANF's other

objectives. Speaking to TANF's third statutory objective of reducing out-of-wedlock

pregnancies, Iowa administers programs for pregnancy prevention including services to at-

risk children, an adolescent pregnancy prevention program, and a family planning program,

all operated with MOE funds. Additionally, Iowa meets TANF's fourth statutory objective

of encouraging two-parent families through a Parental Responsibility Pilot Project and a

Parenting as a Contempt Alternative program (State of Iowa, 2004).

Thus Iowa's FIP plan represents the state's attempt to flexibly interpret TANF in

ways that help its recipients gain self-sufficiency. Restrictions on limited flexibility outlined

in TANF's 2005 re-authorization, however, should make this more difficult. Despite the

good intentions of Iowa's utilization of some limited flexibility, however, the plan enacts the

dominant discourse's emphasis on work, personal responsibility, and family formation.

Exactly how the dominant discourse marginalizes the poor, however, has yet to be

explicated.   If the dominant discourse surrounding the poor perpetuates false and

exaggerated stereotypes, then community organizations that advocate for the poor must

address the tension between complying with the law and empowering those marginalized by

it. In order to uncover the manner in which PRWORA misrepresents the poor, and how state

plans like FIP in fact perpetuates their marginalization and oppression, a closer examination of PRWORA's history along with a detailed reading of Iowa's policies is necessary.

Analysis

Legislating the Dominant Discourse: Where Did PRWORA Come From?

The passage of PRWORA represented the culmination of more than a decade of public debate on welfare between "business leaders, right-wind ideologues, centrist politicians, and liberal policy experts." By the mid-1980s neoconservatives had successfully placed public scrutiny on the poor, specifically articulating the need to "eliminate the socially unproductive 'dependency' of welfare mothers" (Maskovsky & Morgen, 2003, p.316).

In the modern era, beginning with President Ronald Reagan, the consistent message was that "welfare queens" cheat the country by wasting their huge government checks while depriving their children of food (Hancock, 2004; Mink, 1998c; Zucchino, 1997). Reagan's references to the welfare queen actually preceded his presidency; he first made the reference while battling Gerald Ford for the Republican presidential nomination in 1976 ("Welfare Queen," 1976). Later, he told the story of a typical "Chicago welfare queen" who had "eighty names, thirty addresses, twelve social security cards, and collected benefits for four nonexistent husbands" numerous times, including to members of foreign delegations (Cannon, 1991, p. 457). Former Indiana congressman Don Boys articulated this view, perhaps most disgustingly, when he said, "Many Welfare Mamas are, as the old-timers used to say, very 'fleshy,' sucking on cigarettes, with booze and soft drinks in the fridge, feeding their faces with fudge as they watch color TV" (Boys, 1985, para. 5). By the mid-1990 liberals and conservatives had established the bipartisan goal of restructuring welfare, with members of congress continuing their attack on the poor, like Representative John Mica (R-

Fl), arguing in 1995 that welfare recipients were "alligators," whose dependency is caused by the government excessively "feeding them" (quoted in Lindsey, 2003, p. 274).

No doubt influenced by the fact that 1996 was both a congressional and presidential election year, and on the heels of the massive victory by conservative republicans in the 1994 congressional elections President Clinton issued his infamous call to end welfare as we knew it (Mink & Solinger, 2003). Unsurprisingly, in 1996 Congress passed PRWORA and "dramatically altered the goals, objectives, and administrative basis of public assistance" (Maskovsky & Morgen, 2003, p. 316). Welfare reform thereby legislated the view that the poor lacked the qualities that apparently everyone else exhibited: the desire to work, proper morals and values, and the individual initiative and personal responsibility to pull themselves up by their bootstraps. Likening welfare receipt to various medical maladies, they ignored the structural barriers that most families face in their struggle to leave poverty (Fairclough, 2000; Schram, 2000).

The coalescence of this discourse was reflected in the 1994 congressional elections, where the Republican Party gained control of both chambers of congress for the first time in years. This election, in many ways a reaction to the perceived radical left-wing intentions of recently elected President Clinton's calls to reform the national health care system, was perhaps defined best by Newt Gingrich and the "Contract With America," which described welfare recipients as promiscuous, bad mothers, inherently lazy, and work averse (Schram, 2000). Schram (2000) asserts that the notion of contract in the Contract with America reinforced the view that those on welfare had not demonstrated the personal responsibility necessary to uphold their end of the "American" contract (Schram, 2000, p. 7). The only way that welfare recipients were allowed to be full citizens was if they were seen as personally

responsible, self-sufficient, and independent; otherwise, they were in violation of their contract as Americans and no longer worthy of governmental assistance. The Contract with America trapped welfare recipients in no win situations, where in order to be deemed personally responsible by the dominant paradigm, single mothers must work and risk neglecting their children, at which time they are again deemed personally irresponsible.

This dominant discourse created a social context that "reinforce[ed] the tendencies…to stigmatize, demonize, and even criminalize single mothers" (Schram, 2000, p. 29). In short, Welfare Reform encouraged the public to believe that since welfare recipients apparently lacked personal responsibility, they therefore needed to be under more strict control by the government through legislative means. As Ange-Marie Hancock's (2004) study demonstrates, the creation of the public identity of poor single mothers as welfare queens who lacked personal responsibility created a "politics of disgust" that made the passage of PRWORA not only acceptable, but necessary to correct the problems of the poor. What follows is a deconstruction of Iowa's FIP legislation, creating a backdrop for understanding the enacted dominant discourse that the philosophy of COS sought to challenge.

I contend that the dominant discourse, the widely held and legislated view that the poor lack personal responsibility while taking advantage of the rest of us, is in large part a constructed fabrication that absolves society from the responsibility of doing something about the real failures in our social, political, and economic system. The mandates of PRWORA concurrently require the poor to view themselves, and each other, in the same demeaning ways in order to receive aid. While the preceding section briefly outlined how the dominant poverty discourse was legislated, a closer reading of the manner in which it is

enacted at the state level exposes how the specific mandates subtly construct poverty as a personal deficiency and overemphasize work and personal responsibility while ignoring the structural barriers families faced in their struggle for economic security.

Conducting the Conduct of Others: Hidden in Plain Sight

The dominant discourse, upon which PRWORA rests, perpetuates false and demeaning caricatures of the poor. These caricatures, which I will later expose in the language of FIP, assert the poor lack personal responsibility, proper morals, a work ethic, and the ability to make good decisions. Exposing these stereotypes and false truths allow us to unmask the economic realities of modern global capitalism. For example, rather than recognizing the structural barriers created by a free market economy, such as the absence of living wages, lack of affordable childcare and low-income housing, the dominant discourse alternatively constructs personal responsibility in ways that blame the poor for what is the inevitable consequence of modern capitalism (Rank, 2004; McLaren & Farahmandpur, 2005). While the root of the issue remains the manner in which surplus labor is exploited and the negative consequences of the resulting alienation are ignored, modern liberal democratic states, and those who govern them, employ sophisticated strategies or techniques to not only conduct government, but to conduct the conduct of others in ways that mask and misrepresent these economic realities (McLaren & Farahmandpur, 2005; Foucault, 1994).

Foucault (1994), investigating the manners in which the "art of government" evolved in Europe between the 16th and 18th Centuries to include less overt, outwardly violent forms of control and oppression, identified certain methods or "technologies" by which governments rule. By meticulously analyzing the prison, hospital, mental institution, and school, Foucault exposed ways these in which these institutions used "objective"

classifications and defined knowledge of the criminal, the sick, or the insane. The purpose of "knowing" and classifying the criminal, for example, served the dual purpose of both justifying their imprisonment and teaching the criminal to know themselves as deviant in the hopes they would eventually exhibit self-control. Foucault referred to this dual function of classifying and in turn self-regulation as "governmentality" (p. 229). According to Dean (1999), "Putting these senses of 'self-conduct' together, government entails any attempt to shape with some degree of deliberation aspects of our behavior according to particular sets of norms and for a variety of ends" (p. 10).

In recent years this conduct and self-conduct has been manifested in calls for institutional "reform," which are often privatization movements in disguise. For example, Popkewitz (2004) conducts an analysis of the language of recent calls for school reform. Popkewitz, particularly interested in critiquing how standards-based mathematics educational policy for K-12 schools constructs students as "problem solvers," calls the ways school subjects are formed as a kind of "alchemy" (p. 4). Because students are not mathematicians, academic knowledge must be adapted to schooling through pedagogy. As Popkewitz (2004) explains, "The imagination of mathematics is translated into the imagination of a pedagogical psychology. The psychological inscriptions focus on the interior dispositions or the *soul* of the child, fabricating the problem-solving child as a particular human kind for pedagogical intervention" (p. 4). In this way pedagogy is not really about mathematics or the classroom, but instead "is a normalizing practice…[whose] psychologies are the mapping tools that prescribe parameters that student communication and teaching follow" (p. 13). As a result of this mapping students are labeled either "problem-solvers" or "disadvantaged" in some way if they are unable to demonstrate the prescribed skills.

Popkewitz's archeological methods, informed by Foucault, are particularly useful in a critique of PRWORA in how he exposes and describes the fictions "human kinds" and "fabrication." The child as a problem-solver is a particular human kind, as is the "disadvantaged" child, "because they are not merely terms but embody particular types of individualities or determinate classifications that have distinct chronological, physiological, and psychological characteristics administered by the school" (Popkewitz, 2004, p. 13). This human kind is actually a fabrication, after all, how can we know what a problem solver is if we do not establish parameters and characteristics to use in identifying them? More than just knowing what we are looking at, however, "one consequence is the production of kinds of people who are in need of salvation or rescue," and experts jump in with advice, or legislation, which "simultaneously produces those needs by comparing one child to another or to a norm" (p. 14). The resulting fabrication of the human kind becomes self-fulfilling.

By defining the problem-solving child, schools are able to sort and categorize students, where "an artificial order is created" (Popkewitz, 1998, p. 100). Welfare reform also embraces this creation of differences, and it "congeal[s] as human kinds," such as the deserving or undeserving poor or those who are personally responsible or those who are not (Katz, 1995; Quadagno, 1994). It is not that objective poverty does not exist, but rather the idea that the poor are morally corrupt and lack personal responsibility. Of course there may be shades at the end of either spectrum, but PWRORA and the dominant discourse operate in a Manichean fashion. In order to expose the false assumptions on which the categories rest, "what needs to be questioned are the base metals of the alchemy" (Popkewitz, 2004, p. 26). Like Popkewitz questioning the alchemy of school reform and the dangerous implications of

constructing children, we must question the assumptions upon which the poor are classified by PRWORA.

Some scholars have engaged in similar analyses of welfare reform, like Schram's (2000) analysis that exposes how the Contract with America constructs a particular notion of personal responsibility by portraying those who do not meet their standard as being socially deviant. This social deviance is explained by dominant society through the contention that a static culture of poverty exists. A view that originated in the 1960s, the culture of poverty approach describes the poor as helpless, morally corrupt, and dependent on welfare (Lewis, 1966). Because this dependency has permeated the culture of the poor, poverty can be eliminated only if the poor acquire middle-class culture. Forty years of scholarly research has soundly discredited the culture of poverty approach and exposed the manners in which it masks the structural failings that perpetuate poverty (Coward, Feagin, & Williams, 1974; Gould, 1999; Kincheloe and Steinberg, 2002; Rank, 2001, Seccombe, James, & Walters, 1998).

Additionally, Cruikshank (1999) demonstrates ways in which "technologies of citizenship" not only allow governing bodies to act upon us, but also encourage us to act on ourselves in ways that make governing easier. These analyses demonstrate how PRWORA, then, serves to define the poor as morally bankrupt due to their apparent lack of personal responsibility and failure to maintain two-parent households and then acts upon them, and conducts them, by forcing them to comply with its guidelines. PRWORA simultaneously works to encourage the poor to regulate themselves and conduct themselves according to its standards because in order to get aid, the poor must comply. Given the goal of PRWORA is to end welfare and not poverty, governmentality, in this sense, works to encourage the poor

to govern themselves off welfare by demonstrating personal responsibility. Since one can demonstrate personal responsibility and still remain in poverty, this discourse is not only false but also oppressive (Mink, 1998c; Schram, 2000).

Furthering and deepening these analyses, a closer reading of a state's specific TANF implementation is necessary. In what follows I will demonstrate how Iowa's implementation of TANF, through the Family Investment Plan (FIP), represents this dual conducting of conduct. This analysis is imperative because it shows "the practices of government in their complex and variable relations to the different ways in which 'truth' is produced in social, cultural, and political practices" (Dean, 1999, p. 18). The "truth" about the poor, as legislated in PRWORA and perpetuated within the belief in a culture of poverty, falsely represents the realities of being poor. This discourse, the dominant discourse, therefore acts to encourage both poor and non-poor to misrecognize the economic realities of modern, global capitalism.

Masking Structural Barriers

Iowa's FIP plan, as an extension of PRWORA, marginalizes the poor by positioning non-welfare recipients in relation to welfare recipients in stereotypic and demeaning ways. As much as saying what the poor are, the language of FIP says what the poor are not. In this way the language of FIP constructs our knowledge of the poor in particular ways for particular ends. As listed in the Iowa's 2004 TANF bill, Iowa's FIP goals and objectives are as follows [italics added]:

1. Provide an *incentive* to work and *make work pay* to lead families to *self-sufficiency*.

2. Encourage *family stability* and the *formation of families*.

3. Provide clients with the *opportunity* and *expectation* to take *personal responsibility* to *become self-sufficient* and also provide them with the necessary *tools* to move out of poverty.

4. Provide for *consequences* for those who do not *comply* with program requirements.

5. *Empower* clients to take advantage of options by making *real choices*.

6. Remove policies that present *barriers* to families reaching economic *independence*.

Governmentality often "involves some sort of attempt to deliberate on and to direct human conduct" (Dean, 1999, p. 11). The italicized words and phrases represent how the goals of FIP position welfare recipients in relation to non-welfare recipients, uncovering the formalization of the dominant discourse. This wording or phrasing represents the manner in which the poor are created as lacking or deficient in relation to the non-poor. This discourse represents not only a plan of action for those who wish to "help" the poor, it also becomes a plan of action for the poor themselves as welfare discourse and policy is constructed in ways that dichotomize and in turn align binary categories such as independent/dependent, healthy/unhealthy, deserving/undeserving. Phrases in the FIP goals such as "provide an incentive to work," "provide clients with the opportunity and expectation to take personal responsibility," "provide them with the necessary tools," and "making real choices" implies that those who need assistance lack these qualities. This language sets up a false binary whereby those who do not receive assistance are encouraged to view those who do as deficient. Through this kind of language and policy an identity for the poor is constructed, one that exists only in contrast to what is also constructed as desirable, like making real

choices, having the "right" tools, and being personally responsible. In turn this, and FIP's failure to recognize the structural barriers to leaving poverty, forces the poor to choose to view themselves as deficient and broken subjects in need of reform in order to achieve "healthy re-integration into mainstream society" (Iowa Department of Human Rights, 2008, para.1).

In addition to setting up false binaries, this language demonstrates an assumed moral superiority. Modern liberal democratic governments, like the United States, attempt to shape conduct through particular notions of morality, because "policies and practices of government, whether of national government or of other governing bodies, presume to know…what constitutes good virtuous, appropriate, responsible conduct of individuals and collectives" (Dean, 1999, p. 11-12). The language of Iowa's FIP goals and objectives assume this moral superiority when it mandates through policy the "formation of families and family stability (goal #2)," the claim that FIP recipients do not make "real choices (goal #5)," and the implication that they lack both the "incentive to work (goal #1)" and "personal responsibility (goal #3)." By denigrating the poor in this manner, defining what an appropriate family is and asserting that poor families are not stable, assuming the poor do not know what real choices are when in fact their choices are limited, as well as claiming they lack the personal responsibility and incentive to work guarantees the poor a position of deviance or inferiority. Through this process the "non-poor" builds his own store of moral superiority, which further distances him from an association with the poor, thus giving him more power and motivation to continue the cycle of oppression.

Not only is the process of arbitrarily creating these categories an act of power, as knowledge of the poor is constructed, it also legitimates discipline and punishment (Foucault,

1994). For example, the fourth FIP goal proposes consequences, which include a termination of benefits, for those who do not comply with the program's requirements. This goal reinforces the punitive approach of welfare reform, whereby the poor are first punished by a system structured in a way to reduce welfare but not poverty, and then punished again for not complying with the same system that defines them as deficient. This disciplining and punishing can eventually become self-legitimating, as the poor are assigned, and also construct, an identity according to the way they are positioned as subjects. Creating a self-fulfilling prophecy, dominant discourse recreates the problems it attacks while "simultaneously rationalizing how it allegedly solves those problems" (Schram, 2000).

Finally, FIP's fifth goal to "Empower clients to take advantage of options by making real choices" is an overt attempt to, instead of combating poverty, combat dependency (Schram, 2000). Here empowerment refers to a person having the ability to "make real choices." The poor are encouraged, therefore, to "empower" themselves by becoming independent and making real choices in ways deemed acceptable by the dominant paradigm. While empowerment could mean the recognition of systemic barriers to poverty alleviation and "analyzing ideas about the causes of powerlessness…and acting both individually and collectively to change the conditions of our lives" (Lather, 1991), here empowerment is used to re-direct attention to the individual and what they need to do to "overcome" their deficiencies and make "real choices." This individualizing use of empowerment becomes an excuse for expecting the poor to run their own neighborhoods, schools, and communities without addressing serious structural failings (Cruikshank, 1999). By directing attention to what the poor apparently lack in terms of responsibility and work we ignore the structural causes of poverty.

Ignoring Structural Barriers.

According to Rank (2004) "By focusing on individual attributes as the cause of poverty, we have largely missed the underlying dynamic of American impoverishment" (p. 50). Instead of addressing serious structural barriers like the lack of safe and affordable subsidized housing, affordable childcare, health insurance, transportation, education, and jobs that pay living wages, this approach focuses on personal deficiencies. Conversely, Rank (2004) argues that poverty is largely the result of "structural failings at the economic, political and social levels" (p. 50). For example, Rank demonstrates that the labor market is incapable of providing enough jobs to support all families, since even "in the booming U.S. economy of the late 1990s, between five and nine million more jobs were needed in order to meet the needs of the poor and disadvantaged" (p. 55).   Additionally, the jobs the labor market does provide do not pay enough to support a family, as 43.3 percent of all workers in 1999 earned less than $10 an hour, placing their families at great risk of poverty. Making matters worse is what economists refer to as a "natural unemployment rate" common in capitalist economies, where the smooth functioning of the economy is dependent upon keeping unemployment rates high enough to prevent "the costs of producing goods to rise because employers must offer greater financial incentives to attract qualified workers." Referred to as the Phillips Curve problem, "conscious decisions are made, particularly by the Federal Reserve Board, to ensure that unemployment will not fall below a level of approximately 4 percent" (Rank, 2004, p. 153). Therefore, regardless of how much personal responsibility 4 percent of the working population demonstrates, they will nonetheless remain unemployed. Rank (2001) uses the analogy of musical chairs to explain this phenomenon. He says,

Imagine a game of musical chairs in which there are 10 players but only 8 chairs. On one hand, individual success or failure in the game depends on the skill and luck of each player. Those who are less agile or less well placed when the music stops are likely to lose… .On the other hand, given that there are only 8 chairs available, 2 players are bound to lose regardless of their characteristics. Even if all the players double their speed and agility, there would still be two losers. From this broader context, the characteristics of the individual players are no longer important in terms of understanding that the structure of the game ensures that someone will lose. (p. 892)

Other structural factors responsible for poverty include the ineffectiveness of our social safety net in preventing poverty, as the United States devotes less of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) to social welfare than any other industrialized nation except for Japan (Rank, 2004, p. 60). Additionally, the social services that are provided have been scaled back considerably in recent years. This combined with the lack of universal health care, childcare, and affordable housing help keep American poverty rates high.

Additional evidence that TANF, represented by FIP, ignores these structural barriers is the final goal of FIP which is to "Remove policies that present barriers" to familys' independence. While at first glance this statement could be interpreted in a positive light, finally recognition that barriers are present, a careful analysis proves otherwise. In this context the FIP goal is stated in relation to "reaching economic independence," implying that cash assistance has created dependency. This analysis is supported by how barriers are defined under FIP. Families receiving FIP and identified as having "multiple or severe barriers to self-sufficiency" are enrolled in the Family Development and Self-sufficiency

program (FaDSS) (State of Iowa, 2004). This program is designed to help "at-risk" families through "intense personal interaction with trained staff to move to emotional and economic independence" (Iowa Department of Human Rights, 2008, para.3). While FaDSS attempts to help families facing barriers in a "supportive manner," the barriers referred to are constructed as personal problems, not systemic failings and are instead defined as personal barriers such as domestic violence, sexual abuse, neglect as a child, substance abuse, mental health issues, having a child with special needs, and lacking a high school diploma/GED or literary skills. It is important to note that these issues are critical and FaDSS fosters the supportive relationships necessary to cope with them. They are not, however, "policies that present barriers" as stated by the sixth goal of FIP.

The FaDSS annual report states that 37 percent and 23 percent lacked a diploma/GED or had a child with special needs, but that 56 percent were current or past substance abusers. FaDSS reports that in 2003 78 percent of those substances abusers were "successfully engaged in treatment," and 80 percent of individuals in FaDSS with mental health issues also received treatment. Upon leaving FaDSS, for the fiscal year 2004 the average hourly wage of head of households improved from $7.00/hr to $7.57/hr, and that 73 percent of FaDSS families that left welfare were still off welfare a year later. The last statement is in line with the state's method of measuring FIP goals. The state "focus(es) measurement of success on earned income increases and whether families are leaving and remaining off the Family Investment Program." Success in not measured by leaving poverty, but by "remaining off the Family Investment Program." Success is not measured in earning a living wage, but by "earned income increases" (Iowa Department of Human Rights, 2008, para. 3). Temporary Aid to Needy Families, and FIP, are not poverty elimination programs, but rather welfare

elimination programs. Concurrently, FaDSS' emphasis on providing "treatment" for substance abusers and those with mental health disorders both reflects and perpetuates the medicalization of welfare. In this manner, TANF, as an extension of PRWORA, blames the poor without ever having to directly say so (Schram, 2000).

Overemphasizing Work and the Two-Parent Family

One of the philosophical backbones of PRWORA, and the first stated objective of FIP, is to put the poor to work. Scholarly literature demonstrates that requiring FIP recipients to work-first is particularly damaging to women, especially single mothers. It deprives poor women of the opportunity to be caregivers for their children while they work for welfare, and in this way acts as a form of moral regulation as PRWORA "make(s) life more difficult for mothers who are parenting alone" (Mink, 1998c, p. 105). Also, as earlier stated, the idea that work can lead to self-sufficiency is largely a myth. This is due to the preponderance of low-wage jobs necessary to generate the large profits corporations demand in a capitalist economy. The reality is that few low-wage workers ever find economic self-sufficiency, a legacy they leave to their children and their children's children (Shulman, 2003, p. 7). As Shulman (2003) notes,

> If we honor work, we must reward it. For generations, Americans shared a tacit understanding that if you worked hard, a livable income and basic securities were to be yours. That promise has been broken and as a nation we are living a lie. (p. 13)

The discourse of FIP, as seen in its goals, assumes that putting people to work will lead to self-sufficiency. One of the ways FIP attempts to do this is through welfare-to-work programs where FIP recipients are prepared for the world of work. Leslie Rebecca Bloom and Deborah Kilgore (2003a) present an analysis of the literal effects of this discourse in

Iowa on a welfare-to-work program they call "Learn and Work." Based on Bloom's ethnographic experiences with Learn and Work, they conclude that Learn and Work attempts to "fix" those on welfare by teaching them to develop employable identities. Acceptance of an employable identity encourages the poor to view their own identity as inferior or deviant. As a result, students begin to see the employable self as the medium by which they are healed from being irresponsible.

Educational environments like Learn and Work prevent discourses aimed at exposing marginalization by limiting the focus of the program to healing. The pedagogy of programs such as these often emphasize and create participant deficits by mandating the beliefs that success in the workplace is due largely to individual efforts, race and gender play little or no role in determining a person's employability, students are unemployed due to a lack of work ethic, students on welfare possess many personal defects, and that these educational programs could fix students and give them the skills they need to be successful (Sandlin, 2003; Sandlin and Cervero, 2003; Broughton, 2001).

Secondly, the family development programs mandated by FIP are designed to "promote, empower, and nurture the family to self-sufficiency and healthy reintegration into the community" (Iowa Department of Human Rights, 2008, para.1). Using language such as "healthy reintegration" and "empowerment" work to create specific subjectivities that encourage FIP recipients to continue viewing their poverty as a personal deficiency that can be managed by becoming healthy and empowered (Cruikshank, 1999). As stated earlier, in this context, empowerment is not seen as "developing a more positive self-concept and self-confidence, a more critical worldview, and the cultivation of individual and collective skills and resources for social and political action" (Stall and Stoeker, 1998, p. 741).

According to the third stated objective of TANF, reflected in FIP's second goal, marriage is the best anti-poverty policy. The assumption is that if a family is headed by two parents they should not need welfare (Congressional Record, 1996). In order to support the maintenance and creation of two-parent families, FIP requires single mothers to divulge the paternity of their children's fathers or face a 25 percent reduction in benefits, a policy that makes welfare receipt dependent on paternity and often may coerce women to establish contact with men against their will. While in theory this encourages fathers to take financial responsibility for their children, in practice it often alienates them- or worse- forces women to have contact with men who may be abusive (Mink, 1998b, 1998c). FIP also provides programs to encourage two-parent families, such as the "Parental Responsibility Pilot Projects," in addition to taking action to prevent and reduce the incidence of out-of-wedlock pregnancies in order to reduce "illegitimacy." Mandating those who receive FIP to participate in programs designed to encourage two-parent families applies a different set of constitutional standards to the poor, one where the structure of their family is dictated by law (Mink, 1998c, p.38-43).

In later chapters I rely on thick, rich, ethnographic descriptions to analyze the specific interactions between school officials, community organizers, volunteer allies, and participant families in providing useful critiques of the logic of this policy. For these analyses I will move from a macro analysis of the dominant discourse represented by welfare reform legislation to a microanalysis of the ways the dominant discourse manifested itself in specific interpersonal relationships. My analytic tool will also shift from Foucault and governmentality, quite useful in macro examinations of power relationships, to Bourdieu's (1985, 1996, 2001) notions of capital and symbolic violence.

The alchemy of PRWORA, through FIP, fabricates a particular human kind for human service intervention. Like the mathematics curriculum reforms that act upon particular human kinds, the fabricated poor are acted upon through the hidden pedagogy of the FIA, FaDSS, Welfare to Work Programs and other mandated TANF related programs. Some may contend the goals of PRWORA are not oppressive: personal responsibility, desire to work, self-sufficiency, family stability, and making good choices are not objectionable requests. Assuming that the poor do not exhibit these qualities and legislating them, however, in ways that only require those in financial need to be legally obligated to demonstrate them *is* oppressive. This is especially true when embodying these characteristics will not necessarily bring economic security in light of the structural barriers people face when struggling to leave poverty. In fact, welfare policies such as these are structured in ways that ensure families will never leave poverty, let alone achieve self-sufficiency (Rank, 2001, 2004).

Enter Circles of Support (COS): a grassroots, non-profit organization that expressly recognized that people living in poverty are not personally deficient but that there are systematic, structural failures within our socio-political-economic system that prevent families from leaving poverty even when they exhibit the characteristics PRWORA mandates. As the remaining chapters will demonstrate, the oppressive discourse of PRWORA was constantly confronted by the liberating goals of COS, creating tensions that participant families and community organizers constantly negotiated. In what follows I describe how COS and a local public school system created a partnership aimed at helping families leave poverty while simultaneously improving their students chances for success in school.

Chapter 3

Circles of Support: A Community-School Collaboration

> The schools became involved because quite frankly we know that unless we can find ways to support families and keep children in school…we are never going to completely close the achievement gap…[and] keep all students in school with a 100% graduation rate.
>
> -Dr. Steve Waterson

The collaboration represented by Circles of Support (COS) was the direct result of an intentional partnership between a grassroots non-profit Community Based Organization (CBO) and a public school district. The 1996 Personal Responsibility Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) is part of a larger shift towards domestic neoliberalism, characterized by "privatization, marketization, and the downsizing of the welfare state," resulting in more human service emphasis than ever before placed on the shoulders of the private non-profit sector (Maskovsky & Morgen, 2003, p. 319). In that respect, a grassroots community organization like COS was similar to many other organizations nation-wide trying to fight poverty with little public support (Marwell, 2004).

What made COS unique, however, was that it represented an important attempt at community education where a local CBO, grounded in the philosophy of eliminating poverty and creating meaningful cross-class relationships, initially collaborated with, and then was managed by, a local public school district. Using extensive interview data from community organizers and school officials, this chapter describes how that collaboration came to be. In the following pages I will chart the history of COS and illustrate its organization. This chapter describes, therefore, the goals and objectives that motivated both the community organizers and the public school system prior to their collaboration. Additionally, I will

point out the organizational structure these two organizations developed in collaboration, as well as how the partnership evolved over time.

<center>Beyond Welfare, Inc.</center>

Circles of Support's emphasis on creating cross-class relationships and helping families leave poverty grew out of practical knowledge gained from Beyond Welfare in Story County, Iowa. Anticipating PRWORA's 1996 passage, the Iowa Department of Human Services (DHS) organized a series of focus groups with single mothers collecting welfare in order to learn what they needed to leave welfare and poverty safely. Specifically concerned with providing assistance to those recipients nearing time limits on assistance, DHS was under considerable pressure to find new and more creative ways to address poverty. Under the facilitation of Lois Smidt, a former welfare recipient working for the Story County DHS, these groups agreed that "leadership development, self-sufficiency planning, peer support, transportation, livable wage jobs, and advocacy for welfare rights" were the most important issues to focus on for their survival (www.beyondwelfare.org). Based on these conversations, Lois, with the help of Scott Miller of the Move the Mountain Leadership Center (MTM), began Beyond Welfare.

Officially incorporated in 2002 as Beyond Welfare, Inc., perhaps the most important feature of Beyond Welfare for the purpose of this study is its Family Partners program. This program matched middle-class volunteers with low-income participant families "in order to alleviate the class-based social isolation and provide a range of instrumental and relational support to families living in poverty" (Bloom & Kilgore 2003b, p. 434). The Family Partners concept eventually evolved into the model for COS where each participant family was matched with allies who filled particular roles within the circle. By early 2003, Miller began

looking to implement the circles philosophy to other locations in the hopes of combating

poverty on a larger scale (Smidt & Miller, 2004, p. 25). As Scott and Lois looked to

implement COS elsewhere, a group of community leaders in the city of Walden were

meeting to discuss how to help families in their community living in poverty.

<div align="center">Name Each Child</div>

In 1999 the Annie E. Casey foundation made a ten-year commitment to improve the

outcomes for families and children in tough or isolated neighborhoods through its *Making Connections* program.

Through *Making Connections'* local learning partnerships, individual sites "work with a team to help

promote family neighborhood strengthening in a variety of ways," including improving

wages, building ties between families and community resources, and having reliable

resources close to home (Annie E. Casey, 2007, para.2). As a result of Annie E. Casey's

commitment, the directors of the Iowa Human Services Planning Alliance (IHSPA) and the

Child and Family Policy Center (CFPC) submitted a proposal that Walden be considered for

a *Making Connections* grant, which was approved in late 1999.

According to Thomas Snider, the director of the IHSPA, the funded proposal included

a framework for what became the Polk County Learning Partnership (PCLP), which began

presenting the proposal to a broad group of grassroots stakeholders, including neighborhood-

based CBOs and neighborhood leaders. Charles Tillman, City Councilman and United Way

employee, was part of an ad-hoc committee that came together to assist in the development

of the PCLP, called Name Each Child (NEC). According to Tillman,

> When Annie E. Casey came in with their *Making Connections* neighborhoods they
>
> had a lot of plans for helping families. With my involvement with United Way for 14
>
> years, I knew that Annie E. Casey wouldn't be here forever, and that quite often there

would not be long-term change. I knew that there needed to be a local commitment, and NEC decided to meet and see if we could come up with something…that was local that would be long-term.

Membership in this initial group, NEC, included the president of United Way, the superintendent of Walden Public School System (WPSS), the president of the Greater City Foundation, the manager of the Polk County Board of Supervisors, the City Manager, and a local County human service representative. For the better part of 2000 to 2002 the group met every Friday, convening on issues that included helping families living in poverty, students struggling for proficiency, and what they could do to name those in need and find some solutions to help. According to WPSS Superintendent Dr. Steve Waterson,

> We actually called ourselves Name Each Child because we started a stated mission among ourselves that said [Walden] really isn't that big of a place. We can actually name the children in this community who are living in poverty, who are living in situations that put them more at risk… .We're not so big that these are nameless, faceless children, we can actually identify who they are. We can identify their neighborhoods, the schools they attend…the families they are a part of. We said, it's not totally unimaginable, we can wrap our arms around these children.

Taking a case review approach, school social workers brought in different situations and presented them to NEC, like an example of a mother of six children from Somalia who worked in a meatpacking plant ninety miles away. According to Dr. Steve Waterson,

> She gets on a bus before sunlight to ride an hour and a half or more to this job, works an 8-hour day and has another hour and a half ride home. In the meantime her children are at home with no adults in the family.

As she earned more money from work, her family lost benefits to the point that she was worse off than before the job. Furthermore, leaving her children left her vulnerable to child neglect charges from the DHS. Case studies like this one led NEC to conclude the social service system, as is, had too many holes in it. Viewed from the families who need services' perspective, there were too many ways they could fall between the cracks. Witherspoon added, "Quite frankly there are a lot of ways that the system cannot or does not help them…[like] while making gains in employability and income they can actually lose ground in terms of what they can provide for their families." Despite the money spent in the system and the good intentions of service providers he concluded, gesturing his arms as if to represent a hug, "the system itself didn't always wrap itself around these families."

The focus of NEC quickly turned to children because Witherspoon and the other members of NEC believed "that the key out of poverty was really an education." The NEC group concluded that if children could get the support they needed to be successful in school, they would graduate with an education that would hopefully provide the opportunity for better jobs and more education. At this time Scott Miller approached Steve Waterson and described his experiences with Beyond Welfare. Witherspoon, excited about the prospect of a possible collaboration, felt that "Name Each Child could customize Beyond Welfare, literally identifying families by identifying their children through the schools, we could create something that really wraps the community around these families." Scott Miller then met with the rest of NEC and proposed a planning grant to construct a design. Witherspoon noted that "NEC got as excited about this as I was, and we decided that we could really do something in [Walden] that could help lift these families out of poverty by creating Circles of Support."

Circles of Support and Name Each Child

The proposal for COS established a unique collaborative relationship between the public school system, the local community, and the program itself, receiving funding from United Way, the Annie E. Casey Foundation, and the Greater Walden Partnership, an organization "dedicated to the economic and community development of the entire Greater Walden area ("About the Partnership," para.1)." Although the NEC group was particularly attracted to the potential implications for the children's educational achievement, the goals and philosophy of the program in its initial form were rooted in Scott Miller and Lois Smidt's experiences with Beyond Welfare, demonstrating a commitment to helping families cope with living in and eventually leaving poverty. COS's philosophical foundation rested on the hope to build community where

> Each person's inherent intelligence is supported to mobilize their gifts and talents and to face any challenge, each person's well-being is deeply connected to the well-being of all, our relationships are based on deep, reciprocal caring and nonjudgmental respect for the inherent dignity and worth of others, and everyone has the resources to realize their sense of purpose, to fulfill their relationships and to contribute to the common good. (Smidt & Miller, 2004, p. 2)

According to COS's ally training manual, the vision of the program was to foster a community where "everyone has enough money, friends, and meaning to fulfill their dreams and potential in life" with the hopes of "building circles of support that will eliminate poverty" and become models to other communities. COS also acknowledged the "real barriers" people faced when making the transition from poverty to "interdependent economic well-being" were in large part due to structural or systemic barriers. Therefore, this program

reflected the principles of "complete respect for all people," social support, "social change through building authentic relationships," and accountability and reciprocity. Operating within the often-demeaning climate of Welfare Reform, a program with this philosophy was unique and rare, as was the program's organizational structure (Bloom & Kilgore, 2003b; Sandlin, 2003, 2004).

The foundation of COS's organizational structure was building cross-class relationships. Recognizing that many of the relationships that those living in poverty develop with people outside of their social class are with service providers paid to interact with them, COS supported the creation of meaningful relationships across class lines to combat social isolation, victim blaming, and eliminating structural barriers (Bloom & Kilgore, 2003b). They accomplished this by partnering participant families with three middle or upper class allies. Allies were volunteers committed to supporting the participant family in their transition out of poverty. An ally was someone willing to build a "friendship first" relationship "based on the gifts and talents of both, finding common interests, learning about and appreciating differences, with a focus on supports for moving out of poverty" (Smidt & Miller, 2004, p. 9).

According to ally training manuals, COS asked allies to learn about and acknowledge the barriers families faced to leaving poverty, both external in the form of the system and internal in the form of dependency and victimization. Sometimes allies challenged or "gently nudged" the participant out of behaviors or beliefs that did not serve their growth, while concurrently exploring their own beliefs and feelings around differences in socioeconomic status, race, religion, and ability in an environment "free of guilt and/or blaming." Allies were also expected to learn about the public assistance system, both what was useful and

available to support the transition from welfare to work and what gaps existed, and, when appropriate, act as leaders in advocating for system changes. In order to provide the appropriate, necessary, array of support the three-member circle was comprised of an academic ally for the student(s) and the parent(s), a financial ally, and a "meaning and friends" ally.

COS heavily emphasized education, believed to be an integral factor in helping families leave poverty. Therefore, academic allies helped develop academic goals for both parents and children. These allies often coordinated tutoring for school-age children and helped develop an educational plan for parents. The academic plan for school age children included a progress chart where the ally tracked the student's academic progress including reading level, Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) Core Total, Math, Language Arts, days absent and tardy, classroom behavior, extra curricular activities, and academic goals set by the children.

The earned income ally developed an income and assets plan with the participant family. The key piece of this plan included getting the participant's expenses and income on paper, a stress-filled task for people struggling paycheck to paycheck. Fixed expenses such as housing, utilities, transportation and childcare were logged in addition to variable expenses like clothing, food, health, education and savings. Participant's expenses were weighed against their income from wages, food stamps, and the Family Income Plan (FIP). Once income and expenses were logged, the earned income ally worked with the participant to create financial goals and steps to reach them, such as owning a reliable car, owning a home, starting a business, beginning school/training, or being debt-free.

Community-building allies helped participants build authentic cross-class relationships. Lois Smidt reflected on the philosophy of COS at an ally training when she said, "The relationships people in poverty develop are often only with other people living in poverty. Many of their other relationships are with people who are paid to be in their lives, like caseworkers." In order to help remedy this situation, community-building allies worked with participants to gain friends and meaning. The first step in this task was developing a plan whereby participants listed their total number of supportive friends, the people they could talk to about important concerns in their life, and the number of community groups they belonged to. Participants also filled out a survey where they ranked, on a scale of 1 to 5, whether or not they had a good support system, if they were happy, and if they made a difference to others. The community-building ally and participant then created goals and listed steps to achieve them. The circles were expected to meet at least once a month in addition to attending the weekly COS program where the participants and allies came together for dinner and a meeting.

In addition to creating cross-class relationships, COS was involved in helping participants leave poverty through other strategies and programs. One major component of COS was its Wheels-to-Work program that provided community-donated cars to participants in exchange for involvement in the organization. Additionally, in order to provide job coaching and mental health counseling to participants, COS hired subcontractors, like the Institute for Social and Economic Development (ISED), a non-profit organization that "provides consulting, training, evaluation and management activities" as "an anti-poverty program (ISED Ventures, para.1).

The COS staff was led by a community organizer who worked as a liaison between the participant families and their circle while coordinating and facilitating the weekly meetings. The organizer received technical support from Lois Smidt and Scott Miller, and provided participants with self-sufficiency supports such as help locating affordable housing and childcare in addition to maintaining an emergency fund from which participants could get loans. COS was also involved in numerous advocacy projects related to issues that most affected those living in poverty's lives. Through these advocacy activities, participants gained valuable leadership skills. While a participant's allies helped them make connections with informal social supports, the community organizer also worked to link them with available formal services. Additionally, ACHIEVE Case Managers aided in the process of making formal social service connections as well as vital links with the school system.

<div align="center">The ACHIEVE Program</div>

While the structure of COS was unique and vital to building meaningful cross-class relationships, the collaboration with the WPSS made COS incredibly rare. Very few examples exist, nation-wide, of grassroots CBOs committed to eliminating systemic failings overtly partnering with public school systems. Not only was the ACHIEVE Program (not an acronym) working to help families leave poverty, the program was overtly linked to public schools in order to improve academic performance. Meeting the unfunded mandates of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) could not be achieved without addressing some of the real issues that led to low-achievement. Dr. Steve Waterson explained

> The schools became involved because quite frankly we know that unless we can find
> ways to support families and keep children in school…we are never going to

completely close the achievement gap…[and] keep all students in school with a 100%

graduation rate.

Families became involved in COS through recommendations made by school

ACHIEVE Case Managers in two neighborhood elementary schools identified by the NEC:

Washington and Lincoln Elementary schools. The ACHIEVE Program was undoubtedly the

glue that bound this grassroots anti-poverty program together with the WPSS and the greater

community.

ACHIEVE was a grant-funded component of New Horizons, the broad umbrella for

programs in the WPSS that provided learning supports, particularly dropout prevention and

safe and drug free schools. According to Caroline Johnson, the director of New Horizons,

"ACHIEVE is the biggest project we operate and the one that in my estimation has been the

most successful over a period of fifteen or sixteen years." Johnson, the original program

manager for ACHIEVE when it began fifteen years ago with four staff members, now

oversaw the more than forty staff members in fifteen elementary schools and described it as

"an intensive case management approach that is very much family centered." All ACHIEVE

Case Managers had human service backgrounds and were provided with family development

specialist training.

Typically each Case Manager worked with 15 to 20 students and their families, and

Erickson noted they were generally students "who are really struggling, especially in the area

of unmet basic needs and issues going on the family that get in the way of their learning."

ACHIEVE Case Managers met with the students and their families to identify goals they

were interested in working on and put together plans for how to achieve them. Johnson

expressed that "Our Case Managers are experts in knowing what services you would be

eligible for and then helping you access them, kind of being an advocate and easing that connection piece." While coming from a low-income family was not a requirement for working with a ACHIEVE Case Manager, Johnson explained

The great majority of them are people who usually don't feel any connection to school. With this program they now have someone who will listen to what they are concerned about and be an advocate for them, both in the community and in the school.

Because the ACHIEVE Program was already embedded in the local public school system, Steve Waterson decided that Case Managers at two local elementary schools would identify families and recommend they become involved in COS, completely on a voluntary basis. Once a family agreed to participate in COS, they underwent a two hour comprehensive intake/assessment process that welcomed participants into the community, assisted them in identifying their strengths as well as challenges, and helped them to understand relationships, reciprocity, and leadership development as key strategies for economic self-sufficiency and family safety (Smidt & Miller, 2004). The participant family was then paired with three COS volunteer allies and created a circle of support, while the ACHIEVE Case Manager and community organizer continued to provide support and leadership for the circle. Ideally, these circles began formally and then became natural "as needed" support networks for the families.

The Collaboration in Practice

During the first two years of operation COS and the WPSS were autonomous organizations that operated in collaboration, linked by the ACHIEVE Program. While the collaboration achieved numerous successes in terms of creating community and building

relationships, a number of obstacles remained. For example, during this time the initial goal was to recruit twenty-five families and seventy-five allies within the first year. By July 2004 twenty-five families had been recruited but ally recruitment proved to be much more difficult. Sharon Cunningham, the program's first community organizer, soon found her role shifting from coordinating weekly meetings and serving as a liaison between participants and allies to focusing almost exclusively on ally recruitment, an issue never completely resolved. Another obstacle included turnover in the program's management. Donna Driscoll replaced Sharon as community organizer in the summer of 2004, bringing with her an extensive background in social service and education. In the spring of 2005 it was announced that another cohort of twenty-five families would begin in a nearby neighborhood with Margaret Neumann as its organizer. However, soon after the announcement, Donna left unexpectedly, leaving Margaret as the organizer for both cohorts. By the fall of 2005 the two cohorts merged, in part due to a lack of attendance at weekly meetings, and Mary unexpectedly left COS, whereby Jennifer Sullivan became the community organizer.

Further changes occurred in the fall of 2005 when it was announced that the WPSS, through the ACHIEVE Program, would take over management of COS. Steve Waterson proposed that ACHIEVE and the WPSS take over management because the program was becoming too expensive and did not have enough community ownership. According to Steve Waterson, Scott Miller had always wanted someone to take over management, but up to this point no one was willing. Dr. Steve Waterson commented "Quite frankly Scott and Move the Mountain did not want to manage the program…they have a lot of irons in the fire around the country." While Scott clearly wanted to help ensure the viability and visibility of the program, Dr. Steve Waterson realized "That the community was going to have to take

ownership of the program, and quite frankly there was no more logical place than to nest it permanently in the school."

Upon taking over COS, the WPSS began a "visioning process" that in part outlined the lessons learned from the first two years of operation (S. Miller, personal communication, November 15, 2005). On reflection some progress had been made: thirteen of the first twenty-five families improved their employment, twelve families received donated cars, school attendance for children in the program increased from 71 percent to 89 percent of students attending school 95 percent of the time, and 63 percent of participants reported that their support system was a 5 on a scale of 5 compared to only 45 percent saying it was a 5 on intake. Those funding the program were concerned, however, that none of the initial participants had "graduated" and left the program. While making progress, the program was not helping families leave poverty as quickly, perhaps unrealistically, as expected. While the funders and program management attributed this to trying to do too much too soon for too many families, a lack of communication and understanding of roles, and too much turnover in leadership, there was in fact an additional overlooked conflict in goals and objectives between the WPSS and COS.

It became evident to early on in my research that the motivations of COS and the WPSS were epistemologically different. COS's goals and objectives, as earlier mentioned, focused on the economic interdependence of the entire family with heavy emphasis on organizing to eliminate the structural barriers that families faced when trying to leave poverty. Conversely, the goals and objectives of the WPSS and ACHIEVE Program, while undoubtedly concerned with the family, focused primarily on the children and improving

their educational attainment. According to Caroline Johnson, in charge of the ACHIEVE Program,

> The focus of Beyond Welfare and Move the Mountain has been more towards economic self-sufficiency, and that certainly has been a main one of ours but I think very close if not equal to that is the academic success of the kids in those families, that complicates things a little further too… .The kids, for us as Walden Public Schools, are a priority in terms of goals we want to achieve as with the parents. Realistically, if you look at their skills, and their background, a lot of them had criminal involvement that prohibited them from seeking some of the kinds of employment that they might have skills to pursue, what do you do with those folks? Of course you don't abandon them and give up, you keep trying to find some things to make their lives better, but realistically are you going to get them to a level of self sufficiency, I don't know. But their kids, we can certainly have even greater hope for their kids, that we could give them something better for their lives.

Dr. Steve Waterson agreed:

> We focused on the children because we believed that it's the young people in the community where we can break the cycle of generational poverty. It's in the young people where we can give the tools and equip them in their lives so they are not trapped in the same poverty that their parents and grandparents before them have been trapped into… .We adopted a very clear bias or belief that the key out of poverty was really an education… .Then the opportunity to better jobs, more education, and everything else that comes with it…and also we know that so many of the times

families trapped in poverty one of the things that adults in the family don't have is high educational attainment.

These quotations are representative of the conflicting underlying ideologies of these two organizations: COS had liberating intentions, while ACHIEVE sought to help students succeed within the system itself by becoming middle-class. The underlying philosophy of ACHIEVE specifically, and the public school system generally, was heavily influenced by the work of Ruby Payne (2005). In Ruby Payne's self-published books, she presents a framework for understanding poverty that is steeped in the decades old assertion that a static culture of poverty exists (Coward, Feagin, and Williams, 1974). The best way to help students living in poverty, according to Ruby Payne, is for teachers to understand the ways poor students are cognitively, socially, and culturally different from the rest of America, and to teach them how to adopt middle-class values (Gorski, 2006; Osei-Kofi, 2005). Steve Waterson learned of Ruby Payne at a superintendent's conference in Chicago and encouraged his school administrators to read her book *A Framework for Understanding Poverty*. Furthermore, ACHIEVE Case Managers were trained to implement her framework in their practices. The significance of this tension heightened when the ACHIEVE Program assumed management of COS, whereby the focus on liberation all but disappeared. New allies were trained using Ruby Payne's approach, and as a result the new management eliminated the once a month systems barriers meeting. The conclusion to this study will include a detailed analysis of Ruby Payne's negative impact on COS.

While an important purpose of this study is to elucidate the manner in which the COS concept operated in practice, certainly an equally important theme that emerged was that throughout the life of this collaboration, these different philosophical positions were often in

conflict, emerging at weekly meetings as well as through participant-ally-school interaction, and liminally placing participant families between the positions of empowerment and oppression. The following chapters describe the theoretical lenses that will be used to analyze this tension in addition to evaluating, in essence, what it looked like when two autonomous entities, both with different philosophies and goals, collaborated and eventually merged into one.

Chapter 4

Roots of Tension: Liberal and/or Liberating Community Education

> I must ask again what a critical pedagogy might mean for those of us who teach the young at this particular and menacing time. Perhaps we might begin by releasing our imaginations and summoning up the traditions of freedom in which most of us were reared. We might try to make audible again the recurrent calls for justice and equality. We might reactivate the resistance to materialism and conformity. We might even try to inform with meaning the desire to educate "all the children" in a legitimately "common" school.
>
> -Maxine Greene, 2003, p. 110

This chapter will demonstrate how Circles of Support (COS) served as a unique model for community education. Perhaps more importantly, through the use of community education literature, I will lay a foundation for central analyses that will be presented later in this study. For example, the most important theme that emerged in this study was the tension that existed between the dominant perception of the poor, as legislated by the Personal Responsibility Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA), and the reality of the lived experiences of those actually experiencing poverty. The language of PRWORA, and the manner in which it is implemented at the state level, rests on generalizations, stereotypes, and demeaning caricatures of the poor. In response to this discourse, and to the devolution of federal entitlements, COS formed to not only help families living in poverty, but also to overtly identify and eliminate the structural barriers they face while attempting to leave it. Within this collaboration, however, COS partnered with a public institution constrained by part of the very system COS wished to change. Tension existed, therefore, between the dominant perceptions of the poor as legislated by PRWORA and those who recognized the failings of our political and economic system.

My contention is that Community-Based Organizations (CBO) like COS that overtly recognize structural barriers to poverty alleviation must constantly negotiate this tension as long as they collaborate with public institutions. This tension was reflected in the ways COS approached helping the poor, simultaneously working within the current structure and for its change. While I will use various theoretical lenses to interpret the ethnographic and interview data, my analytic and conceptual decisions will be heavily influenced by the ways COS acted as a form of community education. Positioning COS as a form of community education is relevant because COS hoped to educate the general community about the structural barriers to poverty alleviation through the intentional creation of cross-class relationships. The position of COS was that not only will cross-class relationships prove meaningful for the poor; they will expose middle-class allies to the real causes of class inequality. In turn, these middle-class allies would become partners in the fight to end poverty.

Furthermore, COS represented a partnership between a private, non-profit CBO and a public educational institution. Although the partners in this relationship had similar general goals, such as making community connections, building support networks, and helping families cope with living in poverty, the primary focus of each was different: COS focused on poverty reduction while the Walden Public School System (WPSS) focused on formal education.

There is no doubt that the WPSS was committed to helping students living in poverty succeed. They demonstrated this commitment in part through the ACHIEVE Program, which coordinated connections between educational, health, and human services and families with children prenatal to age twenty. Operating within thirty-one elementary, middle, and

high schools, however, ACHIEVE's bottom-line focus began with identifying and helping at-risk children succeed in school.

Conversely, COS' primary concern, which certainly included improving student achievement, was on the entire family and eliminating the structural barriers to leaving poverty. Thus one program rooted in social activism merged with another rooted in public schooling, representing a distinctive and important attempt at educating a community about poverty, how to cope with living in it, and eventually how to reduce it. But exactly how did this collaboration fit into notions of community education, both historically and contemporarily? How does the literature on community education help to make sense of the tension earlier outlined, between emphasis on success within the current structure and success only with the reformation of the structure? Finally, did this partnership simultaneously represent and combat the dominant discourse?

Community Education

There is no body of relevant literature, in an American context, describing community-school partnerships like COS. A grassroots, not-for-profit organization dedicated to helping families cope with living in poverty, eliminating structural barriers, and committed to improving student academic achievement is no doubt rare. Because the weekly meetings consciously included an educational piece and the organization overtly collaborated with local public schools, thinking about COS as a form of community education seemed natural. For the purpose of this study, therefore, community education refers specifically to the manners in which not-for-profit organizations collaborate to address the social, economic, and political inequities faced by marginalized communities. While this notion sometimes includes the formal education of children and adults in "traditional" educational settings,

community education in this context is viewed much more broadly. Here community

education includes identifying community needs and organizing to address them.

While there is a significant body of research in Great Britain focusing specifically on

this notion of "community education," the phrase is virtually non-existent in American

literature. Whereas American literature refers to community action or community building,

community education in a British context recognizes the nuanced interplay between private

organizations, public institutions, and local communities. Furthermore, British literature

gives insight into how community organizations work within existing structures, work to

change existing structures, or a combination of both. In what follows, therefore, I rely on

both American and British literature to not only elucidate the manner in which COS operated

as a form of community education but to understand how its partnership with a public

institution created tension.

I agree with Ward and Taylor (cited in Tett, Crowther, & Ohara, 2003) who contend

community education should embody three significant features:

> It is formed by an unashamedly egalitarian ethic, it aims to enable people to engage
>
> constructively with the changing realities of life in their communities, and it accepts
>
> that this requires much more coherent and systematic strategies of intervention,
>
> positive action, and collaboration at the local level. (p. 37)

Community education is overtly positioned in this way by British scholars like Martin

(2003), who describes three approaches to community education; the universal, reformist,

and radical models. The basic premise of these three approaches is that community

education should play a role in improving social conditions, although the manner in which

this occurs varies on the approach. The *universal* model contends that there are shared

values and a consensus with "a basic harmony of interests," so the community educator's job is to make "universal non-selective provision for all ages and groups" (in Tett, et. al., 2003, p. 38). The *reformist* model recognizes that there are a number of different interests and competition between groups over resources, so the community educator's role is to choose interventions in order to assist people in "disadvantaged communities." Martin's final model, the *radical* model, asserts there are a many different interests in the community that are in conflict and inequality is created by the system itself. The role of the community educator in this model is "developing with local people political education and social action focused on concrete issues and concerns of the community" (Martin, 1993, p. 200).

Furthermore, Lovett and Clarke (1983) claim community education is essentially concerned with affecting the course of social change through the two processes of analyzing social situations and forming relationships. It has three main aims: democratically involving people in making decisions that impact their lives, fostering the personal fulfillment that comes with being part of a community, and searching for community solutions to individual problems (p. 29). Lovett and Clarke describe four common approaches to community education as community organization, community development, community action, and social action.

The *community organization model* focuses on effectively coordinating the delivery of educational resources that are currently available, but does nothing for problems of inequality and poverty, because it does not address the issues of the general community (p. 36). In the *community development model* emphasis is placed on cooperation and coordination between community educators and local institutions, with the ultimate goal being to help institutions better serve the community. The *community action model* stresses

the need to merge community education and community action, hoping to resolve local problems by creating new institutions. The belief is that community action is in itself an educational process on which, similar to Freire's pedagogy, offers opportunities for consciousness-raising about the structural causes of community problems. This model is sometimes criticized for its focus on local issues rather than broad social movements. Finally, the *social action/educational model* places greater emphasis on "motivation and content; on hard educational effort; on social, rather than community action; on 'working class' rather than 'community education." In this model education must be more structured and systematic, where community educators seek to provide specific forms of educational support that shed light on the problems local people seek to resolve. There is more stress in using education to locate the origins of community problems within larger social, economic, and political contexts (Lovett & Clarke, 1983, p. 37-39).

Conversely, as earlier noted, most of the discourse surrounding these issues in the United States does not refer to community education but to "community action," "community building," "community development," "adult education," and "community-school partnerships." Community organizations overtly committed to social change often refer to themselves as community action programs, similar to those created by Alinsky in the 1940s and 1950s (Ellis and Scott, 2003). Alinsky saw community organizations as political institutions with three basic characteristics: indigenous leadership and citizen participation; financial independence; and a commitment to defend local interests while avoiding divisive issues (p. 255). Community building is described as "building community in individual neighborhoods: neighbors learning to rely on each other, working together on concrete tasks that take advantage of new self-awareness of their collective and individual assets…and in

the process creating human, family, and social capital" (McNeely, 1999, p. 742).

Community development is generally defined as "a social learning process…[that] serves to

empower individuals and social groups by involving them as citizens in collective activities

aimed at socio-economic regeneration, development, and change" (McClenaghan, 2000, p.

566). It is also defined as "channels through which responsible citizens can take part in

community decision making through local planning and voluntary social action" (Ewalt,

Freeman, and Poole, 1998, p. 164).

While these examples add depth, sophistication, and diversity to notions of

community education, given they broaden our idea of education to include more than formal

schooling, each of their epistemological foundations rest on whether or not community

education for social justice can occur without systemic change. In other words, at their root

these community education models, whether radical, reformist, universal, community action

or community development take a position on either working within the current paradigm or

against it.

Describing how these discrepancies exist depending on epistemological roots, British

scholar Fletcher (1980) contends community education generally falls within two markedly

different paradigms, describing them as either liberal or liberating. The role of community

education in the liberal model is to better equip people to succeed in current society. In other

words, community education can satisfy the needs of a community within the current

structural framework. These examples focus on identifying community requirements and

marshalling resources to meet them, centering on the more efficient implementation of

existing resources (Brookfield, 1985; Mansfield, 1992). Community educators within liberal

models generally do not recognize the existence of structural barriers to social and economic

inequities; instead they work to provide skills and services to help the needy succeed within the current system.

Conversely, those that subscribe to the liberating model work from the premise that society is in conflict and eliminating structural inequalities should be the purpose of community education (Allen & Martin, 1992, p. 31). In this model, community education becomes a tool to fight injustice and oppression. The philosophical foundation of the liberating model rests on the work of Freire (2000) and advocates using community education to foster development of a critical consciousness whereby community members recognize their position within dominant society and work to improve it. In other words, "Education is seen as the catalyst for some form of redistribution of educational opportunity, from which will arise an alteration in economic and political arrangements" (Brookfield, 1985, p. 236).

Johnston (1992) further elaborates on the liberating approach by describing it as having two separate but related dimensions, contextual analysis and personal empowerment. Referring specifically to community education aimed at addressing poverty, and again relying on the work of Freire, she says the contextual analysis is helping the poor "to develop a clear and critical awareness of the socio-economic and ideological forces that affect our lives" (p. 69). This critical awareness can be fostered by first addressing the immediate needs of the community. First address unemployment, for example, by encouraging an understanding of it within its social context. Then address the context of unemployment and poverty while at the same time recognizing identified needs. In this manner Johnston says people become "knowing subjects" in the Freirean sense (p. 70). Personal empowerment, on the other hand, involves fostering the autonomy and taking control of their own lives among

marginalized groups. Therefore, in order for community education to be educational it must address both ideological and personal elements. It must "combine a critical analysis of society" and the reasons for poverty with "a more student-centered methodology which addresses the starting points and concerns" of the poor and takes into account the specific structural barriers the poor face (p. 76).

Given the massive devolution of public safety nets the majority of American community development or building relies heavily on the present social service system, focusing primarily on "inter-agency cooperation among professional service providers" (Boyd, 2001, p. 59).   In recent years, however, there has been increased emphasis on bridging between public schools, families, and communities, with the focus now on increasing "community action rather than the delivery of professionally dominated services to a poverty area clientele" (p. 59). This new approach, on the heels of PRWORA and No Child Left Behind (NCLB), is based on the increased interest in social capital development between school and community as a strategy for "improving educational opportunity and school performance" (p. 60).

For example, while CBOs have been organizing to advocate and build community for families living in poverty, educational researchers have been demonstrating the increasing importance of school, family, and community partnerships to increase student attendance, close the achievement gap, and improve graduation rates.   Given that NCLB requires schools to have detailed plans for family and community involvement, supporting the act's emphasis on student achievement, schools and communities are forced to find effective ways to foster this collaboration.

One case in point, full-service community schools, advocates teaching children "where they are," both geographically and cognitively (Dryfoos and Maguire, 2002). Dryfoos and Maguire (2002) propose a model for full-service community schools that include programs for health and wellness, curriculum and instruction, family involvement, and social responsibility to the local community. Additionally, Epstein (2004), Director of the Center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships and of the National Network of Partnership Schools (NNPS) at Johns Hopkins University, contends that all schools need to create an organized planned partnership program that fosters an environment which encourages families to become actively involved and contribute to their student's academic success. According to Epstein (2004), these partnership programs must recognize that student learning is not confined to the school, but takes place in both in the home and the greater community. The NNPS advocates six types of involvement including parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and collaborating with the community that can help establish and strengthen a comprehensive program of school, family, and community partnership (Epstein, 2002; 2004). The examples of school-community collaboration Epstein, Dryfoos, and Maguire describe, however, focus on a notion of community building that does not mention or recognize the real systemic barriers that prevent social, economic, or political justice. Without a critique of structural failings, any attempt at community education will only perpetuate the current class structure.

<div align="center">Merging Liberal and Liberating Paradigms</div>

COS represented an important example of the recent trend toward school-community collaboration. What made COS unique, however, was that the philosophical roots of the program reflected a liberating approach to community education, apparent in its commitment

to addressing personal empowerment through "money, meaning, and friends" in addition to partnering across class lines to construct the advocacy and impetus for structural change.

Conversely, the ACHIEVE Program, whose Case Managers were essentially school social workers, exemplified a liberal approach to community education. The ACHIEVE Program "Represents one of the most highly developed and efficiently managed school-linked service systems in the country…[filling] an important niche in meeting family and child needs that otherwise would jeopardize school success" ("Overview," 2007, para.1). As a school based youth-services program, ACHIEVE Case Managers provided services that included "assessment of need, educational support, identification of personal goals, coordination of services with a variety of human service agencies, and advocacy in accessing services and follow up" (para. 3). While working within the parameters established by PRWORA, ACHIEVE, however, did not address the structural realities that create poverty (Rank, 2004), a general failure of public education, and instead defined barriers as "homelessness, neglect and abuse (physical, psychological, sexual), hunger, poor health, basic needs, substance abuse, and domestic violence" ("Overview," 2007, para. 1.).

Thus COS, given its partnership with ACHIEVE, did not fit into an either/or category. COS actually represented elements of both the liberal and liberating paradigms, which I contend reflected the tension between the dominant discourse and the discourse of empowerment. This notion of tension is supported by Young (1999) who describes three perspectives for understanding how non-profits tend to interact with public institutions: complementary, supplementary, and adversarial. The frequency of each perspective is dependant upon the contemporary role the federal government plays in providing services for those who need them. Since the 1960s the complementary perspective has been most

common, where "nonprofits are seen as partners to government, helping to carry out the delivery of public goods largely financed by government" (p. 150). As a result of recent government devolution, however, nonprofits have more commonly reflected the supplementary and adversarial view. In the supplementary model, "nonprofits are seen as fulfilling the demand for public goods left unsatisfied by government," and in the adversarial view "nonprofits prod government to make changes in public policy and to maintain accountability to the public" (p. 151). According to Reisch and Sommerfield (2003)

> The adversarial perspective emphasizes the ways in which the two sectors challenge and confront each other, acting as checks and balances to limit what each perceives as its rival's behavioral excesses. Such conflict, which largely takes the form of nonprofit organizations' advocacy for social reform, is crucial for the healthy functioning of a free, democratic society. (p. 22)

Thus COS represented both the supplemental and adversarial view, resulting in tension, or conflict, between a program devoted to empowerment and structural change merging with a program that did not challenge, and indeed perpetuates, the dominant discourse. This is evident, for example, in the recent liberal models involving school-community partnerships that suggest solutions that do not confront the role schools and social services play in reproducing existing social inequalities. Research demonstrates a direct correlation between student achievement on standardized tests and socioeconomic status and that "public policies that decrease child poverty may have more potential towards increasing student academic achievement than high stakes testing and accountability plans" (Maylone, 2002, p.6; Adams, 1994; Grinion, 1999; Markel-Fox, 1993; Roscigno, 1996; Smith, 1999). I support the position that formal schooling often reproduces existing class

inequalities by operating under the assumption that if the poor would only become more like the middle-class there would be no poverty (Bourdieu, 1996; Bowles & Gintis, 2002; Willis, 1977). According to Brantlinger (2003),

> [School officials] attribute stratified school structure and outcomes to the essentially superior traits of higher social classes and the natural result of fair competition in meritocratic schools, and job markets…they insist that for life to become more equitable, the poor must become more like themselves. (p. 188)

As long as public schools, working within the liberal model, proffer formal education as the best answer to inequalities inherent in a capitalist economic system, "Truly equitable, integrated, and high-quality comprehensive schooling could never be accomplished" (Brantlinger, 2003, p. 189). This is primarily because advocating for structural change "threatens the interests of those who are already well served by the dominant culture" (McLaren, 1999, p. 49). Would the tendency for schooling to reproduce social inequalities change, however, if a public school system was to collaborate with a CBO from the liberating tradition such as COS?

What, then, does it look like when two programs approaching poverty and community education from different perspectives merge? I am particularly interested in analyzing COS within the context of community education because it represented the merging of liberating and liberal models and the resulting tension. As an example of liberating community education, COS was rooted in a non-profit community based organization operating in the climate of welfare reform, attempting to help families build community, gain family sustainability, and eliminate structural barriers. COS sought to build community across class lines where a spirit of collaboration superceded the desire to impose middle-class values.

Conversely, the ACHIEVE Program was a liberal example, working within a public school system operating in the climate of NCLB, facing federal calls for increased accountability and student proficiency even among its most marginalized and disenfranchised students.

There is a gap, therefore, in American literature on how CBOs operate as forms of community education and what happens when they establish partnerships with public educational institutions. According to Freire (2000),

> The oppressed are not marginals, living 'outside' society. They have always been inside- inside the structure which made them 'beings for others.' The solution is not to 'integrate' them into the structure of oppression, but to transform that structure so that they can become beings for themselves. (p. 74)

So, what became of the emerging tension between ACHIEVE's goals of accommodation and assimilation and COS' goals of empowerment and liberation? The remainder of this study will investigate what it looked like when an organization dedicated to changing institutions partnered with one of the very institutions it sought to change.

PART TWO

Educating Community

Part Two is comprised of two distinct sections. The first section, which includes

Chapters 5 and 6, describes and analyzes the community education that occurred during these

formal meetings.   COS devoted each weekly meeting to one of four topics: financial,

academic, community-building, and systems change or the "Big View." Chapter 5,

therefore, contains four ethnographic descriptions: one of each type of meeting. The

ethnographic descriptions are followed, in Chapter 6, by an analysis of the themes that

emerged from a close reading of the data.

Because allies and participants often interacted outside of the weekly meetings, in

Chapters 7 and 8, I chose to present and analyze two individual circles of support. In

Chapter 7, I use interview data to carefully provide a rich description of two of COS' original

participant families and their allies. These descriptions are meant to both demonstrate how

each family, and their respective allies, became involved in the program, and to account for

their experiences as members of COS. Because the participants and allies in these two

circles created meaningful cross-class relationships outside the weekly meetings, in Chapter

8 I analyze the interview data to uncover how they functioned as forms of community

education.

Chapter 5

Ethnographic Descriptions of Four Weekly Meetings

> I like talking and everything, but we need to start doing something. It's really about self-empowerment. Let's create a vision and then a plan. Let's band together and be formidable.
>
> -Donna Driscoll

Given the recent devolution of public entitlements, Young (1999) asserts that [the] "Government is seen as taking a relatively passive, fiscally conservative role in public service provision and the private, nonprofit sector is expected to move to the fore with new levels of charitable funding and volunteering" (p. 158). As a result, grassroots Community Based Organizations (CBO) like Circles of Support (COS) have been called upon to provide direct-services to those marginalized by poverty. COS was a unique CBO, however, in that it not only provided direct services, but it represented the collaboration of both a public school system and a grassroots community organization into a collective voice for community education. As the previous chapter elucidated, the voices in this collaboration represented different, perhaps even contradictory, epistemological positions: the ACHIEVE Program and the Public School System represented a liberal approach to community education by working within the current welfare system, while COS sought to act as a liberatory community education model and change the system.

 Given these circumstances, it is particularly important to understand how COS interacted with families living in poverty while enacting its organizational philosophies. Because of their increasingly dominant status in post-welfare United States, the purpose of this chapter is to provide an ethnographically rich description of the group processes used by COS. One of the primary means by which COS provided services and built community was

through a weekly meeting attended by participants, allies, and community organizers. The weekly meetings often became sites of struggle where community organizers, participant families, and volunteers negotiated the tension between the dominant discourse and the desire for empowerment. In this chapter I closely describe the weekly group meetings of COS to explicate the strategies this CBO used to assist participants in leaving poverty. Analyses of the impacts of these strategies will be discussed in a later chapter.

Ethnographic Understandings of COS Weekly Meetings

This chapter centers on data collected at three years of COS' weekly meetings. At these meetings I took in-depth ethnographic field notes relying on the supposition that "Ethnographers must discern local knowledge not simply on the basis on people's talk, but rather…what people do in relation to others in order to produce specific, situated meanings" (Emerson, Fretz and Shaw, 1995, p. 133). Towards that end, I carefully recorded what I observed in the meetings, wrote initial analyses after each meeting, and used these as the basis for my deeper analyses. Recognizing the influence of Beyond Welfare (BW) on the philosophical foundation of COS, my approach emerged out of numerous conversations with Leslie Rebecca Bloom about critical pedagogy, social justice, social and cultural capital, welfare reform, and especially comparisons between her research with Beyond Welfare and mine with COS. Reflecting on these conversations and the themes emerging from data analysis, I chose to carefully describe the weekly dinner as well as specific examples of each type of meeting conducted by COS in order to be able to provide deep analyses of the program's multi-faceted approach to poverty. I intentionally chose meetings in which the emergent themes were particularly apparent in order to provide a solid base from which to formulate thoughtful analysis. Therefore, the ethnographic descriptions that follow

demonstrate how the weekly meetings served vital functions in helping families cope with living in, and eventually leave, poverty. Some of these functions included building community and meaningful cross-class relationships, presenting critical opportunities for community education to occur, as well as naming structural barriers and organizing to eliminate them.

An important point worth mentioning is that COS participants and allies came together more often than just at the weekly meeting; allies and participants came together often, sometimes recreationally for picnics or trips to the public library, other times to overcome crises. Attending a COS meeting, however, presented one with an opportunity to witness COS' philosophical foundation at work: the coming together of people, across class lines, to build community advocacy. Weekly meetings were remarkable community events that gave hope for the possibility of tangible and meaningful social change. Concurrently, these meetings were highly emotive gatherings confronting one with just how severe the problem of poverty is in this community, and just how inadequately it is addressed by the current system.

As the ethnographic data below will illustrate, the COS meetings were structured to employ a range of strategies intended to help participants cope with living in and eventually leaving poverty. Although each weekly COS meeting began with a community dinner and ended with participants and allies verbally appreciating each other, the focus of this ethnographic section will be on the educational portion of the meeting. Focusing on the educational portion of the meeting serves to illuminate the overt role education played in this community collaboration. This ethnographic section, therefore, is divided into two distinct sub-sections for clarity. The first short subsection, *COS' Weekly Dinners*, briefly focuses on

an ethnographic description of COS's weekly community dinner. The second subsection, *Community Education at the Weekly Meetings,* focuses on the educational portion of the weekly meetings, of which there were generally four types: academic, financial, community-building, and systems barriers.

 COS' Weekly Dinner

While the educational portion was the centerpiece of a COS meeting, each gathering also included a community dinner and a series of important exchanges. Every Thursday evening at 5:45 p.m. an urban church filled with participants, children, allies, and community organizers eager to share a meal and build community. Walking into the Church Hall I was often immediately struck by the activity of the room; children running around playing tag, participants and allies hugging or shaking hands to greet each other, and the smell of food emanating from the kitchen. Eventually dinner was set out on the table and everyone helped themselves to the buffet-style meal, always including a main dish, salad, fruit, and vegetables. The community organizer, officially referred to as the program manager, planned and organized the meal. For the next half hour participants and allies caught up on each other's lives while children finished eating and prepared to leave with the childcare staff. Once dinner finished, usually around 6:30 p.m., an assigned circle gathered up the dishes and cleaned up, the children went to the childcare room, and the remaining adults moved their chairs into a circle in preparation for the meeting.

After sharing this meal, the educational portion of the meeting followed, buttressed by a series of opening and closing statements. The opening statements included a review of the meeting's purposes and principles, announcements, introductions, and updates on what was new and good in participants' lives. After announcements and introductions the

community organizer began by stating what was new and good in her life, at which time each person in attendance did the same. "New and goods" gave participants and allies a chance to introduce themselves and share something positive going on in their lives. The educational portion of the meeting followed new and goods and when finished the meeting concluded with a final exchange, called appreciations. In closing appreciations, members went around the circle saying something positive to the person to their right. The dinner and exchanges were important for reinforcing the philosophical foundation of the organization, and to a certain extent enacting the philosophy into concrete, tangible experiences.

Community Education at the Weekly Meetings

From COS' Fall 2003 inception to July 2005 each Tuesday meeting focused on a different theme: academics, community-building, finances, or systems change. The purpose of focusing each meeting on a different theme was to correspond the meeting curriculum with the specific ally roles. Academic allies learned with and provided additional support at academic meetings, financial allies learned new ideas and had an opportunity to talk about finances at financial meetings and so on with the last meeting of the month being an opportunity to bring everyone together to address current structural barriers or the "Big View." During this time COS employed four different community organizers. Sharon Cunningham, a former ACHIEVE Case Manager, served as COS' first community organizer until July 2004 when she was replaced by Donna Driscoll. In November 2004, once COS reached its self-imposed cap of 25 families, another cohort with Margaret Neumann as its organizer began operation. Unfortunately illness forced Donna Driscoll to resign in May 2005 upon which time Margaret Neumann took over as community organizer for both cohorts. At this point Eric Witherspoon, Scott Miller, and Lois Smidt made the decision for

the ACHIEVE Program, initially only recruiting participant families and providing academic support, to assume complete management of COS.

When the ACHIEVE Program assumed management of COS, a curriculum committee headed by Caroline Johnson, who supervised all the public school programs centered around learning supports including ACHIEVE, made the decision to modify the structure of the weekly meetings. Part of this restructuring included the elimination of the "Big View" meeting devoted to discussing structural barriers. According to Caroline Johnson, "I think we already know what the barriers are…it's more about getting people to the point that they want to do something about it, and then bringing the right people in to help them."

Therefore, in September 2005, ACHIEVE hired Jennifer Sullivan to serve as the program manager responsible for ally recruitment and overall COS management, while Margaret Neumann became the liaison for participant families. Margaret then unexpectedly left COS in December 2005 upon which time both cohorts merged with Jennifer Sullivan serving as both program manager and community organizer. At the time of this writing, COS no longer receives institutional funding from the Annie E. Casey Foundation or United Way, and is in the process of disbanding.

Because the meeting structure changed in December 2005, I chose to include ethnographic examples of meetings prior to the shift in management to the ACHIEVE Program. I made this decision to preserve the continuity of the four types of meetings, given that analysis of the "before- and- after" merge occurs in the conclusion of this study. Furthermore, given the turnover in community organizers I decided to include a meeting led by each of the first three community organizers in order to see if, and how, each negotiated

the tension between challenging and adopting the dominant discourse. In the following

ethnographic section I describe the educational portions of the financial, academic, and

community-building meetings, followed by a more detailed excerpt of the final meeting of

the month, or Big View meeting, including examples of both new and good as well as closing

appreciations.

Financial meeting

The most common Tuesday night theme focused on finances. Given that all of the

participant families were involved in the program because they struggled to leave poverty,

sometimes COS devoted more than one meeting a month to financial matters. The topics of

these meetings varied from fixing bad credit, getting your taxes filed cheaply, creating a

monthly budget, eliminating the "latte factor" or the small amounts of money wasted that add

up in the long run, to presentations from the Institute for Social and Economic Development

(ISED) on saving to buy a house. Given that one of COS' goals was to improve job-related

skills and employability, a number of the meetings I observed focused on how to get a job.

At one particular meeting on February 10, 2004, a number of speakers gave

presentations on how to build a resume, how to interview well, and how to find good jobs.

Sharon Cunningham, COS' first community organizer and a former ACHIEVE Case

Manager, began the educational portion of the meeting by explaining that the night's meeting

would focus on the things participants needed to do in order to get a job if they did not have

one, or a better paying job if they were already employed. She explained that one of the

speakers would be Roberta Smith from the Metro Transit Authority (MTA), and the other

would be a member of COS, an ally named Diane McLain. Diane spoke first, and began her

presentation with a question; "What fears do you have about getting jobs?" Participants

raised their hands and shared examples. Responses included Julia's "I fear I don't' have the necessary skills," Pam's "I fear rejection," and Elizabeth's "My appearance," and Mary, an ally, who remarked, "Applying for and getting a job is just a confusing and difficult process in general."

Diane explained that she was recently unemployed but that she overcame her fears by being "blindly diligent." She explained "My job became getting a job," putting in applications three days a week, sometimes to temp agencies, and just sending in the applications "helped her get over the rejection." When filling out applications, she stressed how important it was to have a "neat" application. She remarked, "A neat application says something about attention to detail." Elizabeth, a participant, raised her hand, obviously frustrated, and said, "You know, that's crap. I'm sorry, I tell it like it is, but not getting a job because they don't think you're neat is crap!" Diane responded, "Right or wrong, that's how it's viewed. You're marketing yourself so you can get a job, if that's what you have to do, then do it…it's an employer's market, they have a line of people waiting, they can pick and choose." Before finishing, Diane held up a folder of rejection letters and said, "Look how many times I failed and I didn't give up. I got a job I love through persistence. My best advice is to use your COS connections, that's what they're for."

The second presenter, Roberta Smith from the MTA, began her presentation by explaining that once you get a resume put together and fill out an application, the interview could make or break your chances of getting the job. Noting that part of her job required her to conduct mock interviews to help people find employment, she told participants, "The keys to interviewing well are dress and appearance while handling yourself appropriately during the interview." Addressing the issue of dress and appearance first, she commented, "Many

of us object to being judged based on how we look. We would prefer to be hired because of our skills and abilities, but like it or not, appearance is important." Continuing, she explained, "The employer has a legitimate business interest in having employees who represent the company and the employers desired image and appearance to the public." At this point she passed out a list of "Grooming Standards" that included statements like "If it is short, tight, or tacky – wear something else" and "Many employers believe that the way you look is a reflection of who you are." Roberta rhetorically asked the participants,

> When you look in the mirror, what do you see? If you were the employer, would you hire that person? Feeling good about yourself is reflected in the image you project to the employer. When you feel good about yourself you will convey confidence and a positive attitude.

After discussing "improper appearance," Roberta explained that another reason people don't get hired is because they lack reliability. She told a story about a man she met who said he applied to the MTA but never heard back. "I checked into it," she said,

> And found out that he gave me an incorrect social security number. His phone number was also disconnected. He obviously wasn't very interested in the job. Some employers get paid based on their turnover rate, so they will only hire people they are confident in.

Roberta stopped at this point and asked if there were any questions. Sheila raised her hand, "How do you handle the pressure and the stress of the interview? I always get so nervous." "Everybody feels stress," Roberta answered,

> But how you handle it is the key. Saying that you whine to your shrink, kick your dog or slam down a fifth of Jack Daniels are not good answers. Exercising, relaxing

with a good book, or turning stress into productive energy is more along the lines of correct answers.

Other questions included one from Amy, "What are the chances of someone who has been a homemaker for a long time getting a job?" Roberta responded, "Well, the question you have to ask is, what qualifies you for this job? Think about the skills you have as a mother that would be marketable and look good on a resume, like organizational skills." Erin, an ally who was the human services director for her company, offered to bring some of her colleagues and hold mock-interviews during a weekly meeting if people were interested. Roberta also offered to come back, which Sharon thought was a great idea. Roberta then concluded her presentation, thanking everyone for their time and attention. She remarked, "One final thing, I heard someone earlier say that the job application process is confusing, it is, but do your homework. It's not my job as an employer to find you a job. I already have one."

Academic meeting

COS devoted one weekly meeting a month to an academic topic. The subjects ranged from a guest speaker on bullying to a presentation by the Iowa State Extension Office on creating a space for children's learning in your home. On one particular Tuesday, Donna Driscoll, who replaced Sharon Cunningham as community organizer in July 2004, began the educational portion of the meeting by explaining "Tonight we're going to talk about school readiness, and Charlotte Buckner from the Child and Family Policy Center [CFPS] is here to talk to us."

Before Charlotte began, Donna asked everyone a question, "First, we are going to talk about how we show our kids we love them. When you were young, how did you know you

were loved?" Participants and allies alike took turns giving examples, sometimes calling on specific childhood memories. One participant, Sally, shared that "For me it was never about things, like material stuff. It was more about the time my family spent with me." Mary, an ally, agreed stating, "Me too. When I think of being young I think of the family traditions, the games we played, feeling safe and cared for."

Donna continued, saying, "Great examples, lets take a few minutes and think about how we show our children we love them." At this point Donna asked everyone to break into learning pairs and take time to share with each other examples of how they showed their children they loved them. After ten minutes we came together as a group and gave examples, including Pam sharing, "One thing I do is work my butt off to make sure my kids have the things they need. Sometimes I come up short, but they know I love them because of how hard I work for them." Once other allies and participants shared their examples, including things like "I hug and kiss my kids every day" and "I write little notes to my kids telling them how proud of them I am," Donna continued, "One way we can show our kids we love them is by helping them be successful in school. A good education is one of the best gifts we can give our children." Donna then passed around a handout listing some examples of how to help children succeed in school. She read examples like "Ask to see your child's school papers, set aside special time to hang out with each child, and volunteer to help at school activities." Once Donna finished with her examples, she introduced Charlotte Buckner from CFPS.

Charlotte moved in front of the large butcher board tablet and explained the importance of school readiness, writing, "Our children are our future." She said "We hear this message time and time again, but it truly hits home for parents, grandparents, caregivers,

teachers, and others who spend time with small children." She asked rhetorically, "Is your child ready for school?" and went on to describe how all children are born ready to learn, yet too many children did not coming to kindergarten "healthy and equipped with the attitudes and abilities to succeed in school." She continued, asserting "There is evidence that as many as one-third of children in America start school at some educational disadvantage that could have been prevented, and this percentage is higher in poorer neighborhoods." Charlotte explained that graduation rates, retention rates in school, test scores, and behavioral problems could all be affected by "getting off to a poor start."

Next Charlotte asked "Is your neighborhood school ready for your child?" She asserted that "School readiness isn't only about getting your kids ready for school, it's also about getting the school ready for your children." Explaining her role with CFPS, Charlotte talked about her involvement with Making Connections School Readiness. In April of 2004, a work group was formed to support school readiness in the Annie E. Casey Making Connections neighborhoods. Charlotte announced that the Making Connections School Readiness Work Group was going to host several "School Readiness Action Circles" for parents who had children in Washington or Lincoln Elementary schools. "This is a great opportunity for you to demonstrate reciprocity," she said. "You could join other parents in your community to discuss concerns and expectations and work together to develop a positive plan of action to ensure that all children are ready for school and all schools are ready for children." Charlotte finished by explaining that at the Action Circles there would be a family meal, a chance to share your expertise as a parent and your child's first teacher, and most importantly an opportunity to develop positive relationships with representatives from your neighborhood school.

Community-building meeting

Because each meeting fostered community in different ways, the weekly meeting specifically devoted to building community frequently tied together strands from other relevant issues. As a result, the community-building meetings often presented opportunities to focus on current issues in the community, such as planning for the holidays during December or preparing for the Iowa Caucuses in January 2004. The focus of the August 1, 2005, meeting centered on helping participants' outline their "dream path."

According to Caroline Johnson, director of New Horizons, once the ACHIEVE Program took over management of COS she made the decision to revisit the goals participants had made within their specific circles with the use of the dream path. Johnson stated,

> The dream path is a model Lois Smidt developed. It's letting the client's dream, not in a sterile 'what academic and financial goals do you have,' but dreaming big. Asking the question 'where would you like to be in five years' and then bringing that down to 'what does that mean you need to accomplish this year, what kinds of things do you need to do this month and this week to make sure that you're on the right path to your dream?' We need to have everybody involved in that, the client sharing what it is they want for their life and then people supporting that.

Margaret Neumann, who had replaced Donna Driscoll as the community organizer, began the August 1 gathering with "Tonight the goal of the meeting is going to be on setting a dream path for each of you." She continued, "It's important for you to sit down with your allies and the rest of the community and share where you are and where you want to be." Margaret went on to tell everyone that the first thing to do is to see where you are. As part of

a financial meeting earlier in the month devoted to eliminating the "latte factor," participants had been asked to keep all of their receipts for a month in order to reflect on exactly what they spent money on. The purpose of the exercise, according to Scott Miller, was to point out to participants how even the little things, like cigarettes or cups of coffee, could add up by the end of the month. Once participants identified where their money went each month, they would be more grounded when it came to carrying out their dream path.

Amy and Mike Johnson were the only participant family to bring their collected receipts. "This absolutely terrifies me," Amy said as she handed Margaret a folder bulging with receipts, remarking, "The thought that you all would know about every can of pop or fast food stop really scares me!" Margaret said, "We all have those little extras we need to keep in mind, I even have to have accounts in two banks so I won't touch the money!" Margaret remarked that part of figuring out where you are is taking a close look at the money you are spending, and whether or not you can afford the things you are spending it on.

"For the rest of the night, however, we're not going to think about how much money you have right now, we're going to imagine it's a perfect world and you had all the training you need. What would your job be?" Margaret asked. Since no one responded immediately, Margaret spoke again, "Let me give you an example. I've always loved working with people. When I was doing in-home childcare for 13 years, I always missed working with and helping people. My dream job was something that involved working with and helping people." After Margaret gave an example, participants slowly began sharing their dream jobs, "A literacy teacher, I know that an education is something no one can ever take away from me, it can open up doors," Julia said. Elizabeth raised her hand, "For me it would be something with people, I'm kind of like an unlicensed therapist at my job right now, so

probably social work." Helping people seemed to be a theme for participants, and Liz agreed

with Elizabeth commenting, "I just want to be done being a mother and raising kids! I'm

finishing my GED and my dream job would be helping people, like saving a life!" Richard,

an ally, added "The great thing about helping people is that there are always things you can

do that don't involve making a lot of money that make a contribution to people's lives."

Once all of the participants who wanted to share had a chance, allies and participants

broke into their specific circles. The goal for participants was to think about that dream job

and then brainstorm with their allies about what they needed to do to be in a position to make

their dream a reality. I was one of Elizabeth's allies, so I joined her circle. Elizabeth again

expressed her interest in social services because her job running the front desk at a women's

resource center put her in a position to talk with and advise struggling women. Mary,

another one of Elizabeth's allies, reminded Elizabeth of one of her goals, which was to

improve her skills through education. "It always comes back to this," Elizabeth said, "I can't

swing working 50 hours a week, going to school, and taking care of my boys." Elizabeth's

academic ally, Richard, interjected "Maybe you should consider vocational school, maybe

that makes more sense than college." Elizabeth answered, "Ya, I know what you're saying,

but that doesn't solve my other problems, working and taking care of my boys."

Margaret called everyone back to the big circle; it was getting late and the meeting

was coming to an end. She said,

> Look at me for example. I ran my own business, childcare, for years, but I took this
>
> job because now I can spend every day helping people. If you have a dream path and
>
> a plan to achieve it, anything's possible.

Getting the "Big View": COS' Tuesday night meeting

The final Tuesday of each month COS had what organizers called the "Big View" meeting. Systems barriers were discussed at this meeting, possible solutions developed, and action plans created. Unlike the other meetings, Big View Tuesdays generally included all allies and participant families, sometimes filling the social room with seventy-five or more people. The ethnographic data below is from the Big View meeting on October 29th 2004.

Following a round of *new and good* updates, the community organizer, Donna, introduced a new Spanish word for the week, something she did at the beginning of every meeting in order to help build solidarity between the English and the seven or eight Spanish speaking participant families. Then, standing with pen in hand in front of a large butcher-block tablet of paper, she asked participants and allies to list the barriers they had faced that month. Cindy, a long-time participant, interpreted for two Latina participants while Ramona, a recent addition to COS, spoke in Spanish to her Public School ACHIEVE Case Manager about her barriers. Ramona's Case Manager interpreted and told the group about Ramona's barriers, particularly, "Although she is not eligible for benefits due to her residency status, Ramona is determined to make it." Barriers from other participants included childcare eligibility limits, limited medical benefits, the fact that food stamp eligibility was reassessed only twice a year, and the lack of transportation, child support recovery, affordable housing, jobs, and living wages.

Donna then reframed the discussion and merged the conversation with how fear prevented participants from moving ahead by asking participants to "Think of the role that fear plays in preventing people from taking the next step to leaving poverty." Before discussing this question within individual participant/ally circles, a strategy COS used in

addition to listening pairs, Donna modeled an example by sharing a personal experience. She said, "I know there is chaos everywhere when you live in poverty. I know from experience I am more comfortable when I have money in my pocket than I was when I was almost homeless." Donna, articulating the paralyzing effects of this fear, explained how she "wanted to be off food stamps, but didn't have a job that paid enough." She knew that if she "made more money, she would lose benefits for her kids but still not have enough to survive." As a result she lived on food stamps and went without the things she and her children needed, which sometimes included no medical coverage at all. Donna continued passionately, remarking that "What held me back was that I was afraid to try to get another job that bumped me to the next level, I was afraid of having nothing as opposed to almost nothing."

At this point, participants and allies moved their chairs into circles and began sharing the fears that prevented them from moving ahead. In the circle I joined as an ally, Elizabeth described her job as her biggest fear. Elizabeth earned $8.03 an hour, did not have health care, and was afraid her place of employment was going out of business. Frustration filled her voice as she told her circle, "I want to move up, but I can't work forty hours a week and go to school." Elizabeth's reference to education was particularly important, as one of her goals upon joining COS was learning how to continue her education.

After it appeared as though all circles had shared their fears, Donna called everyone back together and asked the participants to share the fears that prevented them from moving ahead. Donna responded with "Losing Section VIII housing. I only make $7 an hour, that would be scary." Laura said, "Finding a job with benefits" and Mike added, "Health care benefits, the kids have Hawk-Eye and we have regular. We want the kids on ours but the co-

pay is too much." Erin tackled a critical issue head-on, and referred to failed child support recovery and affordable childcare.

As the meeting came to a close Donna asked everyone "Which barrier is the most pressing issue?" The group decided that childcare was the most important issue, and Donna, talking about doing advocacy work on Capitol Hill with a state-wide CBO, said, "I like talking and everything, but we need to start doing something. It's really about self-empowerment. Let's create a vision and then a plan. Let's band together and be formidable." Donna's plea to participants and allies to get actively involved in advocacy was followed by closing appreciations, where allies and participants took turns verbally appreciating something about the person sitting next to them. Following appreciations, participants, allies, and community organizers moved the chairs from the circle, replacing them at the tables where they earlier ate dinner, while a feeling of hopefulness filled the air as people hugged, said goodbyes, and left to continue their struggles.

As the preceding ethnographic examples demonstrate, the weekly meetings performed vital functions in helping families cope with living in and eventually leaving poverty. The dinner and rituals gave both participants and allies alike an opportunity to share a nutritious meal and build important relationships. The educational portions of the meetings presented critical opportunities for community education to occur. A much deeper analytic reading is necessary, however, to illuminate exactly how these meetings functioned to alleviate poverty. For example, how did the rituals and dinner serve to build community and relieve social isolation? In what ways did cross-class interactions, skill development, and social networking help families leave poverty? Finally, how was the tension between the liberating goals of a community organization and the liberal goals of a public school system

negotiated during the meetings? These are some of the questions the following analytic

chapter will address in the hopes of developing theoretically useful tools to understand how

the meetings might both empower and further marginalize those living in poverty.

Chapter 6

Analysis: Negotiating Dominant and Non-dominant Discourses

The previous ethnographic sections served to describe some of the methods Circles of Support (COS) employed while helping families cope with living in and eventually leaving poverty. COS, like many CBOs nationwide, attempted to address the mandates of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) while rallying community support to aid those marginalized by its policies. For example, specifically addressing the work-first requirements of PRWORA, COS provided services that increased employability and supported self-sufficiency for those living in or on the verge of poverty. COS concurrently worked to build community, in this context defined as a "process that is designed to promote collaboration in decision-making so that individuals can, in meaningful ways, influence decisions that affect their lives" by fostering cooperation between the not-for-profit, non-profit, and public sectors in the hopes of mobilizing the community for social change (Jakubowski and Burman, 2004, p.160).

What remains necessary is an explication of the impact these methods had on families participating in the program. Of particular significance are analyses of the ways cross-class interactions, skill development, and social networking helped families leave poverty, and how the tension between the liberating goals of a community organization and the liberal goals of a public school system were negotiated during the meetings.

My analysis of the ethnographic data illuminated three themes that emerged during the meetings, identified through careful coding. Each of the three themes represents identifiable tensions created by the juxtaposition of the liberal goals of the Walden Public School System (WPSS) and the liberating goals of COS. Toward those ends, I constructed

three analytic sections, one devoted to each theme. In the first analytic section I examine

how dominant and non-dominant cultural capital was transmitted during the educational

portion of the meetings and how this transmission fostered skill development, empowerment,

and structural critique. I also seek to understand if and how the negative discourses of

PRWORA were mobilized in the meetings and what relationship social and cultural capital

transmission played in this mobilization. Finally, I analyze the real and potential liminal

space created in the meetings that valued and encouraged the creation of new forms of

cultural capital.

I draw on Pierre Bourdieu's (1992, 1996, 2001) social theories for analysis, not only

because such theories are linked to the social and cultural capital-building work that COS

consciously did, but also because Bourdieu intended his theories to provide a lens through

which to create rich and detailed analyses of such social processes and interactions. As Moi

(1991) argues, one of the advantages of Bourdieu's "microtheoretical approach" is that it

allows us to "incorporate the most mundane details of everyday life into our analyses" (p.

1019). For my work, the details of the CBO meetings are critical sites for analysis. I also,

however, problematize the use of Bourdieu. Drawing from Yosso's (2005) and Carter's

(2003) critique of those who cite him and underemphasize the significance of "non-

dominant" forms of cultural capital, I seek to illustrate a more complex approach to using

social and cultural capital theories for the analysis of ethnographic data.

Therefore, in what follows I first provide an overview of the concepts of social and

cultural capital as put forth by Bourdieu in light of Yosso and Carter's critiques. I then

analyze the meetings to describe how the tension between empowerment and oppression

played out. For example, what about the meetings were effective and did they paradoxically

and unintentionally subvert their own good intentions to assist and empower participants and instead, function oppressively, reinforcing the negative understandings of those in poverty that they are attempting to transform? Finally, I attempt to avoid creating an overly simplistic dichotomy where community activists and school representatives either oppressed or liberated participants and instead investigate the potential liminal space created at the meetings.

Rethinking "Capital" for Community-Based Organizations

There has been an abundance of recent literature on the importance of social capital, and to a lesser extent cultural capital acquisition, as a means for low-income families to successfully escape poverty. This literature has been used to both frame organizational programming and to analyze their outcomes, finding that a lack of social capital, loosely defined as social networks, prevents people from leaving poverty (Schuller, 2001; Edwards, Franklin, and Holland, 2003).

This interest in capital development at the community level is partially the result of the devolution of public safety nets for low-income families. While the federal government has encouraged volunteerism and local solutions to market failures, grassroots community organizers have shifted focus to how nonmonetary forms of capital--like social capital--can generate power and influence in their poverty alleviation organizations (for a summary of recent literature on social capital see Portes, 1998). Social capital is not a new concept, but rather originated as early as the 1920s (Dika and Singh, 2002). Its theoretical development, however, began in the last quarter of the 20th Century with theorists such as Loury (1977), criticizing the narrowly materialistic manner in which contemporary economists defined capital (DeFillippis, 2001). James Coleman (1988) brought social capital to mainstream

American social sciences, positing that it consisted of "levels of trust, as evidenced by obligations and expectations, information channels, and norms and sanctions that promote the common good over self-interest" (Dika and Singh, 2002, p. 33).

Much of the recent attention devoted to social capital is the result of the immense popularity of Robert Putnam (1995). Putnam, likening social capital to a level of "civicness" in communities, towns, and even entire nations, contends that social capital's characteristics include trust, networks, and norms that facilitate action for the benefit of the individual and group. According to Putnam (1995), social ills such as poverty in the United States can be rectified by civic involvement, particularly membership in voluntary associations. In light of diminished governmental responsibility for alleviating poverty, Putnam's work has been lauded by liberals interested in the importance of trust, generosity, and collective action as well as by conservatives, interested in local alternatives to intrusive government involvement (Bowles and Gintis, 2000; Cruikshank, 1999).

However, my ethnographic understandings of COS reveal the limitations of using Putnam for making sense of the complexity of the interactions that took place at the educational spaces created at COS' weekly meetings. Furthermore, I am concerned that the recent emphasis on social capital marks the unwelcome entrance of neoliberal economics into social analysis (Weis & Fine, 2004). I therefore turn to the work of Pierre Bourdieu (1985, 1992, 1996, 2001), who proffers a more theoretically useful analysis of social capital (Defillipis, 2001; Portes, 1998). According to Bourdieu, social capital is "the sum of the resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition" (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p. 119). For Bourdieu, social capital is both

the relationship that allows members to claim access to each other's resources and the amount and quality of those relationships.

Further, Bourdieu's work is useful for analyzing COS given that he does not divorce social capital from other forms of capital. Studies of community-based organizations that rely solely on social capital often present an unsophisticated, simplistic look at poverty alleviation (Portes, 1998; Defilippis, 2001; see Lockhart, 2005 for an example). Conversely, Bourdieu contends that in social and economic relationships it is impossible to account for the organization and operation of the social world without recognizing other forms capital may take. Bourdieu therefore recognizes, and equally emphasizes, other forms of capital that may dictate the effectiveness of social capital, particularly cultural and economic capital (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 241).

Cultural capital, according to Bourdieu, is grounded in the extent to which one knows the "legitimate" and valued cultural products of one's society. Familiarity with art, music, and literature and one's accent, language and food for example, are marks of cultural capital in the U.S. and Western European society, as are notions of individualism and fluid upward mobility. The amount of cultural capital one has is most accessible to those born into the dominant class of a society, and then to those who attain higher positions through education than they would otherwise expect through inheritance. Possessing large stores of this dominant cultural capital gives people social status, thereby affording them the opportunity to exchange that recognition for economic rewards, such as how a college degree translates into a higher paying job (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992).

Additionally, Bourdieu is concerned with how power functions, specifically, how powerful groups in society are able to define, to their advantage, what is culturally valuable

and what is not. The dominant class utilizes its social and economic capital to create acceptance of its desired forms of cultural capital. For example, dominant society accepts the view that those who have attained economic stability or wealth and social status have done so through their own resourcefulness and are deserving of the rewards they attain. Poverty, in contrast, is the result of personal failures. The dominant class therefore, was able to use its social capital through lobbying and economic capital through campaign contributions to influence the creation of legislation like PRWORA, institutionalizing the dominant view of the undeserving poor as lacking personal responsibility and independence (Katz, 1995).   Not only are the dominant views passed on to children at home, they are legislated, thereby insuring their position of prominence in the discourse. By defining particular forms of individualism and personal responsibility as desirable, the dominant class is able to impose its definition of reality on all other classes (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992).

In the context of this study Bourdieu is especially important because his work demonstrates exactly *how* dominant social classes reproduce themselves. In this regard, some, who claim he puts forth a prescription for adopting dominant values and ideas in order to be successful in mainstream society, have misinterpreted Bourdieu, thereby supporting a deficit view of those living in a poverty (e.g., Ruby Payne, 2005).   In contrast, however, a thoughtful analysis of Bourdieu's notions of capital exposes the often transparent manner in which capital is used to reproduce social inequality. I want to highlight how an understanding of the various types of capital can be utilized to undermine the dominant construction of that capital, specifically through the creation of a hybridized capital that recognizes and values "non-dominant" forms of capital as well.

Prudence Carter (2003) addresses the notion of non-dominant cultural capital by demonstrating the manner in which a group of African American students depended on both dominant and non-dominant cultural capital, especially linguistically, while navigating the New York public school system. Contributing to literature challenging the viability of oppositional culture theory, Carter defines non-dominant cultural capital as "those resources used by lower status individuals to gain 'authentic' cultural status positions within their respective communities" (p. 138). Refusing to view their own worth from the perspective of the dominant group while rejecting the feelings of hope and despair brought on by a "limited opportunity structure," these students "produce semi-autonomous and resourceful cultural 'tool kits' with which to evaluate their own and each others social actions" (p. 139).

Tara Yosso (2005), drawing from Critical Race Theory, complements Carter's position while asserting that marginalized communities have forms of capital not recognized and therefore not valued by the dominant classes because they emerge from the skills and knowledge that comes from experiences of oppression and marginalization, what she calls community cultural wealth. Yosso explains that low-income and racialized minority communities may possess, for example, aspirational, familial, linguistic, navigational, and resistant capital. Aspirational capital is "the ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future, even in the face of real and perceived barriers." (p. 77-78). Familial capital refers to "those cultural knowledges nurtured among . . .kin that carry a sense of community history, memory and cultural intuition that includes friends and connections to communities" (p. 79). Linguistic capital "includes the intellectual and social skills attained through communication experience in more than one language or style" (p. 78). Resistant capital "refers to those knowledges and skills fostered through oppositional behavior that challenges inequality" (p.

81). Finally, navigational capital is the skill of maneuvering through social institutions that are hostile to those not sharing the privilege that created the institutions (p. 80). Yosso argues that navigational capital is connected to resistant capital because it takes "a set of inner resources, social competencies and cultural strategies that permit individuals not only survive, recover, or even thrive after stressful events, but also to draw from the experience to enhance subsequent functioning" (citing Stanton-Salazar, 2001, p. 80). Navigational capital thus acknowledges individual agency within institutional constraints, but it also connects to social networks that facilitate community navigation through places and spaces including schools, the job market, the health care and judicial systems, as well as social services (Williams, 1997).

Utilizing the theoretical works of Bourdieu, informed by Carter and Yosso, presents the opportunity to demonstrate how both dominant and non-dominant forms of capital were negotiated in the weekly meetings of COS. I contend that although there should be an awareness or recognition of dominant cultural capital, "since dominant cultural capital facilitates success within mainstream institutions and organizations," value must be placed on non-dominant capital as well (Carter, 2003, p.139). As Carter points out, "Those individuals who choose the balancing act of maintaining both dominant and non-dominant capital are likely to acquire valued status positions within both their lower status community and the wider society" (p. 139).

As explained in previous chapters, community education that does not challenge systemic failings may actually perpetuate the dominant views on which those structures are built. The liberal position of working within existing structures is, therefore, potentially oppressive while recognizing structural barriers and working to eliminate them is potentially

empowering. My coding of three-years' worth of fieldnotes illuminated three themes and further uncovered this tension between empowerment and oppression. The themes included: (a) the use of didactic strategies in the educational program to empower and develop participant's dominant and non-dominant cultural capital, (b) the potentially marginalizing effects of discourse related to work, leadership, and personal responsibility, and (c) the real as well as potential liminal space created where participants exercised agency and both resisted the dominant discourse and created new forms of capital. Since COS devoted each meeting to one of four focus areas, emphasizing academics, finances, community-building, or systems change, I carefully selected one of each type to analyze the themes that emerged.

Empowering Discourses: Personal Development, Skill Building, and Structural Critique

The academic programs, whether it was Charlotte focusing on school-readiness, Margaret on dream paths, Diane on job interviews, or Donna discussing systemic barriers, created a venue where social and cultural capital acquisition was central. The Tuesday night presentations were meant to help low-income families develop the understanding, skills, and know-how to not only navigate the system, such as the job market, educational, or social service system, but to live and function in a middle-class world. Ultimately, the acquisition of this dominant cultural capital should help those who are poor travel this middle-class world without the stigmatizing signs of poverty, reflected by a lack of dominant cultural capital. Doing so will improve the likelihood of moving into better financial situations.

To obtain these advantages, participants acquired dominant cultural capital from community organizers and allies during the weekly meetings. In this case, it would be cultural capital in what Bourdieu calls the "embodied" state as opposed to the "objectified" state. While objectified cultural capital is transferable in material form through objects and

media, such as writings and paintings, Bourdieu says that embodied capital is "in the form of what is called culture, cultivation, *Bildung*, presupposing a process of embodiment, incorporation, which, insofar as it implies a labor of inculcation and assimilation, costs time, time which must be invested personally by the investor" (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 244).

Bourdieu's metaphor of a game is helpful in conceptualizing how this might work in a practical application. He describes a game whereby all players have stacks of different colored chips of varying quantities and of different colors representing cultural, social, and economic capital. The move each player makes depends on both the quantity and diversity of chips. Bourdieu explains, "Two individuals endowed with an equivalent overall capital can differ, in their position as well in their stances, in that one holds a lot of economic capital and little cultural capital while the other has little economic capital and large cultural assets" (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p. 99). Furthermore, a person generally acquires, and utilizes, social and cultural capital quite unconsciously, constructing what Bourdieu calls "habitus" or a "socialized subjectivity" (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p. 126). All four types of COS weekly meetings invested time in skill building and personal development, which empowered participants by helping them acquire the dominant cultural capital valued in the job market.

Concurrently, during the weekly meetings non-dominant forms of cultural capital were recognized and validated while combating the stereotypes and victim-blaming embedded in PRWORA's oppressive discourses. Furthermore, building participant's stores of dominant cultural capital while recognizing and valuing their non-dominant cultural capital created space for the formation of a new, hybridized cultural capital within the field of COS.

Dominant Cultural Capital: Skills Building and Advocacy

Analyzing the financial meeting demonstrates how the educational components of the meetings built participants' dominant cultural capital through the process of skill building. One of COS' ultimate goals was to find employment for those participants who were unemployed, and/or to find better paying employment for those already working. During the financial meeting, the goal was to help participants convince employers that they were worth hiring. This was done by bringing in someone who was recently jobless, in this case a member of COS demonstrating that it is indeed possible to go from unemployed to employed, along with someone who conducted mock-interviews for a living. Both Roberta and Diane helped participants develop employable skills by demonstrating effective ways of crafting a resume, preparing for an interview, and showing reliability. Employers, with vast stores of dominant cultural capital, hold the expectation that potential employees will exhibit particularly valued characteristics, such as appropriate dress, neatness, and ways of handling stress (Bourdieu, 1986). Diane touched on this and transferred dominant cultural capital when she said "A neat application says something about attention to detail… .You're marketing yourself so you can get a job…it's an employer's market, they have a line of people waiting, they can pick and choose."

Roberta further stressed presenting oneself in a particular way when she told participants "The keys to interviewing well are dress and appearance and handling yourself appropriately during the interview" and "The employer has a legitimate business interest in having employees who represent the company and the employers desired image and appearance to the public." Roberta gave participants concrete examples of how to dress appropriately and handle themselves in an interview by referring to examples in an

enormous, forty-one page packet she gave them. The packet contained chapters devoted to "application skills," "dress and appearance," "interviewing skills," "job-search tips," "job retention," and "customer service." In effect, Roberta was putting time and effort into trying to transfer, or teach, her understanding of dominant cultural capital to participants so they might benefit from it. Theoretically, if participants have a neat resume, interview well, and handle stress appropriately, they put themselves in a position to obtain a better paying job. Furthermore, when Erin offered to bring her colleagues in to conduct mock interviews, participants have the opportunity to test and refine their skills in a practical way.

The dream path exercise during the community-building meeting gave participants the opportunity to develop useful skills, in this case the ability to build a long-range plan to achieve a goal. Although those living in poverty are often overwhelmed with the difficulty of day to day living, like struggling to provide for their families while working for next to nothing with no benefits, taking the time to dream and develop a logical plan to achieve it empowers participants by validating their hopes and committing to helping make them a reality. In this case the exercise not only reinforced the importance of long-range planning, it also mobilized the social capital of the allies in attendance. For example, participants may talk about their dreams and goals to their own circle of support, but sharing dreams and goals with the bigger group presented the opportunity for allies from other circles to think about ways to help those participants make community connections. Allies from other circles may have contacts or networks that are more applicable to the dreams of other participants and this meeting provides the opportunity to deepen and broaden the participant's access to potentially productive social networks.

The dream path was meant to be part of a three-phase process whereby "Allies and participants begin to first brainstorm steps to achieve goals, and then identify each circle member's contributions towards success remembering that the allies are not the only resource to the circle" (Smidt & Miller, 2004, p. 30). During phase one participants and COS staff met to share the reasons they were interested in COS, which often included questions like "what gifts do you bring to circles," "what hopes and dreams do you have," and "what do you like to do for fun." In phase two the community organizer facilitated the initial, informal meetings between participants and their allies where participants were encouraged to frame their goals in terms of community-building, financial, and academics. The dream path itself was part of phase three in which the full circle met, along with COS staff, to encourage participants to dream big without any constraints.

Unfortunately, instead of a dream path, the exercise described in the ethnographic section turned into a discussion about dream jobs when Margaret asked, "We're going to imagine it's a perfect world and you had all the training you need. What would your job be?" Margaret interrupted the period of uncomfortable silence that followed with, "My dream job was something that involved working with and helping people." After the meeting Mary remarked to me, "I thought that was supposed to be about dreaming big." Making the exercise about jobs may not have been intentional but no doubt reflected the work-first philosophy espoused by PRWORA. Instead of being an opportunity for participants and allies to recognize and validate each other's dreams and build community, the effectiveness of the exercise was diminished as dreams were reframed to only include work.

Turning to the ethnographic section on the academic meeting, participants acquired dominant cultural capital when Charlotte encouraged them to reinforce the importance of

their children's education. The reality is that schools operate to reward and reinforce

dominant cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1996; Apple, 2001; Brantlinger, 2003). While families

living in poverty, particularly single mothers, face marginalizing stereotypes and treatment

when advocating for their children at school (Bloom, 2001), Apple (2001) contends,

> [that] Middle-class parents are clearly the most advantaged in this kind of cultural
>
> assemblage…[they] have become quite skilled, in general, in exploiting market
>
> mechanisms in education and in bringing their social, economic, and cultural capital
>
> to bear on them. (p. 73)

Unlike parents living in poverty who may not know how or be able to advocate for their

children in the ways that middle-class school officials expect them to, "Middle-class parents

are more likely to have the knowledge, skills and contacts to decode and manipulate what are

increasingly complex and deregulated [educational] systems" (Apple, 2001, p. 74). As

Bloom illustrates (2001), this image of the correct or "normalized" manner in which parents

are expected to interact with schools has been made national policy through the National

Educational Goals Panel and the National PTA, while "making invisible the many social

conditions that prevent such involvement for families in poverty" (p. 302).

When Charlotte stated "School readiness isn't only about getting your kids ready for

school, it's also about getting the school ready for your children," she recognized that

schools, in their current form, are not prepared, equipped, or concerned about meeting the

needs of children living in poverty. She also presented participants with an example and an

opportunity to do something about it when she said, "You could join other parents in your

community to discuss concerns and expectations and work together to develop a positive

plan of action to ensure that all children are ready for school and all schools are ready for

children." Dominant cultural capital allows middle-class families to navigate the educational system with ease because "They can…provide the hidden cultural resources such as camps and after school programs…that give their children an 'ease,' a 'style,' that seems 'natural' and acts as a set of cultural resources (Apple, 2001, p. 73)."

Providing the awareness and an opportunity to join an Action Circle helped participants learn useful ways to advocate for their children effectively. Familiarity with this kind of advocacy, in addition to the opportunity and the chance to, as Charlotte said, "Share your expertise as a parent and your child's first teacher, and most importantly begin developing positive relationships with representatives from your neighborhood school," helped participants begin to become more comfortable in social encounters with neighborhood and school officials by confirming their right to advocate. The participants, as with those living in the middle-class, could then use this social and cultural capital as "an unseen but powerful storehouse of resources…[the] sense of what might be called 'confidence'" (Apple, 2001, p. 73; Brantlinger, 2003).

This is not to say that the participant families, or families living in poverty in general, do not already think education is important. On the contrary, empirical work supports the conclusion that participant families in CBOs like COS (Bloom, 2001; Books, 2003) believe strongly in the importance of education. Therefore, the purpose of the academic meeting was not to convince, but was to reinforce to participants the importance of education, while demonstrating concrete examples of how to craft their advocacy in ways similar to how the middle-class do. This reinforcement is vital because,

> The match between the historically grounded habitus expected in schools and in its actors and those of more affluent parents, combined with the material resources

available to more affluent parents, usually leads to a successful conversion of economic and social capital into cultural capital. (Apple, 1999, p. 11)

In this way, participant exposure and development of dominant cultural capital may also lead to successful application of that capital in encounters with schools officials.

Unfortunately, this meeting was intended to address school readiness, not advocacy. The reframing that occurred during the dream path also occurred during the academic meeting, where school readiness and advocacy were inadvertently conflated. Instead of, "Tonight we're going to talk about school readiness," as Donna announced, her questions about "how we show our kids we love them" and "when you were young, how did you know you were loved" were meant to demonstrate to participants that advocating for their children at school was just another way to show their love. Paradoxically, school readiness must stress specific tools parents can give their children to help them succeed in school. For example, students entering kindergarten who can recognize letters, numbers, and shapes or the beginning and ending sounds of words are more likely to succeed in school (Coley, 2002, p. 5). According to literature on a school readiness program at the local elementary school, called Parents as Teachers,

Parents are supported by Parents as Teachers-certified parent educators trained to translate scientific information on early brain development into specific *when, what, how,* and *why* advice for families. By understanding what to expect during each stage of development, parents can easily capture the teachable moments in everyday life to enhance their child's language development, intellectual growth, social development and motor skills. ("Parent as Teachers" brochure, p. 4)

By misrepresenting school readiness for advocacy, Donna and Charlotte gave participants the impression that advocating for their children would help prepare them for school success. While advocacy is vitally important for parents and their children living in poverty, it does not address their practical school-readiness needs.

<center>Non-dominant Cultural Capital</center>

During the Big View meeting, the goal was to foster the acquisition of both cultural and social capital through a discussion of the structural barriers families faced in their struggle to leave poverty. Participant's dominant cultural capital was developed through interactions with community organizers and middle/upper class allies who demonstrated the importance of presenting structural critiques, through lobbying, in an articulate and lucid manner. Social capital acquisition was also fostered through a deepening of social ties between allies and participants, uncovering previously unrecognized links and connections that could serve as starting points for collective action plans. These kinds of activities were explicit challenges to the messages embedded in PRWORA, particularly that the poor are to blame for their poverty. While *how* to advocate for structural critiques in a lucid and articulate manner is an example of dominant cultural capital, *recognizing* the structural barriers is actually a non-dominant form of cultural capital, or resistant capital (Yosso, 2005). This is where the questions raised by Yosso and Carter in relation to Bourdieu's theories are so important: COS not only valued and validated dominant cultural capital, but the meetings also recognized and valued the participants' non-dominant forms of capital.

Donna's initial question about the "barriers you faced this month" during the systems change meeting was an overt recognition that participant families faced incredible obstacles

to leaving poverty, which is a form of resistant capital. As Yosso (2005) states, resistant capital represents

> Those knowledges and skills fostered through oppositional behavior that challenges inequality…grounded in the legacy of resistance to subordination…acquired through verbal and nonverbal lessons that teach about one's self-worth as a means to resist the social messages that demean. (p. 81)

Although Donna asked a similar question at the beginning of every Big View meeting, she nonetheless reminded participants to "focus on the structural barriers you are facing so we can do something about them." A group discussion of the barriers that participants faced, and the process of naming those barriers that were structural, reaffirmed to participants and allies alike that many of the obstacles marginalized families face were not natural but rather systemic failures. To name and acknowledge the existence of these barriers, and to do so within the field of COS, was different from experiencing these barriers alone in everyday life. Instead of purely an individual experience, the barrier became a structural issue and a shared class experience.

Reflecting Yosso's categories of community cultural wealth, the community-building meeting recognized and valued aspirational capital. For example, when Margaret said, "For the rest of the night, we're not going to think about how much money you have right now, we're going to imagine it's a perfect world and you had all the training you need. What would your job be?" Participants were encouraged to name their dreams with no strings attached, no limits or demands to be realistic. Therefore, the dream path project validated the participants' aspirational capital while concurrently encouraged them to develop a logical

plan of action. Furthermore, participant's aspirational capital could have been developed even more fully had the dream path focused on more than their dream jobs.

During the academic meeting, familial capital was legitimated when participants were asked to remember how they knew they were loved when they were young. Their responses, such as "For me it was never about things, like material stuff. It was more about the time my family spent with me" and "Me too, when I think of being young I think of the family traditions, the games we played, feeling safe and cared for," in this context created a space that named participants' familial capital and expanded the notion of family to include the community present at the meeting, ally and participant alike.

Finally, linguistic capital was authenticated at all the meetings where the speed of the meeting was often predicated upon interpretation for Spanish speaking participant families. As opposed to being viewed as a hindrance or difficulty, community organizers, participants, and allies valued linguistic diversity through activities such as taking time to learn basic conversational Spanish, which deepened the sense of community in such a linguistically diverse environment.

In these ways the COS meetings empowered participants by building skills, creating community, and challenging PRWORA's negative discourse. The meetings combated the stereotypes that participants are to blame for their poverty by validating resistant capital, participant leadership, and naming structural barriers. The meetings reaffirmed to participants, and demonstrated to allies, that many of the skills they possessed were not recognized by dominant society and that they were not to blame for low wages, inaccessible and dangerous Section VIII housing, or the lack of affordable childcare. As we shall see,

however, the inherent contradictions in the dominant and non-dominant discourses of the meetings limited empowerment and have the potential to further marginalize participants.

Disdainful Discourses Reproduced Nonetheless

A careful analysis of the COS meetings demonstrates that while empowering and liberating, the meetings also unintentionally reinforced oppressive discourses. In general, the meetings became oppressive when the discourse positioned participants as "broken" and in need of fixing (Cruikshank, 1999). The problematic discourses that were perpetuated support contradictions in "real" empowerment, creating employable identities, and encouraging participants to feel personally responsible for not moving ahead.

During the process of developing employable identities, recognizing structural barriers and learning to critique them in articulate and lucid ways, contradictions arose. As is the case in government-sponsored welfare-to-work programs, the financial and Big View discussions were redirected and became more about personal failures: a process of de-emphasizing structural inadequacies and instead over-emphasizing constructed individual deficiencies (Bloom and Kilgore, 2003a; Broughton, 2003; Sandlin, 2003, 2004; Sandlin and Cervero, 2003). The financial meeting ignored non-dominant forms of cultural capital, like Elizabeth's resistance to the assumption being poor meant not being neat, and instead encouraged participants to conform to an arbitrary standard of acceptability. Furthermore, the cultural capital that participants acquired during the Big View meeting encouraged them to approach structural barriers in a manner that was acceptable to their middle-class allies, through lobbying, phone calls, and emails to their representatives, ignoring other forms of collective action like demonstrating or political activism.

Additionally, when both Diane and Donna moved the discussion away from structural barriers and instead focused on fears that prevent people from taking steps to leaving poverty, the message of empowerment got obscured and the conversation perpetuated PRWORA's discourse of personal responsibility by over-emphasizing individual deficits and de-emphasizing structural barriers. This contradiction was evident when Diane asked participants "What fears do you have about getting jobs" and shortly after said, "it's an employer's market, they have a line of people waiting, and they can pick and choose." Diane's discourse implied that participants were allowing their fears to prevent them from getting jobs, like her "fear of rejection," while simultaneously implying that there were more people seeking work than jobs available. Roberta's comment about dress and appearance affirmed the idea that "Many of us object to being judged based on how we look," but she nonetheless legitimated this position when she went on to say "The employer has a legitimate business interest in having employees who represent…the employers desired image and appearance." Furthermore, when Roberta said, "If it is short, tight, or tacky – wear something else" followed by "Feeling good about yourself is reflected in the image you project to the employer" she not only implied that women who wear these clothes cannot feel good about themselves, she overlooked the reality that those clothes may be have been all they owned (Mink, 1998c). Furthermore, this reference to tight clothing perpetuates the demeaning stereotype that women living in poverty are overtly sexual, and that "[they] use the body in a sexual way and verbally and subverbally compliment body parts. If you have few financial resources, the way you sexually attract someone is with your body" (Payne, 2005, p. 52).

Although meant to be practical advice on how to succeed, these statements represented tension between dominant and non-dominant understandings, and in these cases the dominant understandings were legitimated and reinforced, emphasizing conformity and acceptance of the dominant discourse. In this instance, legitimizing the dominant discourse works to inform the habitus of both allies and participants. Working on a semi-conscious level, the habitus then informs future practices within COS (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992).

In the Big View meeting, when Donna shared that she was afraid of losing Section VIII housing and Amy and Mike expressed fears about having jobs without health care benefits for themselves and their children, each of these responses pointed to a systemic barrier, not a barrier propped up by fear. These are structural barriers because the waiting list in this city for Section VIII housing was more than one year and in order to qualify an applicant may not have received an eviction notice in the last seven years, a difficult proposition for families forced to make decisions about whether to pay rent or buy food. Low wage jobs, like the ones many COS participants worked in, rarely offered affordable health insurance while at the same time made them ineligible for Medicaid thresholds. Additionally, Elizabeth's fear was directly linked to the fact that she did not earn a living wage, only $8.03 per hour in an unstable job, while living in dangerous and unsafe Section VIII housing. Donna's reframing of the discussion, merging systemic barriers with personal fears, detracted from a constructive critique of structural barriers and instead called on participants to focus on their own inadequacies. Although COS did recognize systemic barriers, and took action to remove them by lobbying on Capitol Hill, this kind of discourse lost its effectiveness when the barriers were framed as personal deficits and the participants were constructed as broken and in need of fixing.

The marginalizing language that permeated the financial meeting was reflected in comments like "you need to handle yourself appropriately," "You're marketing yourself to get a job," "look how many times I failed," and "how you look is who you are." There is no doubt that in order to get a decent paying job in this employment climate, participants must appear to be something employers assume they are not. While fostering the development of dominant cultural capital can help participants navigate the employment system more effectively, emphasizing the marginalizing and, quite frankly, untrue assertions that looking good and getting over failure are real antidotes to the lack of available jobs that pay living wages inappropriately constructed unemployment as an issue of personal failure. For example, in Roberta's example of the man who complained to her that he had not been contacted for an interview, she said, "I checked into it and found out that…his phone number was disconnected…he obviously wasn't very interested in the job." Her assumption ignored the unfortunate reality that people living in poverty struggle to balance paying bills and feeding their families and often have their phones disconnected (Rank, 2004).

Furthermore, the process of "marketing yourself" was another potentially marginalizing aspect of the financial meeting. When Roberta encouraged Amy to "Think about the skills you have as a mother that would be marketable and look good on a resume, like organizational skills," this strategy correctly recognizes mothering as intentional work (Bloom, 2001; Griffith and Smith, 1990). It is also, however,

> Part of the colonizing process of negating mothering because it appropriates
> motherwork for its own ends. Until a woman can list her skills on a resume, these
> skills…are not deemed legitimate skills that enable a person to participate in society.
> (Bloom and Kilgore, 2003a, p. 376)

In these manners, the meetings operated to overemphasize individualism, responsibility, and change in ways that marginalized participants. Regardless of how hard participants work at being responsible and acquiring cultural capital, it may not be enough. First, demonstrating dominant cultural capital through a neat resume, appropriate attire, and acceptable methods of alleviating stress while ignoring the reality of the limited opportunity in the global marketplace may leave participants right where they started (Rank, 2004). Second, middle-class allies acquired, and continue to acquire, dominant cultural capital every day of their lives, in their homes, their schools, and their communities. According to Bourdieu (1986), "The initial accumulation of cultural capital, the precondition for the fast, easy accumulation of every kind of cultural capital, starts at the outset…only for the offspring of families endowed with strong cultural capital" (p. 246). Therefore, participants interacting with middle-class allies and organizers one day a week were at a disadvantage, playing catch-up in a race where they were considerably behind.

The weekly meetings had the potential to overemphasize the liberal goal of "becoming middle-class" while underemphasizing or completely ignoring the liberatory goals that represented the foundation of the program. The belief in the systemic causes of poverty and the need for communal associations to alleviate them was challenged by encouraging participants to define these barriers in terms of personal fears. By defining structural barriers as personal fears and overemphasizing dominant cultural capital, community organizers wield power symbolically by suppressing alternative representations. This power is symbolic (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992) when "institutions of power lie behind behavior and cultural meanings that construct and limit choices, confer legitimacy, and guide our daily routine" (Thomas, 2003, p. 50). When the dominant representations are

used to control, direct, marginalize, or oppress it becomes symbolically violent (Bourdieu, 2001). According to Bourdieu (1992), "Symbolic violence, to put it as tersely and simply as possible, is the violence which is exercised upon a social agent with his or her complicity" (p. 167). For example, the meetings became symbolically violent when community organizers and allies encouraged participants to view structural barriers from their dominant position. In this case symbolic violence occurred when "The dominated apply categories constructed from the point of view of the dominant to the relations of domination, thus making them appear as natural. This can lead to a kind of systematic self-depreciation, even self-denigration" (Bourdieu, 2001, p. 35)

This was again evident in Donna's discussion, merging dominant poverty discourse and empowering community-centered discourse in the same narrative while leaving out the structural critique. In order to leave poverty, participants were being asked to appropriate pieces of dominant poverty discourse, which was symbolically violent in that participants begin viewing themselves in ways that contradict their lived experiences. COS was helping participants accumulate forms of capital like language, skills, and education that dominant society agrees upon as having value. But dominant society, as demonstrated in the language of PRWORA, contends that only by accepting its value and acquiring it can someone leave poverty. Over reliance on constructing individual deficiencies fails to provide the systemic critique necessary to truly empower participants and legitimize the depth of their struggles. In contrast, if the Tuesday night discourse recognized the importance of personal responsibility in the context of community-building and systemic change, consciously aiding in the development of the participants own awareness of what systemic and community

reforms were necessary for economic security, the discourse could serve liberatory and empowering ends.

Liminal Potential

Using Bourdieu for analysis is helpful because his theories allow us to closely analyze how dominant social classes reproduce themselves. While COS did not overtly use language like cultural capital, they intentionally, without saying so, attempted to help participants become middle-class. Becoming middle-class through adopting the skills and outlook of the dominant class, while potentially empowering in a superficial way given that participants no longer "fit the stereotype" so to speak and may interview better, did not address the structural barriers they actually faced in struggling to leave poverty. This is why the liberating goals of COS were so important. However, the dominant discourse may overshadow the structural critique, and the liberating goals, when community organizers reframed the issues in terms of personal failings, thereby de-emphasizing the potential shared community agency created at the meetings.

Participants in COS shared cultural capital that was not recognized by mainstream, dominant society. Familial, aspirational, navigational, and linguistic capital may be present in middle and upper class communities, but is transparent and not recognized or legitimated by legislation like PRWORA. The Horatio Alger stories and the achievement ideology so prevalent in dominant society are predicated upon notions of individual responsibility, sacrifice, and hard work, ignoring the non-dominant examples earlier outlined (Rank, 2004). Instead of viewing capital exchange in COS from a zero sum perspective, where either non-dominant or dominant capital was valued, what actually occurred at the meetings was something in between. When participants and allies negotiated the tension between the

dominant discourse of becoming middle class and the non-dominant discourse of recognizing structural barriers and validating the lived experiences of the poor, a liminal, Third Space emerged where new, liberatory understandings were created. As McLaren and Farahmandpur (2005) advocate, "We need to identify alternative subject positions that we might assume or counternarratives and countermemories that we might make available to our students to contest existing regimes of representation and social practice" (p. 180). Recognizing the tension and resulting liminal space created at the meetings can potentially foster the creation of such alternative subject positions.

Despite the oppressive reframings, where participants were encouraged to find within themselves the causes of their poverty and marginalization, the participants were never fully oppressed. Instead, the tension created by the desire to conform to dominant society's standards while maintaining the view that the system is broken created a liminal space whereby participants and allies had the opportunity to create a new, hybrid form of capital. This liminal space, and hybrid capital, served as a spark for agency. At this point, deeper explanations of liminality and hybridity are necessary in order to demonstrate their relevance to the weekly meetings.

Postcolonial scholars and anthropologists often use liminality and hybridity when describing encounters between dominant and non-dominant cultures (Anthias, 2001; Bhabha, 1985, 1990, 1995; Turner, 1995; Werbner, 2001). Postcolonial theorists, for example, demonstrate that through the process of colonization, the colonizer systematically imposes his culture on the colonized and defines anything indigenous as inferior. Instead of completely destroying the indigenous culture, however, the colonized resist. This resistance

may occur in the liminal space between what is dominant and what is non-dominant. According to Turner (1995), liminality, from the Latin limen, or threshold, is

> The state and process of mid-transition in a rite of passage…[when] the
> characteristics of the ritual subjects are ambiguous, for they pass through a cultural
> realm that has few or none of the attributes of the past or coming state…they are
> betwixt and between. (p. 149)

Turner, a cultural anthropologist, saw in rituals like rites of passage the juxtaposition of dominant and non-dominant culture, creating a space and time for reflexivity and change (McLaren, 1999b; Werbner, 2001).

While this liminal space can be filled with tension and contradictions, the potential exists for creating something new, different, and/or resistant. Bhabha (1995) refers to this liminality, in the colonial encounter, as a Third Space. When the dominant culture, presenting itself as the original, true culture, imposes itself on the colonized,

> The 'originary' is always open to translation so that it can never be said to have a
> totalized prior moment of being or meaning – an essence. What this really means is
> that cultures are only constituted in relation to that otherness internal to their own
> symbol-forming activity which makes them decentered structures – through that
> displacement or liminality opens up the possibility of articulating different, even
> incommensurable cultural practices and priorities. (Bhabha, 1990, p. 211)

Therefore, no matter how oppressive the dominant discourse may be, a hybrid space is nonetheless created which is "at once a mode of appropriation and resistance…[and] the insignia of authority becomes a mask, a mockery" (Bhabha, 1985, p. 162). In this liminal, hybrid space, " a double perspective becomes possible and signals the migrant

artist/intellectual as the voice that speaks from two places at once, and inhabits neither"

(Anthias, 2001, p. 626).

Recognizing that using the concept of hybridity may support the claim that static,

essentialized cultures exist, such as a culture of poverty, I instead reject the notion of a fixed

culture of poverty and use this approach strategically to lead to new and different

understandings. I agree with Werbner (2001), who "[poses] the possibility that cultures may

be grasped as porous, constantly changing and borrowing, while nevertheless being able to

retain at any particular historical moment the capacity to shock through deliberate conflations

and subversions of sanctified orderings" (p. 134). Thus, my use of culture is more closely

related to the field of cultural studies (Giroux, et. al., 1996; Kincheloe & Steinberg, 2002).

Cultural studies is "an interdisciplinary, transdisciplinary and sometimes counter-disciplinary

field that functions within the dynamics of competing definitions of culture" (Kincheloe &

Steinberg, 2002, p. 85). Additionally, "Cultural studies interests are much broader and tend

generally to involve the production and nature of the rules of inclusivity and exclusivity…in

particular, the way these rules shape and are shaped by relations of *power*" (italics in original,

p. 86). Because cultural studies confronts the "complex relationship between knowledge and

power…the ways knowledge is produced, accepted and rejected…the nature of

cultural/political authority and its relation to the dialectic of empowerment and domination,"

it is perfect for informing my use of dominant and non-dominant discourses in the field of the

weekly meeting (p. 87).

Furthermore, Third Space understandings are not confined to a Postcolonial or

anthropological context. McLaren (1999b), for example, demonstrates the effectiveness of

utilizing liminality and hybridity in an educational setting. While conducting an ethnography

of a Catholic school in Toronto, Canada, McLaren found that religious rituals were used to

subjugate and control low-income students. He contends that Catholic schooling in this context

created certain 'root paradigms,' notably "making good Catholics" and "making good workers."

McLaren demonstrates how micro- individual classroom- and macro- entire school day- rituals

create a learning environment that is a

> Site of surveillance and the reproduction of power, where working-class bodies are
>
> located as inferior, quarantined within designated spaces of formal identity, dissected by
>
> the white gaze of power, masticated by the jaws of capital, made receptive to the
>
> command metaphors of formal citizenship, and transformed into semiotic battlegrounds
>
> where the capitalist law of value and the law of the Father become sanctified in the daily
>
> pedagogical practices. (McLaren, 1999b, p. xxxiii)

Despite many teachers' reframing of religious rituals, initially intended to be

spiritually liberating, into oppressive methods of control, a few teachers acted as "liminal

servants" and resisted the dominant discourse (p. 113). Delpit (1992, 2008) also analyzes the

Third Space in educational settings. Problematizing her own struggle with deciding whether

to affirm the home discourses of "poor students and students of color" or to teach the

dominant discourse of the middle class, Delpit (1992) suggests that

> The teacher…can reduce this sense of choice by transforming the new [dominant]
>
> Discourse so that it contains within it a place for the students' selves. To do so, they
>
> must saturate the dominant Discourse with new meaning, must wrest from it a place
>
> for the glorification of their students and their forebears. (p. 300)

I am also applying Third Space notions to an educational context, positing that while

negotiating the tension between dominant and non-dominant discourses, allies, participants,

and community organizers operated within a liminal, Third Space, in which the potential

existed to create hybrid, potentially liberatory capital. As Bhabha (1990) contends, "The

importance of hybridity is not to be able to trace two original moments from which the third

emerges, rather hybridity to me is the 'third space' which enables other positions to emerge"

(p. 211). During the weekly meetings, this liminal potential was evident whenever allies,

participants, and community organizers juxtaposed dominant and non-dominant cultural

capital. Within this juxtaposition, the potential for new understandings existed. I have

chosen, however, to focus on three examples here: when Margaret, Donna, and Diane called

upon their personal experiences of living in poverty during the educational portion of the

weekly meetings.

Experiencing and leaving poverty

During the weekly COS meetings, where participants and allies routinely interacted in

the educational components of the program, this liminal opportunity was created by the

tension between appropriating dominant cultural capital and validating non-dominant cultural

capital. Thus the educational portions of COS' academic, community-building, financial,

and systems change meetings provided a space where participants and allies alike could

negotiate this tension. Education, in this context, occurred when participants and allies

learned interviewing skills, financial planning, school readiness, advocacy, or about systemic

barriers. The educational process and resulting liminal space itself became a rite of passage

for COS participants and allies, juxtaposing dominant and non-dominant culture in ways

similar to those described by Turner (1995). Through these rites of passage and subsequent

liminal space, the educational process fostered the creation of new, empowered subjectivities.

One of the ways the educational component of the weekly meetings manifested this hybridity, what I refer to as liberatory capital throughout the remainder of this dissertation, was through community organizers and allies calling on their own personal experiences of living in poverty. All three of the community organizers described in the ethnographic section, Sharon, Donna, and Margaret, in addition to Diane, an ally, at one time or another lived in poverty and collected welfare. They could relate to the participants in COS and value their non-dominant capital because they experienced the hardships and marginalization of poverty. In their current status as middle-class, however, they also reflected dominant cultural capital. The dominant cultural capital they exhibited had been acquired throughout their struggle to leave poverty and not only served as a symbol of success to the participants in the program; it also helped them relate to the middle-class allies. This liberatory capital positioned them in a way that gained the respect of those involved in the program while giving them the power to name what was valuable within COS. Thus, during these meetings, Sharon, Donna, Margaret, and Diane simultaneously embodied dominant and non-dominant cultural capital.

During the community-building meeting Margaret called on her liberatory capital, in this case from a position of economic security, while reflecting on her past: "Look at me for example. I ran my own business, childcare, for years, but I took this job because now I can spend every day helping people. If you have a dream path and a plan to achieve it, anything's possible." Using life experiences allowed Margaret to place herself within COS in a way that helped her empower the participants. For Margaret, this empowerment occurred because she was able to demonstrate to participants that she understood how they felt on many levels, she could relate to their struggles, and she could serve as an example of

success and hope. The fact that she had experienced the suffering and marginalization of poverty not only helped her to relate to participants, it gave her cultural status positioning, or the use of cultural capital to obtain symbolic forms of recognition (Carter, 2003). During the dream path exercise, Margaret consciously validated aspirational capital while recognizing that dreams and goals were not enough, logical plans to make them a reality were imperative. Thus liberatory capital was fostered as participants' dreams and hopes were validated while the COS community brainstormed and developed action plans to achieve them.

Donna also demonstrated liberatory capital, during the Big View meeting, when she referred to her fears of getting a different job. There is no doubt that the uncertainty of living in poverty is scary, and when referring to her own experience of living in poverty, saying she "wanted to be off food stamps, but didn't have a job that paid enough," she demonstrated the value of rational thinking and difficult budgeting as a means to get ahead. When Donna presented her fears in relation to the decisions she made, she reaffirmed that families living in poverty are not strangers to careful rationing of household resources. Thus, although fear is cogent due to the earlier discussion of systemic barriers, it should not become paralyzing; participants must make budgeting, housing, and job choices carefully. Instead of reframing the structural barriers discussion and making it about the fear of trying something new or moving forward, Donna could have used this as an opportunity to highlight the contradictions embedded in PRWORA and validate the fact that the participant's fear in many ways was the result of hopelessness in the face of overwhelming structural barriers. The key was recognizing fear and not letting it paralyze you, as opposed to making fear the cause of poverty. Conversely, when families move past their paralyzing fears, make rational choices, budget carefully and well, they demonstrate personal responsibility. While they may have

next to nothing, they have the know-how, or cultural capital, and personal responsibility to keep themselves and their children from having nothing at all.

During the financial meeting, Diane shared her personal struggle with unemployment and poverty to both allies and participants. Her comments, referring to "an employer's market," validated the fact that our economic system favors those who already have resources. In doing so, she both affirmed participants' struggle to find sustainable employment and confronted stereotypes that the unemployed just don't want to work. Despite the existence of an employer's market, however, Diane encouraged participants to learn how to apply and interview, never give up, be persistent, and "to use your COS connections, that's what they're for." At this moment, allies and participants negotiated the Third Space. Confronted with competing realities, one that acknowledged an employer's market as a structural barrier, and another that acknowledged the importance of job interviewing skills as dominant cultural capital, participants, allies, and community organizers were building liberatory capital. This liberatory capital embodied the pragmatics of learning how to interview while not losing sight of structural inequalities.

In this context COS fostered what Bakhtin (1981) calls an intentional hybrid, or "a conscious hybrid, that is, an encounter, within the area of an utterance, between two different linguistic consciousnesses, separated from one another by an epoch, by social differentiation, or by some other factor" (p. 359). According to Bakhtin, the intentional hybrid is "inevitably dialogical…double voiced" (1981, p. 360). It is the dialogical quality of the intentional hybrid that creates a liminal space not only for the participants to be transformed, but the middle-class allies to be transformed as well. As Benjamin (1992) notes, in the colonial

encounter it is not just the colonized that are subjected to the West, but the colonizers too are transformed.

Therefore, not only do these COS conversations highlight the contradictions embedded in PRWORA, like participant's lack of personal responsibility being to blame for their poverty, they build group advocacy. Because this learning experience took place in the group context and through the intimacy of learning circles, the possibility existed for participants to move from a self-position of being a victim of social policy to a position, through COS, of having agency from which to advocate for reform.

Concurrently, in this process, community organizers and middle-class allies contributed to creating liberatory capital when they merged their knowledge of community resources and ways of advancing their own well-being with a recognition and understanding of non-dominant capital and systemic barriers. Thus, recognizing structural barriers and valuing forms of non-dominant capital, in addition to a more detailed understanding of the workings of our political and economic system, served as a new liberatory cultural capital within this field of COS. In a later analysis of two specific circles of support, I will more fully articulate how allies and participants embodied this liberatory capital outside the weekly meetings.

Limits of the liminal space

This capital, however, is not automatically liberatory, as demonstrated by the way Donna overemphasized dominant cultural capital and fabricated personal inadequacies, Margaret made the Dream Path only about getting a job, and Diane encouraged participants to market themselves. When the dominant discourse stifled and suffocated the affirmation of non-dominant discourses, the liminal potential diminished. At this point the weekly meeting

became more like a welfare-to-work program. Educators in welfare-to-work programs often suppress non-dominant discourses in favor of the dominant discourse. Sandlin and Cervero (2003) give the example of Denise, a job-training teacher, who discouraged her students from critically examining the role of racism in the dominant discourse by saying "'I get respect and ain't I the same color as you?' She's [Denise] basically saying that color does not play a role in how someone is treated. Denise says, 'I'm black, I'm respected, and so what?'" (p. 261).

Even validating non-dominant discourses does not necessarily guarantee empowerment. According to Flores and McPhail (quoted in McLaren & Farahmandpur, 2005),

> By simply replacing "dominant" voices with "marginalized" voices, critics can perpetuate notions of identity that presume an essential authenticity…these voices can become as constraining and as counterproductive as those they are intended to replace…we therefore cannot assume that the marginalized voice is the liberatory voice. (p. 115)

This hybrid space instead represents potentiality by creating a "Polycentric social and political space…deconstructing the center/periphery and dominant/marginalized dichotomies that underwrite many critical approaches to social reform" (McLaren & Farahmandpur, 2005, p. 110). The liberatory potential of this polycentric social and political space could be increased if overt attempts were made by community organizers to encourage participants to identify and critically reflect on the dominant discourse. McLaren & Farahmandpur (2005) outline the significance of this space in creating working class pedagogies, (worth citing in its entirety), because a space like the weekly meeting gives the oppressed

An opportunity to interrogate theoretically…forms of both high culture and popular culture so that they can analyze, articulate, express, and construct meaning from multiple positionalities located in their lived experiences dealing with racism, sexism, and class exploitation. In addition, disenfranchised groups need to control the means of production of their symbolic economies, not to mention their material existence. Because…the language and the discourses practiced within the classroom setting as well as in the workplace are ideologically tainted with the values, beliefs, and interests of the privileged social classes so as to conceal asymmetrical relations of power, an important step involves the encouragement of critical dialogues among teachers, students, and workers. (p. 183)

The weekly meetings presented exemplary opportunities to foster these critical dialogues, solidifying and deepening the social networks that COS had created. While the meetings were incredibly important, however, they were only one piece of COS' enacted philosophy. In fact, Scott Miller, one of the program's co-founders, contended, "[that] The majority of great things are actually happening outside of the meetings." Therefore, in the following sections I will utilize more ethnographic data to describe and then analyze two specific participant families and their allies. Closely describing and analyzing two distinct yet similar participant families and their individual circles will not only demonstrate the plurality of ways COS helps participants, it may also further elucidate the Third Space between empowerment and the dominant discourse.

Chapter 7

Interview Descriptions of Two Individual Circles

The bottom line for me is that I want to better my kids' life. That's why I'm

in Circles!

-Elizabeth

One of the foundational purposes of Circles of Support (COS) was to foster the

creation of cross-class relationships that not only help relieve the pernicious social isolation

so prevalent in impoverished communities, but also to collectively organize for structural

change (Wilson, 1987). The weekly meetings presented periodic opportunities for this to

occur; allies, community organizers, and participants created community, identified structural

barriers, and organized for collective action. Not all participants and allies, however,

regularly attended weekly meetings. Despite not always attending meetings, they were still

part of active, functioning circles.

A year and a half into this study I presented concerns about the potentially

marginalizing aspects of the weekly meetings to Carrie, the ACHIEVE Case Manager

assigned to COS' families. I specifically mentioned how the meetings could potentially

serve to perpetuate some of the dominant myths of the poor, based on my observances and

conversations with both participants and allies. I mentioned a conversation I had with co-

founder Scott Miller about this same concern, who told me that most of the great things COS

did were happening outside of the meetings. I asked Carrie what she thought of that, and she

replied,

I would say 99% of the great things are happening outside the meetings. When a good connection is made I have seen absolutely amazing things happen with allies and participants. I don't think much of that has been because of the meetings. There are many families with functioning allies who meet regularly who never go to meetings.

Because one of the numerous factors making COS unique, both as an anti-poverty program and a form of community education, was the desire to intentionally foster cross-class relationships to both relieve social isolation and organize for structural change, I decided to investigate the ally-participant relationship more closely. Therefore, I chose to present two similar yet different circles as case studies in order to uncover how they operated outside of the weekly meeting. This chapter, then, seeks to closely follow ethnographic data in describing two specific circles of support. Using thick, rich, description I will depict, in their words, how two specific participant families and their allies made meaning of their involvement in COS. A subsequent chapter will provide analyses of the relationships developed in these two circles in order to elucidate not only whether the aforementioned tension existed outside the meetings, but the role COS played in these families' struggle to leave poverty.

I based my first criterion for choosing case study circles on whether or not the family had participated since the program's inception. I reasoned that I wanted to be able to describe circles that operated both before and after the ACHIEVE Program and the public school system took over management of COS. Additionally, this gave me more than three years of data to analyze for each participant family. The second criterion related to the structure and characteristics of the families. I contend in an earlier chapter that the Personal

Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) of 1996 is built upon, and perpetuates, false and demeaning stereotypes of the poor. According to the dominant discourse, as legislated by PRWORA, the poor lack personal responsibility, the ability to make good choices, and the desire to work (Mink, 1998a, 1998b, 1998c; Schram, 2000). Furthermore, the language PRWORA asserts that being gainfully employed and married reduces a person's chance of being poor.

Therefore, I purposefully chose family structures that challenged the dominant discourse: a single mother of two children who worked forty hours a week and no longer received subsidies, and a married couple of four children, both employed, who lived in poverty but earned too much to qualify for aid.

The specific ethnographic descriptions presented come from eight semi-formal interviews conducted separately with each participant family and their allies. I chose to interview each ally and participant family individually in order to emphasize my desire to understand how they individually made meaning of their involvement in COS. The first descriptive case study presents a single mother of three, Elizabeth, and her three allies: Richard, Mary, and Andrew. Their interviews occurred between July and August of 2005. The second case study circle describes a married couple with four children, Amy and Mike, who are both employed. My interviews with Mike, Amy, and their allies Erin, Lori, and Thomas occurred between April and October of 2006.

Although the interviews were free-flowing and not rigidly structured, I encouraged each person to address specific questions. I asked participants to share how they became involved in COS, what barriers they faced in attempting to leave poverty, what their relationships were like with their allies, and whether or not they felt they were closer to

leaving poverty than when they entered the program. In each ally interview my interest was in why they decided to become an ally, what specific role they played in their circle, how they thought their circle functioned, if the participant family had made progress towards leaving poverty, and what they thought were the program's strengths and weaknesses. In the ethnographic description that follows I have attempted to let their words speak for them as much as possible. I have, however, attempted to craft more artful narratives of the participant interviews in order to richly describe them and their thoughts more thematically (Emerson, Fretz and Shaw, 1995, p. 98).

Relying heavily on ethnographic data, the remainder of this chapter will carefully describe the case study participant families, their allies, and the ways they perceive COS to be working to help them leave poverty. The purposes of this chapter, therefore, are to illustrate the participant family structures, being sure to analyze the factors that led to their joining COS and the structural barriers they faced in leaving poverty, and explain who their allies were, why they became involved in COS, and the roles they played in their respective circles. It is my hope that this ethnographic section will effectively set up subsequent analyses of how the ally/participant relationship helped families leave poverty and how the manners in which the participants and allies made meaning of their involvement, and each other, reflected and addressed the aforementioned tension between dominant and non-dominant discourse.

<div align="center">Elizabeth</div>

The best way to describe Elizabeth is as a paradox, generally cautious and guarded with her personal life, yet would not hesitate to speak her mind to anyone in any situation. Her bravery and strength amazed me, especially in light of her never-ending struggle for

family sustainability. A single mother past her welfare eligibility cliffs, she worked more than 40 hours a week yet still lived in poverty. Her story spoke directly back to PRWORA and the dominant discourse, where work is supposed to bring self-sufficiency,

Walking across the church parking lot for my first COS meeting, I felt a tangled knot of nervousness in my stomach. Worried that I wouldn't be accepted into this community and instead be immediately identified as an outsider, I anxiously entered the church and followed the sounds of laughter and conversation to the church basement. As I walked down the steps into the meeting room, my senses were immediately overwhelmed with the smell of fried chicken, the shouts and laughter of more than a dozen children, and the sight of at least thirty adults gathered talking around circular tables. I found myself unconsciously trying to distinguish between participants and allies, my eyes unexpectedly met and recognized Mary from an after school program at a local elementary school where I had volunteered. Mary, with her characteristically warm and welcoming smile, waved me over to her table and introduced me first to her husband Richard and then to Elizabeth.

Sensing my nervousness, Elizabeth immediately put me at ease when she said "Just stay here with us, this is the good people table." That first meeting took me on a roller coaster ride of emotion, from the excitement of seeing a community come together to combat poverty, to the despair that I felt as participants recounted the barriers they faced in their struggle to provide for their families. Elizabeth and I did not sit down for our first "formal" interview until nearly two years after that first meeting. We talked before dinner nearly every week at the meetings, and I would often say, "You know we need to sit down and talk about what's going on sometime," but actually sitting down for an interview did not materialize. Part of this was because I wanted Elizabeth to feel as comfortable with me as

possible. I wanted her to know that the interview was just a formality and that my concern

for her entailed much more than that. Upon retrospect maybe it was that I needed to feel

more comfortable; I needed to earn the right to ask her personal questions. The fact that

Elizabeth and I developed a friendship, to the point of her eventually asking me to be an ally

in her circle, made the interview much more comfortable and productive than it might have

been otherwise.

Pulling into Elizabeth's driveway on the night of our first interview, in August 2005,

the size and condition of her house shocked me. I tried to imagine how she and her two

teenage sons struggled to negotiate such a tiny place. Patches on her roof were missing

shingles and plastic covered a hole in one of the windows and I immediately thought about

how cold it must get in the winter. Getting out of my car a little terrier-mix, determined to

chew my leg off, confronted me. Elizabeth hurried outside and laughingly remarking,

"That's Earl. He's my man. He protects me." She picked Earl up, took him off his chain

and put him inside. I sensed she didn't want me to come in, so I waited until she returned.

"My house is a pit, do you care if we go somewhere else?" she asked. I suggested we get

some coffee at a local fast food restaurant, she agreed, and after arriving and sitting down she

asked "Did you see that crack house across the street from my place, scary, huh?" I agreed,

and sensing her discomfort, talked for a little while about growing up in a family battling

drug addiction. "That house actually reminded me of a place my parents used to take my

sister and me to," I said. "And those aren't good memories." "I know what you mean,"

Elizabeth told me. "Those are the only kinds of memories I have of my childhood."

Sensing Elizabeth felt more comfortable, I asked her how long she'd been struggling

to get out of poverty. She replied,

I've been in poverty my whole life. When I was five years old my mom was burnt

really bad, so she couldn't take care of us. She's also got mental problems. Then my

dad got sick of us and put us in foster care. I was in foster care for most of my life,

was sexually abused by someone in a foster family, and left when I turned 18.

Elizabeth joined Job Corps, eventually earned her GED and became a nurse's aid in

Wellington. "I met my ex-husband there and we had our three boys," she said. Describing

her ex-husband, she remarked "He's Asian, and no one in my family could accept him, or

even my kids since they're bi-racial." Elizabeth and her husband eventually divorced,

primarily because of his brutal physical abuse. "I didn't take that crap," she told me, and left

with her three boys.

One of the program's original participants, Elizabeth joined COS during a devastating

time for her family; her 19 year old son, Jonathan, had just been sent to prison. At that time

her youngest son James was in the seventh grade and her middle son, Roger, was a junior in

high school. Although she did not have any children at either of the public elementary

schools affiliated with COS, her ACHIEVE Case Manager had recently become COS' first

community organizer and asked Elizabeth to join. "Sharon had been my ACHIEVE

caseworker and when my oldest son got in trouble with the law she recommended me to the

program…[she] grabbed me one day and told me to come with her."

Upon entering COS Elizabeth's barriers to leaving poverty included a low paying job,

inadequate and dangerous Section VIII housing, a lack of health insurance, and the fact that

she was no longer eligible for the Family Investment Plan (FIP) or food stamps. "I struggle

with money," she said, "Especially because of the job I have." Elizabeth had held two long-

term jobs in the last thirteen years: first as a custodian in her sons' school, and for the last

five years she worked more than forty hours a week, for a maximum of $8.06 an hour, at a downtown women's resource center. She worked the night shift, her primary responsibility to manage the front desk, so she could be home when her son James went to and from school. Despite not making enough to pay her bills, according to Elizabeth "I love my job, because I can help the women. I've been where they are, and I'm kind of like a role model. I tell them that if I can get where I am at now you all can too."

Working for $8 an hour, however, made it difficult to afford her $650 a month rent in Section VIII housing, where she moved from place to place for 13 years. Elizabeth said, "I don't want to live there, I mean, Mary and Richard know you don't want to be there after dark." Mary, her community-building ally, described Elizabeth's Section VIII house as "a dinky little shack with a crack house across the street from it. It's falling down…and her average utility bill is $50 more a month than mine and my house is pretty big." Mary remarked, "I told Elizabeth that her high energy bill is crazy and I asked her if she cranks her heat up?" Elizabeth replied that she hardly ever ran it unless they were really freezing. The house had no insulation or storm windows. Mary blamed this on Elizabeth's landlord and described him as "A slum lord who gets all these cheap houses from the government. He doesn't keep them up."

In March of 2005 Andrew, Elizabeth's financial ally, discovered that Section VIII had been overcharging her, but instead of returning the money to Elizabeth they sent a check to the landlord, who told Elizabeth he never received it. The next month Elizabeth mailed her rent, via money order, and the landlord said he did not receive that either and threatened to give Elizabeth a 30-day eviction notice, which would immediately disqualify her from Section VIII housing. Finally, Elizabeth's house did not pass her annual Section VIII

inspection because the ceiling in her bedroom sagged from a leak in the roof and she had her lawnmower in the living room. If she left the lawnmower outside at night it would get stolen, and her landlord would not allow her to store anything in the garage behind the house. Section VIII gave her two weeks to purchase a storage shed and get her landlord to fix the ceiling or face eviction.

In light of her barriers, Elizabeth's goals upon entering COS were to get her driver's license, get more education in order to find a better paying job, and buy a house of her own; one where James wouldn't have to walk to and from school everyday, as she put it, "Where there are drug busts all the time." Elizabeth no longer qualified for FIP, because exceeded her 60-month cutoff as mandated by TANF. "Every month I have to make choices," she said. "Do I let the bills go and buy food, or pay bills and don't buy food."

Elizabeth's goal to buy a house of her own stalled in March 2005, when Section VIII increased her rent. Elizabeth's 19-year-old son Roger, who lived with her, got a job working at a local electronics store. Because he still lived at home, Section VIII included his income with Elizabeth's. As a result they determined she could afford an additional $300 a month. Elizabeth remarked, "My biggest pet peeve right now is I wish the government wouldn't count teenagers as income, and my income would be a lot better… .If they didn't count Roger I would qualify for food stamps and medical for James." According to Mary, "Roger does not give his mother one penny and does not help in any way with expenses." Elizabeth's only choice was to tell Roger to get out and find his own place, a painful proposition given the fact that Elizabeth's oldest son Jonathan went to prison at Roger's age; she did not want to lose another child. "Roger is in his own little world," Elizabeth said,

He tries to pretend like he's rich for his friends…. he wants to have the things his friends have, so that's what he spends his money on. James does help me. If I ask him to mow the lawn he'll do it. I let my kids have their freedom, but I also need their help.

As we sat across from each other, finishing our coffee, I asked Elizabeth "What do you think is preventing you from leaving poverty? It seems to me that you are incredibly independent and resourceful, yet still struggling to make ends meet." Elizabeth replied

I think that women who have been by themselves for a long time figure out ways to do things themselves…Sometimes I feel like I know more about the system than the organizers do because I've been doing it on my own for so long. I know where to get shampoo and the other things I need. But that doesn't mean I don't need help, I do.

Believe me, I don't like asking people for help. I'd rather do everything myself. "What about your job? Do you think you'll ever earn enough there to leave poverty?" I asked. I knew this question was an emotional one for Elizabeth, as it came up a few weeks earlier in a goals-setting meeting I attended with Elizabeth, her allies, and the community organizer. Her allies recommended she try harder to find a better paying job. "You know," she said as tears filled her eyes,

It's hard when I've been working all the way through. I've never drawn unemployment. I'm willing to get out there and work. I just can't afford to switch jobs now. I mean, if a better job comes along I will, but I don't want to work from three to eleven at night. I've done that before and I never get to see my kids. I can't work during the day because I want to be home when James leaves and comes home

from school. I work the graveyard shift so I can take care of my kids during the day.

It sucks because a lot of times I have to make a choice, do I sleep or do I work?

Elizabeth had worked three to eleven shifts in the past, until her oldest son was sent to prison.

She continued,

> With Jonathan, this is the age he started getting in trouble and I want to be home so I
> can crack the whip. I've learned from my past mistakes. If I have to work two jobs I
> will. I go to work on two hours of sleep as it is, I can do it.

At this point I changed the subject and encouraged Elizabeth to talk about what she

liked and disliked about her involvement in COS. Referring to money she'd been placing

into an account through the Institute for Social and Economic Development (ISED), she

responded "I'm closer to reaching one of my goals, which is owning my own house. I'm

only $600 away from having a down payment. When I got my income taxes back I dropped

$1000 into that account." Referring to where she would be without COS, she said, "Without

my allies I'd probably be in the same old race, trying to keep my head above water. At least

now I see a little light at the end of the tunnel." Critiquing the program, Elizabeth referred to

the ways she felt other participants were taking advantage of a good thing.

> If you're going to have a bunch of kids you need to learn how to feed them. Some
> people come to the meetings just for free food and childcare. You know what? A lot
> of people think everything's supposed to be free. Sometimes you have to work for
> things in life. I think the program is working for the families that really want to work.
> You can't get anything overnight. When immigrants first came to America it took
> them time too.

I mentioned to Elizabeth that I had not seen her at the last few weekly meetings, and she commented, referring to a presentation on how to help your children with their homework,

I'm frustrated. I've been going to meetings for a long time and I've had to learn to keep my mouth quiet on some things. I think the community organizers don't want me to talk during meetings because I say my opinion. They call on everyone but me.

Elizabeth's phone rang and I realized we'd been talking for two hours. "I'll be home in a second!" she sternly spoke into the phone. She told her youngest son James, "I'm talking to my ally!"

"I should get home anyway," I said. "Me too," she replied, adding "The bottom line for me is that I want to better my kids' life. That's why I'm in Circles." Heading back to her house I reflected on how it surprised me to hear Elizabeth tell James I was her ally. I knew, however, that after two years that is exactly what I had become.

Elizabeth's Allies: How They Became Involved

Elizabeth's allies had been consistent supporters throughout her involvement in COS. When I asked Elizabeth about what she liked about her allies, she said, "One of the best things is that my allies have been together for the whole time," which has not been the case for all participant families. All three of Elizabeth's allies became involved through their church, located in an inner-city neighborhood across the street from a local elementary school.

Mary and Richard, a married couple in their fifties, were contacted by their pastor because it was believed at the time that COS would eventually branch out and serve the elementary school across the street from the church as well, where Mary volunteered serving breakfast six days a week at a before school program. Mary and Richard had recently moved

to Iowa from Los Angeles and were interested in becoming more involved in the community. Mary had a social service background and had volunteered in homeless programs in Syracuse, New York, and Los Angeles, California. Mary told me,

> I liked being involved with the homeless, and this was a different opportunity because up until now it was usually just me, but Circles was an opportunity for Richard and I to get involved together. We both liked the program and thought it was a unique way to help solve poverty.

Mary and Richard were partnered with Andrew, also a member of their church. Andrew's motivation came from growing up among the working poor. He told me "I know what it's like to grow up in family that struggles financially, and I thought I could bring a useful perspective to the program."

Undoubtedly Elizabeth's most actively involved ally, Mary frequently took Elizabeth grocery shopping and religiously attended every weekly meeting. Given her diverse human service and volunteer experience, Mary took on the role of community-building ally. Within COS, the community-building ally was expected to not only help link the participant family with resources in the community, but to also help build a strong support system. When I asked her what motivated her to get involved, she said "Something inside me I guess. It's something I've always done. I've always been a volunteer for different groups. I've been drawn to the inner city and to the homeless through different churches and programs." Referring to why she wanted to be a community-building ally, Mary remarked "We've moved a lot due to Richard's job with the Veterans Administration, this is our ninth move, so volunteering is a quick way to get involved in whatever community we live in, and I've become good at it." Mary's sincere devotion to the cause of social justice also motivated her.

She remarked "I wish there weren't a need for COS, but there is, and in our world it's just the way it is right now…I need to make people's lives better and to have everybody equal. It's just something in me that I need to help and do whatever I can."

Richard's background as a former teacher--in fact he still volunteered and taught English as a Second Language and citizenship classes at their church--motivated him to become the academic ally. Academic allies were expected to provide educational support not only to a participant family's children, but to adults as well. Richard told me, "My particular role is in providing educational support to the family. In this case she has three children, two are older now and her youngest is 13." Richard described his goal upon becoming an ally as,

> To make an impact in somebody's life with regard to elevating their level of life and give them the opportunity to have a better life and more opportunities…[but] I didn't go into it with my eyes closed because I recognized the difficulty in what we were trying to do.

Richard told me he and Mary agreed to participate on the condition that they were paired with a third ally who had a serious commitment to the program. That third ally, Andrew, had expertise that best suited him in serving as Elizabeth's financial ally. COS' community organizers relied on financial allies to help participant families develop a budget and problem solve to overcome financial crises. While Andrew may have been her least active ally, sporadically attending meetings or contacting Elizabeth, his contributions through financial planning and intervening on her behalf with Section VIII were invaluable. When I asked Elizabeth about him she told me "Andrew has struggled too, you see, so he knows what it's like. He gets involved when he needs to and I respect that."

Reflecting on how their circle is functioned, Mary said, "I don't know of any other circle that has consistently had three allies, where at least one of them was at every weekly meeting. With us I think we've established a friendship."

Elizabeth's Allies: Thoughts on Elizabeth and her Progress Towards Leaving Poverty

Throughout their interviews, Elizabeth's allies described her as a hardworking person and a dependable employee. They expressed amazement, almost surprise, at how hard she worked and how little money she wasted. Andrew, Elizabeth's financial ally, articulated this when he said

> I sat down with Elizabeth not too long after we met to set up a budget. There wasn't any extra money, but she's a good budgeter…She's very thrifty. She spent less than $700. She impressed me with the way she worked with her lack of income.

Richard, also commented on Elizabeth's ability to manage limited resources, and said,

> One of the big surprises of the program for me is that regardless of what people in the community think, my experience has been that these individuals do not waste a lot of money. If anything Elizabeth is more accountable for her money because she has had to cope with reduced resources her whole life.

Impressed with Elizabeth's work ethic, Mary remarked, "I can't imagine myself trying to raise three boys and having a minimum wage job. She only makes $8 an hour and this is the most she's ever made." Mary continued, "She works hard. She always goes to work even if she hasn't had any sleep. I know that's got to be tough trying to sleep in the daytime with kids." Richard also spoke of Elizabeth's work ethic when he said, "She's a hard working individual. She rarely if ever misses work and she's a very dependable employee."

In addition to being hardworking and able to budget minimal resources, Elizabeth's allies commented on her resourcefulness and independence. "Elizabeth serves on an advisory committee for COS and frequently talks to prospective participants and allies about the program," Mary said. She continued, "She even facilitated one weekly meeting where she explained to participants how to get involved in the community!" Richard reiterated this and referred to the same weekly meeting when he stated, "It's important to note that Elizabeth could teach social support. She knows all the programs and how to access them. She also knows the problems with the programs and those obstacles that you run into."

Responding to the question of whether or not he felt the program had benefited Elizabeth, Richard replied,

> Has the program benefited Elizabeth? Absolutely. I think it has in terms of her developing some goals for the future that might ultimately lead to better employment. It's also given her some access to budgeting courses as part of this program that she and Mary have attended. I think in those terms it's been successful.

Mary felt the biggest benefit of the program for Elizabeth was the way it helped her develop community. She remarked, "Before, I don't think she [Elizabeth] had any kind of outside contact with other adults. I think that through COS she's made more friends and broadened her base of support." Continuing, Mary said the program had also benefited Elizabeth's youngest son, James. "James is pretty squared away now," she said. "He's become involved in the Big Brother Program and it's great. His Big Brother even set up his own circle of support to help James get the tutoring and clothes he needs. They do something new each week."

Andrew commented on the ways the program benefited not only Elizabeth but also other participants and spoke of the way COS fostered the development of meaningful relationships, and stated,

> I think the program has provided Elizabeth, and many of the other participants, with a sense of community that previously was unknown to them. They may have known one another before, but now they're sharing experiences and getting to know one another in a structured yet informal environment. Many have become friends, willing to pitch in to help another person who has fallen ill, or needs transportation.

In this way Andrew saw the program as an opportunity for Elizabeth to learn from and teach others. He continued, "This sharing of knowledge has been educational for Elizabeth. She's not only learned about different job and educational opportunities. She's been able to teach others about government assistance programs and how to get the things they need in unconventional ways."

Despite her hard work, ability to budget, resourcefulness, and independence, Elizabeth's allies agreed that she had a long way to go in order to leave poverty. Subsequently, during my interviews with Mary, Richard, and Andrew I asked each of them to comment on what was holding Elizabeth back. Andrew replied,

> Elizabeth has been in the circle for more than two years and I don't see her any closer to coming out of poverty than before…some of that's beyond her control. I'd say she would have to go from making $8 an hour to $14 an hour to make it financially.

Elizabeth's financial situation confounded Floyd's textbook understanding of economics. He said,

Basically there are two ways you raise someone out of poverty: you decrease

spending or you increase income… .But with Elizabeth she budgets what she has

well, and doesn't have the skills she needs to get a better paying job. So at this point

there is no way to reduce spending or increase income.

Mary also expressed frustration with Elizabeth's situation. When I asked her if she

thought Elizabeth would leave poverty, she said

No. She hasn't met the goals we set originally, which were to get a driver's license,

get some education, or to apply for better paying jobs. She hasn't done any of that. I

like her and think she works very hard, but I can't get her to step into something new

she hasn't done before.

Richard attributed some Elizabeth's lack of progress to Elizabeth herself. He told me "I

think the opportunities are there for her and she's not optimizing them in all cases… .She's

reluctant to move forward and look for other opportunities and I don't really know the reason

for that." Andrew felt Elizabeth stood in her own way and referred to her "lack of initiative

and fear of the unknown." Mary talked about this as well, and commented

I've shown her where there are classes online and tried to help her computer skills. At

her work they even gave her permission to work on other things but she won't. She

doesn't have the motivation to improve herself… .Sometimes it's like dealing with a

teenager.

At this point in my interview I asked Mary if she had any idea why Elizabeth had not made

more progress towards leaving poverty. She responded,

I don't know. After two years I know there are things she's not sharing with us. I try

just letting it come out a little bit at a time. As we become friends she does share

more but I know there are things she's not sharing, but that's Okay. I don't need to

know everything I just need to know enough to help her.

Richard confessed he did not think Elizabeth could read, "but was too embarrassed to tell

us." Mary confirmed Richard's concern and referred to Elizabeth's reluctance to take a

written test in order to get her driver's license when she said, "If she can't read we can help

her. We can read the book to her. We can get her into a literacy program. I know it's very

hard to say you can't read."

As her interview came to an end, Mary communicated to me that she cared about

Elizabeth and considered her a friend, but did not know exactly how to help her. She said,

"There's a thin line where you can't be too pushy or bossy. I want to help her. I want to try

to steer her in the right direction, but I don't want to step over the line." I asked Mary what

she would address if she did not have to worry about crossing the line. She replied,

> I know she has very little money and it's hard to budget like that, but sometimes she
>
> doesn't make wise choices as far as spending her money. For example, her boys are
>
> constantly her asking for money and she gives it to them. It's tough stuff.

Mary concluded her interview and said "I think COS is more of a social club for Elizabeth,"

which she felt Elizabeth needed, but would not get her out of poverty. "But I suppose," she

continued, "It gives her someone to talk to when she has a problem, which isn't necessarily a

bad thing because I've learned isolation is such a big problem for a lot of people in poverty."

Mary's comment about the social isolation of poverty demonstrated something she

learned about poverty by participating in the program. Richard also expressed a greater

understanding of poverty as a result of his participation. When I asked him if he learned

anything he did not know about poverty through the program, he said,

There are certain stereotypes about people living in poverty that simply aren't true, and there's also a certain stigma about being poor…a lot of it goes back to "Well, I did it, you can to!" It's not that easy.

I asked Richard if he could think of any specific examples that disproved these stereotypes, and he said, "If my refrigerator breaks down we go out and buy a new one." Families living in poverty, however, do not have that luxury. Richard went on to say "I heard a story at the meeting last week about someone who couldn't pay their electricity bill so they didn't have electricity for a period of time."

"How did that change your perspective?" I replied. Richard answered, "I think many of the obstacles participants' face are daunting. I used to think if you work harder you could overcome anything. I now know better." As his interview ended I asked Richard if he wanted to add anything in conclusion. He replied,

One of the things we haven't talked about is the value it has for the ally. In many ways I think it has more value for an ally than a participant. I have gained so much from the experience of working with Elizabeth. There are a lot of hardworking people in this group who use their money wisely but don't have enough money to meet their everyday obligations. It has benefited me personally to know these issues, the issues of poverty and those who live on the margins with no resources who in many cases work harder than those who make the resources. That was kind of unexpected.

At the time of this writing Elizabeth no longer participates in the weekly meetings, although Richard, Andrew, and Mary remain as her allies. Mary told me that the community

organizers reprimanded Elizabeth after she apparently cussed at Jennifer during a meeting.

Mary told me,

> Jennifer asked Elizabeth to talk to some students from the local college who were
> working on a project for one of their classes. Elizabeth let Jennifer know she didn't
> want to talk to them, but Jennifer told the students it was OK anyway. We as allies
> were asked by Jennifer to attend a meeting with Elizabeth and the program
> management. Elizabeth then made the decision to no longer attend weekly meetings.

<div align="center">Amy and Mike Johnson</div>

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"Explain that to me, you don't earn enough to live but too much to get help"
Mike Johnson

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How Mike and Amy became involved in COS

As I considered which participant families to incorporate as case studies, I

intentionally included families that regularly attended weekly meetings. While the program

required participants to attend at least one meeting per month, I chose families who attended

more frequently because seeing them interact with their allies gave me a better idea as to how

their circle functioned. I also intentionally chose families that, based on the dominant

discourse of PRWORA, should not be living in poverty. For example, Elizabeth was hard

working, thrifty, independent, employed full-time, and did not receive FIP, yet did not earn a

living wage. My second case study family, Mike and Amy Johnson, exemplified the

working-class American family: both were gainfully employed, did not receive federal

subsidies, and yet still lived in poverty. The parents of four children ages seven to twelve,

Mike and Amy were also among the first families to join COS.

The Johnsons' stood out to me at weekly meetings, largely because they were the only married participant couple that consistently attended meetings. Actually, since nearly all of the program's participants were single mothers, I initially did not know Mike was a participant. Mike, however, made an impression not only because he was often the only man in attendance, but also because he was fighting cancer when he and Amy joined the program. Admitted to the hospital on December 23, 2003, doctors gave Mike little chance for long-term survival because the cancer had spread to his lymph nodes. By early January, however, he had been released from the hospital and was undergoing chemotherapy. Additionally, Mike made a strong impression, not only through his struggle with cancer, giving us updates on his health at each weekly meeting, but because he freely voiced his opinion. For example, during the January 6, 2004 weekly meeting, while discussing the upcoming Iowa caucuses in preparation for the November presidential election, Mike emotionally reflected to those in attendance,

> You know, as I was laying in the hospital wondering how we were going to pay our
> bills without me working, these politicians were debating whether to ban gay
> marriage. It just showed me how out of touch they are with reality!

Amy represented Mike's mirror opposite in many ways; painfully shy, she rarely participated in the meeting conversations for nearly the first year of her involvement in the program. My initial reaction questioned whether her reluctance to talk stemmed from what appeared to be the patriarchal role Mike played in their relationship, but in time I came to believe Amy was just incredibly uncomfortable in social settings. As a result, my interaction at weekly meetings with the Johnson's generally included having conversations with Mike only, even with Amy present. Through these conversations, over the better part of three

years, I learned about their financial struggles, particularly that they both worked full time

and earned too much to qualify for subsidies, but not enough to meet their expenses. During

this time Mike's cancer went into remission and Amy opened up to the point that she

routinely participated in conversations and activities during the meetings.

By the time we sat down in April 2006 for a formal interview, Mike and I had run

into each other a few times outside of the meetings. On one occasion, for example, we both

helped Elizabeth move to another house because her Section VIII landlord had been arrested

and her house condemned. During the move we developed a bond; battling Elizabeth's

cockroach infested house represented a bonding experience neither one of us would soon

forget. Eventually we decided to meet for an interview on a Tuesday evening during the

weekly meeting, because childcare would be provided.

As I walked in to the meeting place nervousness crept into my stomach, but for

different reasons than before; significant changes in the program had occurred since the

ACHIEVE program took over management, most of the original participants no longer

attended meetings, and I did not know many of the new participant families. Despite

recently attending one meeting per month, as opposed to every weekly meeting as I had three

years earlier, I still maintained frequent contact with some of the original participants and the

program's current community organizer, Jennifer. Jennifer recently informed me that I

needed her approval before I interviewed participants during the meetings. Furthermore, I

knew from a recent phone conversation with Mike that he and Amy had stopped attending

meetings and that Jennifer wanted to know why. Walking into the church hall I was met by

Jennifer. After exchanging helloes, I asked, "Have you seen Amy or Mike?" Jennifer

responded, "I haven't seen them in quite some time, I'm not sure what's going on with

them." I told her I did not know any more than she did, and recognizing a table of participants and allies I knew, I sat and waited for Mike and Amy to arrive.

Participants and allies were finishing eating and preparing for the meeting when Amy, Mike, and their four children entered the church hall. After the children filled their plates with food and headed to childcare, Mike, Amy, and I found a quiet room adjacent to the church hall. After reminding Mike and Amy the purpose of my research I began by asking them how they became involved in the program. Amy responded, "When Mike was diagnosed with cancer things didn't look good. It had spread to his lymph nodes." In the first months of the program's existence, school ACHIEVE Case Managers were responsible for identifying prospective families, and through conversations with their children's Case Manager they decided Amy needed a better support system in case Mike did not survive. According to Mike,

> The bottom line was that if I died, we needed to make sure Amy had what she needed
>
> to take care of the kids. I worked days and she worked nights, she didn't have a
>
> driver's license, had few friends, and generally wasn't independent.

"So, basically you became involved because you were sick?" I asked. Amy interjected, "At first that was the main reason, but we realized we had other barriers that the program could help with."

When Amy and Mike joined COS, they were both employed but still struggled financially to provide for their four children. Mike worked full-time for $9 an hour at a retail store in a shopping mall, while Amy worked as a Certified Nurses Assistant. Compounding Mike's low-wages were the fact that Amy worked as part of a health care pool, where they contacted her only as needed. "Working for a pool allows me to take care of the kids during

the day and go to their school if I need to. That way we don't have childcare to pay for."

Mike in turn worked during the day, an arrangement they negotiated for the last thirteen years. Amy's work flexibility, however, came at a cost; her hours were inconsistent from week to week. Mike said, "Since Amy isn't on set hours, it's hard to budget what you think you're going to make. I try to work overtime as much as I can to cover when she has a slow week, but it's hard."

Six months after being diagnosed with cancer, Mike found a better paying job. "When I went back to work, I had to work from 9am to 9pm to make up what we'd lost," Mike said. He continued,

> When I would get home everyone was in bed. I saw my kids in the morning and I took them to school. Then they were in bed when I get home and I don't see them until the next morning. That was a hard lifestyle.

In May 2004 one of the retail store's other employees told Mike about a possible position at a packaging company. This employee's father owned the business, and Mike gave him a call. Mike told me,

> Within a couple of days his dad called me in. He offered me the job the very next day. I really needed to get out of this schedule so I could see my kids. When you see death, it changes your whole outlook. You look at how you can change your negatives for the better.

Mike's initially earned $12 an hour for his new employer, and he grossed approximately $23,000 in his first year with the company. Describing the role COS played in his job change, Mike commented, "I think more than anything being a part of the program gave me more confidence. But I've always been a hard worker, and my new boss recognized that."

Unfortunately, unexpected medical expenses and Amy's inconsistent earnings dampened the positive effects of Mike's pay increase. By the time of our interview, their youngest son, Justin, was recovering from an operable brain tumor and their oldest daughter, Amelia, had just undergone emergency eye surgery. When Justin became ill he was sent to Iowa City for surgery, where the Johnson's stayed for a week. The travel, lodging, and food expenses alone exceeded $700.

Talking about how they still struggle to meet their expenses despite Mike's pay raise, Amy said, "Right now we're strapped. We push a lot of things that we can't pay back. It's been going on for a long time." Mike added,

> This week in particular has been a bad. Amy's been cancelled everyday this week. So right now I've pretty much doubled her salary, she's had so few hours. We go from check to check and everything's spent. What makes it worse is that we earn too much to get government assistance. Explain that to me, you don't earn enough to live but too much to get help.

Amy added, "Everything just costs so much. Our mortgage is over $700 a month, utilities cost more than $300, our medical insurance is close to $300 and that doesn't included the kids." Mike interjected, "I don't know how people can live on minimum wage, because we struggle on my $13 an hour. It's not much for a family of six."

Changing the subject slightly, I asked how being a part of COS had benefited them. Amy responded,

> It's helped me in many ways. It motivated me to get my driver's license and become more independent. Someone from a church donated a car to the program, and since I have four kids and no transportation the program gave it to me.

Mike added, "I think being in the program has helped Amy especially. Her allies have talked to her about continuing her education. She's enrolled at the community college this fall for accounting classes." "How has it helped you, Mike?" I asked. He answered,

> The first two years of the program were really successful, getting Amy her independence and everything. We also made some friends. We actually met people who lived by us but we didn't know that we're friends with now. We found out they're in the same money situation as us. For me I'd have to say meeting Thomas, my ally. He's actually more of a friend now.

Mike included that being involved in the program helped them keep informed about what is going on in the community. He said, "We're pretty busy people. I don't watch the news and I don't read the newspaper. Without the program, I wouldn't know what's going on in the community."

"What about the negatives of COS?" I asked. Amy responded quickly with "One of the reasons we don't go to meetings anymore is because the meetings are only about government aid like food stamps, Section VIII Housing, or welfare. What about us? I think we're the only ones who don't get assistance." Mike agreed, and added "In the beginning they covered everyone's needs and goals and now they're only focusing in one direction. Not everyone qualifies for aid. Amy and I don't qualify for anything." This issue brought up emotions for Mike, and he continued, saying

> It frustrates me when you see people out there who slack and want a handout from the government. I mean, our taxes are enormous because of that. There are too many people who abuse the system. It's frustrating. What we get is what we work for, and if we don't work we don't get it.

Agreeing with Mike, Amy interrupted and said, "I think some people say, 'I have a low end job, and I'm better off collecting government assistance.' They're taking advantage of the system and it frustrates the people like us who are actually working." She went on to reiterate how it discouraged them when they go to a COS meeting welfare dominated the discussion.

Two hours had passed and we could hear noise emanating from the church hall, which included the laughter of children. Assuming the COS meeting had ended, I thanked Mike and Amy for taking the time to sit down and talk about their experiences. I told Mike and Amy I owed them one for taking the time to talk to me, and Mike shook my hand and said,

> You don't owe us anything. If you do something for someone else, if your work
>
> helps someone else, it's just like you helping us. It makes society a better place. We
>
> don't have enough people doing things to make our community a better place.

Mike and Amy's Allies: How They Became Involved

The Johnson's allies, Erin, Lori, and Thomas, each brought an enormous amount of volunteer experience to their circle. Erin and Lori had previously volunteered together on other community service projects, and Thomas operated a transitional homeless shelter in the city. Interestingly, however, in this particular circle Amy and Mike's allies functioned separately; Thomas was Mike's ally while Amy's allies were Erin and Lori.

Mike's ally, Thomas, became involved in COS for a number of reasons. While operating a transitional homeless shelter, Thomas spent a great deal of time working with marginalized populations. This, in addition to serving as the director of the Human Services Planning Alliance (HSPA), which oversaw the initial *Making Connections* proposal to the

Annie E. Casey Foundation, gave Thomas a particular interest in a program seeking to eliminate poverty in the city. Thomas told me

> For one, I don't have a background in human services and I thought I could learn more about the needs of these families. Also, because we at the HSPA were kind of watching over the contract, it would give me more insight as to what was going on in the program.

From the beginning of their involvement Mike saw Thomas as his personal ally. Mike felt that Thomas was the perfect match, since he had also battled and beat cancer and could help Mike prepare for the early effects of chemotherapy. "That was a good match and we bonded," Mike said. Although Thomas did not have a clearly defined role, given Mike managed the Johnson's finances, Thomas helped Mike with financial questions and developed a budget. More than budgeting, however, Thomas said, "I always felt my role was as more of a mentor, in particular with Mike." Unfortunately, Thomas did not serve as a formal ally for the Johnson's entire involvement in COS. "With his busy schedule, he had to drop out after the first year," Mike recalled. Referring to the relationship they developed and Thomas' eventual leaving COS, Mike continued,

> That was kind of hard. We do keep in touch here and there and we try to go out when we can. Even though Thomas is not an ally or a person of the group anymore, we still have our friendship one-on-one.

> Amy's allies, Erin and Lori, knew each other through previous involvement in other community service programs. In fact, Lori joined COS first, then encouraged Erin to get involved hoping they would work together in the same circle. A woman in her early forties, Lori said she first heard of COS through her church, where Sharon, COS' original

community organizer, gave a presentation asking for volunteers. Lori remarked, "Well, I really became involved through my church, so faith is a huge component for me. But I was also interested in getting some hands on experience related to my job." Lori worked for an organization that focused on helping improve the health of vulnerable populations in the local area. Therefore, she saw becoming an ally as both an interest that would help fulfill some of her desire to volunteer in the community and also provide some real-life experiences that would relate to her work.

Initially, Lori hoped to limit her involvement and avoid over committing herself. She said, "I didn't want to get paired with a very high need family. To be honest I didn't want to get involved with a completely dysfunctional family in crisis all the time." Once paired with the Johnson's, Lori realized that "Since I didn't have a clue how to bridge socioeconomic boundaries, I just wanted our relationship to evolve as naturally as possible." That is exactly what happened. Although Lori initially wanted to be a financial ally, she realized that "As we got to know each other as allies and we got to know the family, it was kind of a natural evolution that Mike aligned with Thomas. They also seemed to have a rapport around finances."

Seeing that occur, and being a mother herself, Lori related to Sharon, her kids, and their success in school. Lori commented,

> Because of my knowledge of the many non-profits in town, the thing I really felt I offered would be in trying to help the family link with existing resources in the community. But in the end they needed an academic ally, so I focused on being the school-family liaison.

Erin, a married woman also in her early forties, initially heard about COS through her job as the director of human resources for a large local corporation. She knew the director of the Greater Des Moines Foundation, Sally McMullen, one of COS' three institutional funders, from past community work together. Erin explained, "Sally was involved as an ally, and told me that this was something she thought I would be interested in getting involved with, so I went to the training and decided that this might be good." Additionally, through the ally training, Erin discovered that her friend Lori had joined the Johnson's circle and that they needed one more ally. She continued, "So, I was pulled in by someone else in the community who knew what kind of community work I did…and then through talking to someone I knew who was already an ally."

In terms of her role in the Johnson's circle, Erin told me, "Originally the program was really looking for the financial ally, the academic ally, and so on. The Johnson's specifically were looking for the community-building ally. I said that worked out just fine. I could probably do any of them." Despite having a "lead" ally in each role, Erin's understanding was that "you all can work with the family across the board."

Although Erin, Lori, and Thomas had vast community service participation and helpful work experience, they were unable to make a long-term commitment to formal involvement in the program. Amy, referring to her allies, said, "Their busy schedules allowed them to come to meetings only once every three months…that kind of hurts." Mike added, "Later on in the program, the organizers said they were going to give us new allies, so we could have allies that could come for sure. But that never happened." I asked if they were going to replace Lori, Erin, and Thomas, and Mike replied, "No, they [the organizers] said we could keep them as part time." Worried that I might be getting the wrong idea, Amy said,

Our allies are nice and good. We actually built a friendship with them. But everyone was so busy. They tried to come once a month, but their lives and jobs just got too busy, so I would consider them mainly as friends.

Despite their lack of formal involvement, in terms of attending weekly meetings, the Johnson's kept in constant communication with their allies. Amy continued to correspond with Lori and Erin through email at least once a week, and Mike and Thomas periodically got together socially. Thomas summarized his role as an ally, remarking

I think for Mike I became someone to talk to, and as a matter of fact I still talk to him once in a while. We actually met for a beer the other day. Our relationship has gone beyond just being in the program.

Mike and Amy's Allies: Thoughts on Mike and Amy's Prospects for Leaving Poverty

During my interviews with the Johnson's allies, I asked each of them a series of guiding questions, but gave them a great deal of leeway to describe how they made meaning of their involvement in the program. Through these guiding questions I asked them what progress they felt the Johnson's had made towards leaving poverty, if there were any factors preventing them from leaving poverty, how they felt their circle functioned, and to describe the program's overall strengths and weaknesses.

Reflecting on the progress the Johnson's made towards their goal of leaving poverty, Thomas emphasized his belief that they "were a perfect family for this program because they really didn't have many problems." The problems Thomas referred to were problems that he believed many families living in poverty faced. He continued, "They really don't have any of the mental health problems that would prevent an ally from working with them. For Mike and Amy it was more of an economic situation." Mike and Amy both worked, something

Thomas felt made them great candidates for the program. "Both of them are working, actually wanting to work," he remarked. Because they both had a strong work ethic, all they needed, Thomas felt, "Was a little push or a little help, since they weren't far away from economic self-sufficiency."

Thomas believed he could do the most good for the Johnson's in this area. He explained, "Their problem was that they never had…I don't want to say bad parents, I can't be the judge of that…but they didn't have parents that were able to teach them how to do things like budget." In helping Mike set up a budget, Thomas realized that the Johnson's were paying exorbitant fees to a rent-to-own store for a washer, dryer, television, and furniture set. "I said to Mike," Thomas began,

> I only have one television in my house and you may want to rethink how much you're paying to this rental place and maybe do without a T.V. for a while. You know, you can give that stuff back to them and save the money you were paying and then in 6 months you can actually buy it free and clear. That was the kind of help that I thought was most helpful. Just looking at putting together household budgets and he never had really done that before.

In general, Thomas felt the program had benefited Mike and Amy. Thomas reflected, "I think Mike has done really well with his new job, especially because he's so honest and tries really hard." Mike's honesty and hard work contributed to solidifying the relationship he developed with Thomas. He continued, "I think it's cool Mike and I developed a connection. That's important for an ally, being able to identify with what the family needs."

Because Erin and Lori interacted primarily with Amy, their comments tended to refer specifically to her progress. Erin remembered the first time she met the Johnson's; Amy would not make eye contact with her. She said,

I really had to think about whether I was going to be a good match for this family. If I asked Amy a one word question, that's how she would answer. 'Yes' and 'no' were about the only words I could get out of her.

Erin made the decision to try to communicate with Amy through email and to get together for picnics. "At first she was very introverted and shy. Now, however, after a lot of hard work, she's very confident. I even get a hug from her now when I see her, and she emails me all the time."

Lori also referred to Amy's shy personality as initially being a barrier to developing a strong bond. Lori recalled, "I think Amy had a terribly low self-esteem. She didn't feel good about herself." More than just a barrier to developing a strong circle, both Lori and Erin felt Amy's personality prevented her from moving forward. "I think Amy coming out of her shell is one of our huge successes," Lori recalled. She continued, "I remember the first time she called me at home and I was like 'Yahoo!' That was huge! And now 99% of the time she initiates all communication." Lori believed Amy's growing confidence and assertiveness put her in a better position to help her family achieve their goals. The last time she spoke to Amy, Lori said, "She had signed up to take some college classes this fall. She doesn't want to be a C-N-A forever."

During her interview, Erin mentioned Amy's goal of finding more reliable employment. Given her vast experience in human resources, Erin helped prepare Amy by holding mock interviews at her office. "Doing that in a business setting, getting her used to

those kinds of things, will help. Also working on her resume helped." Using her knowledge, Erin made up a list of possible interview questions and had Amy practice answering them at home. During their first mock interview, Erin recalled,

> I asked Amy to explain a typical day in her current job. Amy replied with 'I do whatever they tell me to do that day.' I told her, O.K., but we probably need some more specifics, so that the person interviewing would know what kind of skill sets you have. We worked really hard and eventually got to a good point in her interviewing.

In addition to believing Amy had a low self-esteem, Lori felt the stress of raising four children on little money encouraged poor eating habits among the Johnson's. Reflecting on this, Lori believed an area of significant progress involved Amy setting a goal to lose weight. "She and I walked one spring day around the lake and I think it offered her incentives down the road." Eventually Amy took up walking as a hobby and "They eat healthier now. Amy's even lost a bunch of weight" Lori commented. Not certain whether that would have happened without her help or not, she believed that "At the core of making significant change in your life is feeling good about yourself." Lori continued,

> If you don't feel good about yourself you're not going to come off great at a job interview, you're going to have excuses. All of that collectively is important in the path that people choose to take. She wasn't sleeping and she was working nights and getting up early. Basically she was managing a family of four kids and a dog on no sleep. I said, 'You know, there are alternatives.' She allowed herself the permission to get a good night's sleep. You could see it in her behavior and her look, and she looks a lot better. Feeling good can help in your parenting.

The issue of parenting not only came up in Lori's interview, but both Thomas and Erin referred to it as well. Erin in particular believed Mike and Amy lacked effective parenting skills. Erin, describing how out of control she felt the Johnson's children were, referred to two situations specifically. "The kids pull on Amy's heart strings, and she's just not a disciplinarian. I'm amazed at how many times she has to tell them the same things over and over," Erin recalled. "For example," she continued,

> On one occasion we went to the library and later went to get some lunch at a fast food restaurant. The two boys took their paper placemats and folded them up into this thing where you snap it and pop it. Mike Jr. was doing that in the restaurant in front of all the other patrons and it was loud and obnoxious.

According to Erin, Amy asked Mike Jr. six times to stop before she tried to take the paper away from him. Erin said, "I wouldn't have got to three. I flat out wouldn't have got to three. They just don't listen… .I think the kids need attention and that's how they get it."

On another occasion the Thomas, Erin, and Lori met Mike, Amy, and their children for a picnic. Amy and Mike's oldest daughter, ten-year old Amanda, began chewing potato chips and spitting them in Amy's hair. "Amy kept saying, 'Don't do that!' over and over," Erin explained. "Instead of taking the plate and throwing it away, she left the plate there." Eventually, after the fourth time, Mike picked Amanda up and removed her from the situation. Erin continued, "I told Amy, 'Just a recommendation for ya…. The way I would have handled that, I would have picked her up after the first time, moved her away from the family, and told her to sit there until she apologized.'" Amy replied that she did not think Amanda would have stayed there, to which Erin said, "Then you put her back and tell her if

she gets up again you're taking her home and she won't have the privileges her brothers and sister have when you get home."

Thomas referred to the same picnic in his interview and told me that Mike and Amy's daughters were out of control. "Erin was really upset about it," Thomas remembered,

But I said, 'What the heck do you expect, you've seen the girls, they don't know any better.' Just thinking that these kids are going to be like all the other kids you've been around, with good parents and such, just isn't the case… .That can be difficult to deal with if you haven't been around it much.

Despite these early struggles, Erin felt Mike and Amy's parenting had improved. She recalled, "I think the kids' behavior is better, and that is due to a lot of work with Amy. They need to have consequences for their behaviors." For Erin, good parenting would help the Johnson's children be successful in life. She rationalized this by emphasizing the importance of making good choices. "I told Amy you have to let them choose and teach them the consequences of their actions." Teaching children to make good choices would help the next generation of children avoid poverty. Erin explained,

They need to know that some choices are good and some are not. If you teach children early to make the better choice, then they'll realize they are going to have a better life and they are going to have a better chance… .We've got to get this corrected for the next generation.

Erin, Thomas, and Lori all agreed the Johnson's had made considerable progress towards achieving their goal of leaving poverty. Mike had found a job he enjoyed and increased his earnings, while Amy acquired her driver's license, made important friendships, practiced her interviewing skills, and registered for a college course. Although the Johnson's

made significant personal and economic progress, at the time of this writing they continue to struggle on the fringes of poverty. I asked each ally to talk about what they believed prevented Amy and Mike from reaching family sustainability.

Lori's immediate response was, "I think having four children and their recent major medical expenses have prevented them from getting ahead." Erin made a similar observation and stated,

> With this family I think the reason they haven't made the progress we would have liked them to is because of all the medical issues in their family. Mike had cancer, Justin's brain tumor, and Erika's eye surgery really set them back. Just when they reach a point where they are doing better they have had a crisis. It's hard to pay for everything.

In addition to their medical expenses, all three allies felt the inconsistency of Amy's employment kept them in poverty. "If Amy were able to make a little more money and work more hours it would really help the family," Thomas observed. The issue of Amy's job also concerned Erin, who told me "I think what prevents them from getting out of poverty is Amy's work situation, because of how sporadic it is." Erin expressed some confusion as to why the Johnson's had not left poverty, and continued,

> I think they have the capability to do it, I do. I always thought that when I got involved with this family that I didn't know why they were in COS. They are not the typical family. I mean they don't collect welfare, so I thought we were going to be in and out in no time. But it's been three years now and they still can't pay their bills.

In response to their comments about Amy's job situation, my follow-up question for each ally asked what they believed prevented Amy from seeking better employment? "Part

of it is the parenting thing, because she really wants to be with her kids," Erin remarked.

While both Lori and Erin mentioned being home with her children as a significant reason

Amy resisted changing jobs, they both also mentioned other factors. "I tried to expose her to

some other work environments," Lori explained, "With normal hours and benefits. I actually

took her to a place where I think she would have been hired…but she resisted. I'm not sure

whether it was fear or not wanting to commit to full-time hours." Lori conceded that "I think

primary in her mind was making sure that when the kids came home someone was there," but

she also did not think Amy was as motivated to get a full-time job as she had initially

thought. Erin reiterated Lori's observations, and said "I've asked her if she wanted to go to

another facility where she would have more consistent hours and she not sure she wants to do

that."

The subject of Amy's employment caused a great deal of tension for Lori. "I actually

set up an interview for Amy, but she wasn't comfortable following up. I don't know if it's

the psychological fear of success or of going into a completely different work environment."

At that point, however, Lori referred to her own struggles as a wife and mother trying to find

equilibrium between work and family. She told me, "My husband and I had small children

and we both worked, so I appreciate trying to find that delicate balance."

The Johnson's allies agreed, therefore, that although significant progress had been

made, Amy's work situation continued to prevent them from leaving poverty. They

disagreed, however, as to whether they had the right to tell the Johnson's how to live. This

issue, which came up in all three ally interviews, pertained to whether or not Mike and Amy

possessed the appropriate values necessary to succeed in middle-class America.

Erin believed the inability to effectively parent, as described earlier, would prevent the Johnson's children from ever leaving poverty. This would occur because, according to Erin, the poor needed to overcome a certain mindset that revolved around making poor choices. "COS is not about throwing money at problems. That's not it. We don't throw money at problems. These families have to learn how to budget, how to use their money wisely, and how make better choices," Erin said. Furthermore, she continued, "You have to be prepared for the consequences of poor choices. If participant families are not making progress, there has to be a consequence. You have to change the behavior!"

Returning to the idea of using money to solve the problem of poverty, Erin, referring to how she believed some other allies in other circles frequently gave their participant families money, remarked, "Whenever I talk to people about COS I always say that you don't get involved to fix things with money." She felt the problem of poverty too great to overcome through handouts. Erin concluded:

> I have learned so much being a part of circles because I can't just spend money. Do I have the means to do that? I do. I could correct their problems. But, it's not going to make them better people and it's not going to make their children better people. If you always dig them out you are enabling them. It's just like an alcoholic. I just don't think enabling should be there.

Thomas referred to this notion of middle-class values in his interview as well, and said, "The Johnson's actually really have middle-class values, compared to the homeless families I work with in my job." "But in the end," he concluded,

> In this program you could be dealing with families who have been in poverty forever, or maybe from a different culture. How is that going to work real well with a mentor

who may not understand the culture very well? They may think the family is doing something wrong, but it may not be wrong, just different.

For Lori, the thought of differing values became the most difficult for her to resolve. The way their circle functioned had a lot to do with different values and backgrounds. For example, Lori told me "Mike is a boy's boy, and he just latched on to Thomas and they had a great rapport immediately." While she could exchange pleasantries with Mike, they did not develop a bond. "As far as Amy and I, she's a mom and I'm a mom and we had that connection." Thomas becoming "Mike's ally" resulted in large part because of the pre-existing Johnson family dynamics. "I think that dynamic is very strong in this family. Mom has her role and dad has his role and it's very traditional. That may have prevented us from approaching the family as holistically as we would have liked." Negotiating these gender roles were just a small part of a bigger dilemma for Lori. "I think it has a lot to do with different frames of reference as well," she concluded. "This is complicated stuff. I mean, family, parenting and work, personal choices within the family, and how to spend your money. How far do you push on that?" Whereas Erin believed she had a responsibility to get involved in these questions, Lori reflected

> I mean, my value system my not be their value system. Is it really up to me to say 'That's a stupid way to spend money. Why are you paying a monthly fee to rent a rickety old couch? I didn't know if it was my role to say that.

Contemplating the possibility of imposing her values on the Johnson's led Lori to think about the success of the program in general. "Even the allies come from different backgrounds with different expectations, different frameworks," Lori reflected. As a result, she felt the allies needed better training to prepare them to handle these issues. In the end,

Lori thought "It's all about communication, value systems, and role clarification. I think we were trying to accomplish or tackle more than was realistic. I don't know how you manage the line between being a social worker and a volunteer."

Thomas also addressed this point, and believed allies were asked to do too much. "We can't expect people out in the community to come in and mentor families that may have terrific problems, and expect them to replace social workers when they aren't trained to do that!" Thomas thought one of the program's goals was to replace social services, to which he replied, "My experience with non profits and seeing some of the situations you run into with these families, you just can't expect Joe Blow who is trying to do good to really understand how to help these families."

Thomas' vast experience working with the homeless, as well as being a member of the initial HSPA, allowed him to formulate a particularly insightful critique of the program. When I asked him how he felt about the program in general, he replied, "As far as volunteers go, getting people into a situation where they see what these families are really living like, it's a great idea. They see that these individuals are really no different than we are, they're just poor." At the same time, however, Thomas felt the program had major weaknesses. One involved asking allies to do too much, as mentioned earlier. Another weakness, according to Thomas, was the turnover in program leadership. Referring to the program's four different program managers in less than three years, he said, "When you're dealing with families like this you have got to have consistency. It's real important for marginalized families, when they get comfortable with something they feel is helping, not to change it that drastically." Thomas also felt many of the people who advocated for COS did not understand, or did not

want to understand, how the program was truly functioning. Elaborating, and referring to the three institutional funders, he said,

> A lot of times when you get into non profits, it becomes a marketing tool for
> fundraising instead of for the actual program. Instead of looking at how the program
> actually works, or if it's working, the fundraising becomes a marketing tool for the
> funder.

"Despite this," he continued, "The program could still be a good program." Because he operated a homeless shelter, Thomas knew how few resources are spent in the area of human services. Therefore, "The most important thing should always be what's best for the community, and how can the little money you have achieve the greatest impact." COS, however, "Is an exceedingly, extraordinarily expensive program." Although he felt the idea of bringing in middle-class allies from the community to help families was a great idea, "It was never taken beyond that to look at how the program could be run efficiently and effectively to serve the most people possible."

Lori concluded her interview by restating the significance of Mike finding a better paying job, and Amy's new found independence. She expressed lingering concerns, however, when she said, "How long do you stay with the program! When are you done? My expectation was that I would be involved for a year, and it's been nearly three. You can't just walk away, since we have a friendship now." She continued, and stated concerns regarding the lack of communication between school officials and allies,

> I don't think the changes from the original COS liaison to ACHIEVE was as clear as
> it could have been. I don't think our roles were clearly defined, and I don't think that
> Carrie knew what we could be offering. Carrie didn't know when she should and

shouldn't call on us. So, I think role clarification was a problem between parents,

allies, and case managers.

Because of their friendship, however, Lori believed the Johnson's "Will always be a family I

stay in touch with and communicate with." "Do you think your involvement will help them

leave poverty?" I asked. She replied, "I doubt it. But maybe it's given them a different

perspective and maybe the many small things will add up to something significant."

Despite her belief that Amy needed to find more consistent employment, and that

both Mike and Amy needed to do a better job of parenting, in the end Erin felt they had made

tremendous progress. The manner in which they overcame their son's struggle with a brain

tumor is one example. Erin recalled, "Of course it was nerve racking in that they didn't

know how the surgery would turn out, but they now had a better support system." Erin

talked to Mike and Amy every day they were in Iowa City. "I called them and they called

me. We also emailed back and forth. I think it was a matter of knowing they had someone

else to call and that they weren't by themselves."

On a different occasion, Amy contacted Erin to tell her their electricity had been shut

off. Erin responded,

> I didn't even ask her how much she needed. It was more of a situation where I asked
>
> her what steps they had taken, and offered advice on what steps to take next. She told
>
> me Mike had done such and such, and their electricity was turned back on.

This situation demonstrated to Erin that the Johnson's were doing a better job of problem

solving. She still felt the program had significant weaknesses, however, especially

"consistency and follow through from the organizers." Referring specifically to the other

allies in her circle, she did not think they worked cohesively. "I really don't think there's

been any collaboration in our circle. I couldn't tell you who is supposed to facilitate that. I've tried to bring us together a few times, but nothing consistent."

Reflecting on what being an ally meant to her, Erin concluded her interview by describing the recent death of her father. She told me,

Probably one of the greatest moments for me as an ally was getting an email from Amy telling me she was concerned about me. She asked if there was anything she could do to help me get through the situation. When I first met this family there is no way I thought I would have received a message from Amy that she was concerned and offering to help. So, if you look at where we are…we're doing well.

These two case studies' interview data demonstrates how vitally important, and complicated, the relationships are between participant families and their allies. According to the foundational philosophy of the program, COS "Strives to build community where…Our relationships are based on deep, reciprocal caring, and nonjudgmental respect for the inherent dignity and worth of others"("Leading our Communities out of Poverty," 2003, p.1). It is evident from the descriptions that these cross-class relationships do represent a mutual caring and respect, to the point that both participant families consider their allies to be friends. A much deeper analytic reading is necessary, however, to uncover exactly how these relationships helped the participant families reach their goals, and what tension, if any, existed between appropriating dominant cultural capital and valuing the non-dominant. For example, in light of the earlier analysis of cultural and social capital exchange during the weekly meetings, what roles did cultural and social capital play in the individual circles, and did a space of liminality exist? Related to this question, how have these cross-class relationships helped relieve the social isolation so prevalent in impoverished communities?

Furthermore, how do these case study families speak back to the dominant discourse?

Finally, how is the dominant discourse reflected, and rejected in both the ally and participant

quotations?

Chapter 8

Analysis: Teaching Each Other

One issue that ties this study together, as described earlier, is the tension that existed between the dominant discourse, reflected in the Personal Responsibility Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (PRWORA), and the actual lived experiences of the poor. For the community-school partnership represented by COS, this tension manifested itself on multiple levels. From a macro perspective, the tension is reflected in the contradicting goals of liberal and liberating models of community education, where liberal models operate within existing institutional structures and liberating models work to change the institutional structures themselves.

Circle of Support's (COS) foundational goals mirrored the motives of liberating models of community education (Allen & Martin, 1992; Brookfield, 1985, 2005). The founders of COS believed PRWORA rested on false stereotypes and generalizations, perpetuated in large part by mainstream American society. COS, therefore, sought to create meaningful cross-class relationships that relieved the social isolation of poverty by helping low-income families acquire "money, meaning, and friends." Additionally, they hoped the cross-class relationships would create enough support for change that collective action would be taken to remove institutional barriers. Part of this social support included teaching middle and upper class allies the realities of living in poverty. If allies saw how hard families in poverty worked, how much they cared for their children, and how the system was constructed in ways that guarantee the reproduction of class inequality, allies would be moved to do something about it. According to co-founder Scott Miller, "Once a critical mass of people

befriend one another across class and race lines, social and public policies will change to produce more equality and justice" (COS e-bulletin, August 2005).

The Walden Public School System (WPSS), however, like public education in general, operated within the liberal tradition (Brantlinger, 2003; Brookfield, 1985, 2005; Fletcher, 1980). The liberal tradition of community education seeks to equip marginalized populations with the tools to succeed within existing institutional structures, exemplified by COS allies and community organizers working to transfer dominant social and cultural capital to participants (Johnston, 1992).

Consequently, the goals of these two collaborating organizations were often in conflict. From a micro perspective, COS' weekly meetings exemplified this tension. In the weekly meetings, participants constantly negotiated conflicting discourses: a liberal discourse aimed at helping them become middle-class by adopting dominant middle-class skills and values, as well as a liberating discourse which recognized the existence of structural barriers and affirmed non-dominant cultural capital. Learning and adopting middle-class values, or dominant cultural capital, helped families living in poverty transition into dominant society by acquiring the skills of communication, organization, and effective decision-making taken for granted by most middle-class Americans.

Conversely, by recognizing structural failings and affirming non-dominant cultural capital, allies and participants were able to organize collectively to eliminate systemic barriers propped up by dominant stereotypes of the poor. Because these discourses were often in conflict and created tension during the weekly meetings, participants were placed in between accepting the dominant paradigm as it is by "becoming" middle-class, without the economic means to do so, and opposing it by working for systemic change. Furthermore,

becoming middle-class by adopting middle-class values is often a myth, as many people living in poverty share the same values and characteristics of their middle-class neighbors, but lack the economic capital necessary for family sustainability (Hawkins, 2005; Mink, 1998c; Schram, 2000).

Participants and allies of COS, however, met formally as a community only once a week. In other words, the manners in which social and cultural capital were exchanged, the tensions negotiated, and the potential liminal space created, may be unique to the "field" of the weekly meeting (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Given that allies and participants also interacted and formed relationships outside of the weekly meetings, a closer analysis of those relationships is necessary to determine how they functioned as community education.

This chapter, therefore, seeks to follow the previous interview descriptions closely in analyzing two specific circles of support. Reiterating my approach to analyzing the weekly meetings, what remains necessary is an explication of the impact these cross-class relationships had both on families living in poverty and their allies. Of particular significance are analyses of the ways speaking back to the dominant discourse, cross-class interactions, skills development, and social networking operated as forms of community education. Additionally, I analyze how individual circles outside of the meetings negotiated the tension between the liberating goals of a community organization and the liberal goals of a public school system.

Through careful coding of the individual circles' interview data, I identified five themes, for which I constructed five separate analytical sections. I evaluated each of these themes through the lens of liberal and liberating community education in order to interrogate the manners in which allies learned from participants and participants learned from allies to

form a collective class awareness. Developing cross-class relationships and exposing the

social isolation of poverty is the subject of the first analytic section. I contend the authentic

relationships created in these two circles were vital in achieving the program's community

education goals. According to the discourse legislated by PRWORA, being gainfully

employed and married are the best prevention for poverty (Congressional Record, 1996). In

the second analytic section, therefore, I examine the ways in which the two participant

families "speak back" to PRWORA's dominant discourse and educate the greater community

about the realities of living in poverty. The third analytic section evaluates the ways allies in

these two sets of cross-class relationships actually helped the participant families acquire

dominant social and cultural capital. In the fourth analytic section I demonstrate how the

most effective community education occurred when a liminal space was present, one that

allowed for the recognition of structural barriers and validated non-dominant forms of capital

while simultaneously realizing the necessity of acquiring dominant cultural capital. Finally,

in the fifth analytic section, I evaluate if and how the dominant discourse manifested itself in

both participants and allies, and if so, what the implications were for community education.

Exposing The Social Isolation of Poverty and Forming Friendships

One of COS' intentional goals, in many respects the foundation of the program, was

to create meaningful cross-class relationships to relieve the social isolation so many families

living in poverty experience (McCormack, 2004). Social isolation, in this context is a

situation where the poor rarely have contact with the non-poor, therefore depriving those

living in poverty "of the social resources provided by mainstream networks that facilitate

social and economic advancement in a modern industrial society" (Wilson, 1996, p. 64).

Ethnographic studies demonstrate that upon self-reflection, people living in poverty are less

likely to claim they have friends (Kasinitz & Rosenberg, 1996; Wilson and Wacquant, 1989).

Having friends is incredibly important, given "they often play crucial role in life in that they

provide emotional and material support, help construct one's identity, and often open up

opportunities that one would not have without them—particularly in the area of jobs"

(Wilson & Wacquant, 1989, p. 132).

In November 2003 I attended a COS ally training session, also attended by two of

Mike and Amy's allies, Thomas and Lori, where COS staff explained their emphasis on

cross-class relationships. Lois, one of the program's co-founders, drew what looked like a

target on the dry-erase board, and titled it "relationship spheres." She went on to explain

how few meaningful relationships people living in poverty had with people who did not live

in poverty. In fact, Lois said, "Most of the non-poor people that families living in poverty

know are paid to provide services for them, like social workers." This claim is supported by

literature, as Wilson and Wacquant (1989) found when people living in poverty do claim to

have friends, those friends "are less likely to work, less educated, and twice as likely to be on

[federal or state] aid" (p. 132).

A fundamental goal for COS, therefore, was to utilize middle and upper class allies

and facilitate the creation of meaningful cross-class relationships. More than just meaningful

cross-class relationships, however, COS desired the creation of actual friendships. The Ally

Orientation Manual (2004) specifically stated that an ally,

> Takes a vested interest in supporting a participant…in their transition out of poverty,
>
> and is willing to build a "friendship first" relationship based on the gifts and talents of
>
> both, finding common interests, learning about and appreciating differences, with a
>
> focus on supports for moving out of poverty. (p. 9)

After analyzing the interview data, I contend these friendships acted as the linchpin for COS' community education; genuine relationships fostered the commitment and reciprocity necessary for allies and participants to learn from each other. Because families living in poverty often "lack the networks of friends and family with access to jobs and transportation," as well as important skills required to earn living wages, COS hoped middle and upper-class allies would both form new networks of support and transfer cultural capital to participant families (McCormack, 2004, p. 363). Because middle and upper class allies often did not genuinely understand the realities of living in poverty, developing relationships with low-income families exposed and the interrupted the dominant discourse.

After closely reading and analyzing the interview data, a central theme that emerged was that allies could help participant families acquire important stores of cultural and social capital while providing social support. The importance of reducing the social isolation of poverty cannot be overstated. Amazing ethnographic work has been done to expose the social isolation of poverty and roles volunteers play in its reduction (Bloom, 2001; Bloom and Kilgore, 2003a, 2003b). The focus of my analysis, however, is not on how cross-class relationships reduced social isolation, which they did. Rather, my emphasis is on the ways these relationships served to interrupt the dominant discourse and deepen the ally awareness and education about low-income families' lived experiences. Therefore, in what follows, I briefly describe the relationships that developed within each circle, which functioned to deepen ally awareness of poverty's marginalizing effects.

Creating Relationships and Learning About Social Isolation

Social support, in the context of this study, related directly to COS' goal to help families living in poverty find "friends, meaning, and money" (Smidt & Miller, 2004).

During the mid-1990s, the co-founders of COS held a number of focus groups with women living in poverty. They hoped to collect data on what women currently receiving subsidies needed in order to reach self-sufficiency. The data collected reflected a lack of "friends, meaning, and money." Consequently, in order to address "friends and meaning" the co-founders hoped middle and upper-class allies could provide social support that friends generally provide: useful advice, an attentive ear, a shoulder to cry on, and someone to share the joys of accomplishment. Just as important as allies providing social support, organizers hoped that creating authentic cross-class relationships would inspire the greater community to eliminate poverty. This subsection will, therefore, analyze the relationships that developed between allies and participants while demonstrating how those relationships fostered the development of a collective will to fight structural poverty.

The co-founders of COS, Lois Smidt and Scott Miller, believed creating meaningful cross-class relationships would not only provide social support to low-income families, it would inspire allies to take action. Scott Miller contended,

> To succeed at helping people out of poverty, you will need a healthy community of people who have built effective relationships across class and cultural lines. Everything happens in relationships and very little of long-term value happens outside of them. (COS E-Bulletin, August 2005, para. 3)

Thus, if the ally-participant relationship was meaningful and genuine, COS' efforts at community education were more likely to succeed.

After analysis, both circles' interview data reflected the successful creation of "relationships based on deep, reciprocal caring" (Smidt & Miller, 2004, p. 2).

For example, Elizabeth expressed appreciation and hope when she said, "Without my allies I'd probably be in the same old race…now I see a little light at the end of the tunnel." Although Elizabeth did not specifically use the word "friend" when describing her allies in this interview, she frequently referred to her allies, especially Richard and Mary, in this manner. The affection was mutual. For example, Elizabeth's primary method of transportation was the metro bus. Like many single mothers living in poverty, transportation was a mountainous barrier for Elizabeth. As Bloom (2005) asserts, "Welfare recipients, low income people, and welfare analysts agree that transportation is one of the most critical barriers to achieving economic self-sufficiency" (p. 42). Mary, acting on her role as community-building ally, took it upon herself to give Elizabeth rides to the weekly meetings, the grocery store, and eventually to visits with Elizabeth's son in prison. What began as a way to keep Elizabeth connected to the world outside her neighborhood, eventually turned into a friendship. Additionally, Mary and Richard attended budgeting classes and once a month went to a local food bank with Elizabeth. When I asked Mary to describe her relationship with Elizabeth, she said, "With us I think we've established a friendship."

Mike and Amy, along with their allies Erin, Lori, and Thomas, also referred to their relationship as a friendship. This was reflected in comments from Mike and Amy, like Amy remarking "We actually built a friendship with them" or Mike referring to Thomas, "he's actually more of a friend now" and "I would consider them [allies] mainly as friends." Amy emailed her allies at least once a week and went for periodic walks with Lori, while Mike got together with Thomas socially for drinks. The Johnson's allies defined their relationship similarly. At the expense of being redundant, Lori commented "we have a friendship now" and Thomas stated,

I think for Mike I became someone to talk to, and as a matter of fact I still talk to him once in a while. We actually met for a beer the other day. Our relationship has gone beyond just being in the program.

Erin's reflection, referring to the support she received from Amy at the time of her father's death, demonstrated just how deep and genuine their relationship had become, when she said, "Probably one of the greatest moments for me as an ally was getting an email from Amy telling me she was concerned about me."

Developing meaningful cross-class relationships, described in these examples as actual friendships, helped the allies become aware of the social isolation of poverty. As Mary stated, "Before, I don't think she [Elizabeth] had any king of outside contact with other adults…I think that through COS she's made more friends and broadened her base of support." Andrew agreed, and succinctly summarized the program's effects on Elizabeth with his comment "I think the program has provided Elizabeth…. with a sense of community previously unknown" to her. This occurred through "sharing experiences and getting to know one another" and being "willing to pitch in to help another person" that needs help. Mary directly referred to Elizabeth's isolation in her comment "I've learned isolation is such a big problem for a lot of people in poverty," and, referring to COS, "It gives her [Elizabeth] someone to talk to when she has a problem." Erin also vocalized the importance of her relationship in reducing Amy and Mike's isolation. Throughout her son Justin's battle with a brain tumor, Amy talked to Erin every day, which demonstrated to Erin that "they now had a better support system…it was a matter of knowing they had someone else to call and that they weren't by themselves."

These quotations, and my conclusions, mirror Bloom and Kilgore's (2003a) analysis of volunteers in Beyond Welfare, a program with nearly identical goals that served as a model for COS. Bloom contends,

> Close contact with families in poverty did have the desired outcome of teaching
> volunteers about poverty, the welfare system, the isolation of people in poverty, the
> stigmatization of those in poverty, and the relationship between poverty and domestic
> violence. (p. 447)

The interview data supports the conclusion that the allies and participants in both circles spent a significant amount of time together outside of the weekly meetings. Time, along with the commitment to helping the participant families leave poverty, created the caring relationships COS hoped to foster. After conducting the interviews and closely analyzing the data, I do not believe allies and participants used the word "friend" lightly. Referring to their relationships in this manner, and demonstrating sincerity in their actions, convinced me of two things: these relationships contributed to the participant's readiness to learn new approaches to achieving family sustainability, and simultaneously to willingness among allies to recognize and challenge recognizing the dominant discourse. In the next section, I demonstrate the manners in which the participants defied the dominant discourse and how it helped allies become aware of structural barriers.

<div align="center">Speaking Back: Two Families Defy the Dominant Discourse</div>

Dominant Discourse and the Culture of Poverty

During the mid-1990s, PRWORA effectively ended public entitlements for the poor by eliminating the 1935 Social Security Act's federal cash assistance program, Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC). PRWORA replaced AFDC with Temporary Aid

to Needy Families (TANF), a state-level block grant program administered by the Office of Family Assistance (OFA). The version of the bill that went to the president's desk, H.R. 3734, presented Congresses assertions on the causes of poverty and outlined TANF's requirements.

Earlier in this study, in Chapter 2, I utilized a macro approach, informed by Michel Foucault's notion of governmentality (1994), to deconstruct the language of PRWORA's policies and demonstrate how they reflected the dominant discourse and reinforced false, demeaning, caricatures of the poor. This analysis empirically confirmed that the federally mandated dominant discourse, represented by PRWORA, not only sought to govern the conduct of welfare recipients, but also encouraged the poor to govern themselves by constructing personal identities that mirrored dominant society's expectations. Consequently, the liberal democratic state governs the poor while simultaneously requiring the poor to govern themselves according to its arbitrarily defined standards (Cruikshank, 1999).

The mental model employed to both garner support and carry out welfare reform was not new, but one established more than forty years ago by Oscar Lewis (1966), commonly referred to as the "culture of poverty." This view of the poor "reflected the assumption…of the helplessness and passivity of dependent peoples, who needed the assistance of outsiders to break the cycles of deprivation and degradation that reproduced it from generation to generation" (Katz, 1995, p. 69). Although Lewis intended to spark a liberal, activist agenda aimed at eliminating poverty,

> Others with more conservative agendas turned the concept's original politics on its
> head… .The culture of poverty [then] became a euphemism for the pathology of the

undeserving poor, an explanation for their condition, an excuse…for both inaction

and harsh, punitive public policy (p. 70).

More than forty years of thoughtful, empirical research has thoroughly discredited this

approach to explaining poverty, yet the goals and mandates of PROWRA still rest on its

fabrications (Coward, Feagin, and Williams, 1974; Gould, 1999; Kincheloe and Steinberg,

2002; Rank, 2001, Seccombe, James, & Walters, 1998).

We recall that, as noted in Chapter 2, the bedrock claims of the culture of poverty

approach are that the poor lack family values and the desire to work (Kincheloe and

Steinberg, 2002). As a result, supporting the creation of two-parent families and encouraging

gainful employment became the foundation upon which PRWORA rested. Emphasizing the

importance of marriage in reducing welfare Congress asserted, "Marriage is the foundation

of a successful society…an essential institution of a successful society which promotes the

interest of children…[and] promotion of responsible fatherhood and motherhood is integral

to a successful child rearing and the well-being of children" (Congressional Record, 1996,

H.R. 3734). Additionally, PRWORA required states to mandate work activities for welfare

recipients in order to receive TANF block grants. This dual emphasis on work and marriage

was reflected most recently in the 2005 Deficit Reduction Act (DFA), which re-authorized

TANF through the year 2010. The DFA passed with "a renewed focus on work, program

integrity and strengthening families through healthy marriage promotion and responsible

fatherhood, " which included mandates requiring single mothers to divulge paternity in order

to receive aid (Administration for Children and Families, 2006).

A plethora of empirical studies demonstrate that PRWORA actually represented the

formalization of widely held stereotypes and caricatures of the poor (Hancock, 2004;

Maskovsky and Morgen, 2003; Mink, 1998c; Mink and Solinger, 2003; Schram, 2000). I contend the dominant discourse, the widely held and currently legislated view that the poor lack personal responsibility while taking advantage of the rest of us, is in large part a constructed fabrication that absolves society from the obligation of doing something about the real failures in our social, political, and economic system. The mandates of PRWORA concurrently required the poor to view themselves, and each other, in the same demeaning ways in order to receive aid.

In Chapter 6 I challenged the culture of poverty's myths ethnographically and demonstrated how participants, allies, and community organizers <u>negotiated</u> the dominant discourse during COS' weekly meetings. In this analysis, I claimed the dominant discourse was <u>simultaneously challenged and reinforced</u>. What remains is a close analysis of how two specific circles of support spoke back to the actual provisions of Iowa's TANF legislation. In what follows I use empirical data to reveal how two COS participant families defied dominant stereotypes, yet still lived in poverty. Speaking back to the dominant discourse played a vital role in informing the community, in this case COS' organizers and allies, of the false stereotypes and exaggerated generalizations upon which PRWORA rests.

COS Families Speak Back

The goals and objectives of Iowa's 2004 TANF plan dichotomize welfare recipients and create false binaries, constructing an "us versus them" paradigm in which low-income families are labeled deficient (Bloom and Kilgore, 2003a; Schram, 1995, 2000, 2006). Consequently, Iowa's TANF plan seeks to,

Provide an incentive to work…make work pay…encourage family stability and the

formation of families…take personal responsibility to become self-sufficient…[and]

empower clients…to make real choices. (State Plan, 2004)

The previous quotation demonstrates the assumptions on which TANF rest; the poor lack the

incentive to work, do not have stable families, are not personally responsible, and fail to

make real choices. This is exemplified in the legislation's overemphasis on work; the best

thing a family living in poverty can do is become gainfully employed (Congressional Record,

1996). Thus, the goal of TANF's first stated objective is to "Provide an incentive to work

and make work pay" for its recipients. Both of the individual participant families, Elizabeth

and the Johnson's, worked full-time yet remained poor. Elizabeth had worked full-time for

the last thirteen years, eight years as a custodian and the last five years at a local women's

resource center. She had never received unemployment compensation. Although she no

longer received TANF subsidies due to the fact that she exceeded the 60-month limit, she

worked full-time even when she qualified for aid for her young children. The Johnson's,

conversely, did not qualify for TANF subsidies because they earned too much. Mike even

increased his income from nine dollars and hour to thirteen dollars an hour while

participating in COS, but still did not earn enough to help his family meet their basic needs.

Not only does the interview data demonstrate ways Elizabeth and the Johnson's spoke back,

it also demonstrates what their allies learned about the dominant discourse.

According to her community-building ally, Mary, Elizabeth "works hard" and

always went to work "even if she hasn't had any sleep." Richard agreed, stating, "She's a

hard working individual. She rarely if ever misses work and she's a very dependable

employee." Elizabeth exuded this strong work ethic when she told me "If I have to work two

jobs I will. I go to work on two hours of sleep as it is, I can do it!" Referring to Mike and

Amy, Thomas said, "Both of them are working, actually wanting to work." Mike expressed

his attitude towards work when he said, "What we get is what we work for, and if we don't

work we don't get it." Instead of lacking "incentive to work," working was not "paying" for

either family. Elizabeth earned a little more that eight dollars an hour in her struggle to

provide for her two teenage sons, and the Johnson's earned less than $25,000 a year

providing for four children under the age of twelve. In Elizabeth's case, her financial ally,

Andrew, felt "She would have to go from making $8 an hour to $14 an hour to make it

financially."

Instead of lacking personal responsibility, independence, and the inability to make

real choices, both Elizabeth and the Johnson's impressed their allies with their ability to

survive with few material resources. They were not wasting what money they earned; they

simply were not earning enough. Although Richard was Elizabeth's ally, he referred to his

experience with the program in general when he said "One of the big surprises of the

program for me is that regardless of what people in the community think, my experience has

been that these individuals do not waste a lot of money." Affirming Elizabeth's ability to

make real choices, Andrew remarked, "She's a good budgeter… .She's very thrifty… .She

impressed me with the way she worked with her lack of income."

When they entered COS, Mike and Amy were overpaying a rental store for furniture

and electronic appliances. Mike and Amy thought this was a good deal, since they also

rented to own their home and an automobile. The Johnson's learned, however, with Thomas'

help, that by adding up their total monthly payments, including interest, by the time they had

purchased the furniture and appliances they would have paid exponentially more than what

the items were actually worth. Thomas explained that had they saved their money in the first place and bought the furniture outright, they would have saved a great deal of money. An excellent example of how low-income families can be exploited for profit, Thomas' insight not only served to educate the Johnson's, he later shared this information with the rest of COS during a weekly meeting.

The second foundational objective of Iowa's TANF plan was to support the formation of two-parent families. This objective, reflecting Congresses claim that out-of-wedlock motherhood is one of the primary causes of poverty, not only rests on the moral assumption that women are better off married, it also assumes a two-parent family will not need subsidies (Mink, 1998c). Mike and Amy embodied everything the government expected them to; in fact, as Thomas said, "they are the perfect family." Both parents worked, were married, and cared about the future of their children. Amy cared so much about being home with her children during the day, so she could care for them and visit their school if she needed to, that she was willing to work nights at a job she did not enjoy. Amy working nights and Mike working days also allowed the Johnson's to avoid childcare costs for their youngest two children.

Unfortunately, both Mike and Amy lacked the education, training, skills, and available employment necessary to earn enough to avoid poverty. Although Mike improved his earnings from $9 an hour to $13 an hour while involved in COS, it was simply not enough. Not only do Mike and Amy's story speak back to the assumption that a two parent family and work are the best answers to poverty, they prove that the real objective of welfare reform was not to reduce poverty, but to reduce welfare (Mink, 1998c; Schram, 2000). Because Mike and Amy were married and worked, they earned too much to qualify for

subsidies. Because they did not earn enough, however, they still could not provide the basic

needs of shelter and food for their children. Consequently, they do not show up among the

dwindling number of welfare recipients, and welfare reform is lauded for its success at

ending welfare (Mink, 1998c; Schram, 2000). Amy and Mike's struggle is also reflective of

marriage in general among low-income families. Edin (2000) found non-marriage among

low-income single mothers the result of affordability, lack of respect by their partners, trust,

and fear of domestic violence. According to Edin (2000), "In short, mothers believe that

marriage will probably make their lives more difficult than they are currently" (p. 130).

Instead of presenting these two individual circles as outliers or exceptions to the rule,

more than half of COS' original twenty five families did not receive subsidies at the time of

their admittance to the program, and nearly all participants were employed (COS E-Bulletin,

March 2005). Most participant families had at one time collected welfare, but many of those

had either reached their 60-month TANF mandated limit like Elizabeth, or earned slightly too

much to qualify like the Johnson's. This speaks back to the logic that if you do not receive

welfare you should, therefore, be self-sufficient. These two families represented the

thousands of American families among the working poor, simultaneously robbed of self-

sufficiency due to low wages and deprived of subsidies because of incredibly low income

thresholds (Pavetti, 1997, 2000; Pavetti & Acs, 1997; Siegel & Abbott, 2007).

Rank (2001) attributes the majority of poverty in the United States to what he calls a

"dual labor market" (p. 891). In this dual labor market, there are primary and secondary

markets. In the primary market, "Jobs are characterized by stability, relatively high wages,

and good working conditions" (Rank, 2001, p. 891). By contrast, jobs in the secondary

market "are more likely to have poor working conditions, marked by instability and low

wages. Individuals with less marketable skills and education often find themselves working in the secondary labor market"(p. 891). Rank goes on to cite Beeghley (1996), finding "the structure of the economy insures that millions of people will be poor no mater how hard they work, no matter what their skills, no matter how much they try" (Rank, 2001, p. 891).

Elizabeth and the Johnson's defied the stereotypes represented by both the culture of poverty and TANF's guidelines, yet still found themselves poor as a result of laboring in the secondary work market. Instead of reinforcing the dominant discourse or acting as outliers, both circles are representative of other ethnographic studies that demonstrate "The poor tend to amplify and reiterate mainstream American values such as the importance of hard work, personal responsibility, and a dislike of the welfare system" (quotation in Rank, 2001, p. 887; Albelda, 2001; Fairclough, 2000; Rank, 2004; Seccombe, 2002). In fact, instead of the "moral or immoral characteristics of the underclass" being responsible for perpetuating false stereotypes (Siegel & Abbott, 2007, p. 411), I agree with Schwartz (1999) who claims

> The theory and practice of free-market economics have done more to undermine traditional moral values than any other social force. It is not permissive parents, unwed mothers, undisciplined teachers, multicultural curricula, fanatical civil libertarians, feminists, rock musicians, or drug pushers who are the primary sources of the corrosion that moral conservatives are trying to repair. Instead, it is the operation of the market system itself, along with an ideology that justifies the pursuit of economic self-interest as the 'American way.' (p. 34)

Speaking back to the dominant discourse and learning about structural barriers are examples of how COS operated as liberating community education. The awareness gained by the allies in these two specific circles of support, exemplified by their comments,

demonstrate how speaking back to the dominant discourse exposed the contradictions between Elizabeth and the Johnson's lived experiences and the dominant myths of PRWORA. Demystifying the culture of poverty strengthened these cross-class relationships, validated the participant's personal responsibility and desire to work, and, as I will analyze later, motivated allies to eliminate structural barriers. The meaningful ally-participant relationships, together with speaking back to the dominant discourse, fostered a collective awareness of structural inequalities.

In addition to combating isolation and exposing the dominant discourse, these relationships also helped the participant families move closer to leaving poverty. In the next section, I parallel my earlier analysis of the weekly meetings by relying on Bourdieu (1986, 1992, 1996, 2001) for a microanalysis of the social and cultural capital exchange between each family and their allies. Again, Bourdieu is helpful because he intended his theories to provide a lens through which to create rich and detailed analyses of everyday social processes and interactions (Moi, 1991). I contend that social and cultural capital exchange operated to help participant families succeed within the current paradigm, therefore acting as a liberal example of community education.

Dominant Social and Cultural Capital Exchange

The relationships that Elizabeth and the Johnson's developed with their allies helped them begin to acquire the skills and social networks necessary to move towards "personal and family sustainability" (Hawkins, 2005). I intentionally use the phrase personal and family sustainability because, since the passage of PRWORA, the notion of self-sufficiency has come to mean no longer collecting welfare, regardless of whether or not you are poor. Personal and family sustainability, in contrast, refers to "maximizing full human potential to

establish long-term economic, physical, psychological, and social well-being for individuals and their families" (p. 86). For participants in COS, the cross-class relationships they developed with their allies provided them an opportunity to move closer to this personal and family sustainability. This occurred in part through the transmission of dominant cultural and social capital (Bourdieu, 1986). Given that I thoroughly described cultural and social capital and how it informs my research in Chapter 6, I will only briefly re-define them here before applying their lens to the individual circles.

For Bourdieu, social capital includes more than just a support system, friends, or the voluntary associations one belongs to. This is partly because Bourdieu's notion of social capital cannot be divorced from other forms of capital, like cultural, economic, or symbolic capital (1986, 2001). For Bourdieu, then, social capital is both the relationship that allows members to claim access to each other's resources and the amount and quality of those relationships. The quality of the relationships depend, in part, on the amount of economic and dominant cultural capital the other members possess. Bourdieu (1986) explains,

> The amount of social capital as a *portfolio of connections* becomes all the greater the more numerous, stable, and profitable these connections are (in other words, the greater the capital possessed by institutions - boards of directors, for example – or the individuals to whom they give access), and in many cases, the better *hidden* this capital is as well. (italics in original, p. 360)

Cultural capital, according to Bourdieu, is really "informational capital" (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p. 119). In other words, possessing cultural capital means one knows what is legitimate and valued within society. Cultural capital, however, is arbitrarily defined. Describing what is legitimate for society, whether defining good art, music, or the

characteristics of personal responsibility, requires and perpetuates power. People in positions of power within specific fields, such as academia or government, have the opportunity to define dominant cultural capital through syllabi or legislation. Those individuals in powerful positions are taught dominant cultural capital in two ways: they are born into a dominant social class and are taught by their families, and/or they attain higher positions through education than they would otherwise expect through inheritance. Possessing large stores of dominant cultural capital, through inheritance and education, allows the elite to distinguish themselves from others and in turn accumulate social status. This, then, affords them the opportunity to exchange that recognition for economic rewards, such as how a college degree translates into a higher paying job (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992).

Elsewhere in this study I describe in more detail what cultural capital is, and how dominant society defines what is and is not "acceptable" cultural capital. In order to demonstrate how cultural capital is relevant in analyzing the two individual circles, a further explanation of how cultural capital operates is necessary. Our society does indeed have objective social and economic structures. Wealth and poverty do exist, as do institutional racism and gender discrimination. According to Bourdieu (2001), these are simultaneously the result, and cause, of objective structures. Furthermore, these objective structures are internalized and consequently influence how we view and interact our world. They work to create a socialized subjectivity, or habitus. Habitus is,

> The strategy-generating principle enabling agents to cope with unforeseen and ever-changing situations…a system of lasting and transposable dispositions which, integrating past experiences, functions at every moment as a matrix of perceptions,

appreciations, and actions and makes possible the achievement of infinitely

diversified tasks. (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 18)

The objective structures of our economic and social system inform our habitus, which

in turn influences the manners in which we erect our social and economic structures.

Members of the dominant social class invest time and often money into teaching their

children how to reproduce their status and remain elite. They teach them how to dine in a

fancy restaurant, carry on after-dinner conversations, dress for job interviews, how to

advocate for their school children, or how to recognize good art. Embodying this cultural

capital becomes part of their internalized habitus, and the elite's children are able to

comfortably navigate their social environment through their semi-conscious practices

(Bourdieu, 1986, 2001). It is here that Bourdieu is criticized as being overly deterministic or

reductionist (King, 2000). In other words, habitus informs a person's practices, which

creates structures, which in turn solidifies the habitus: repeat. In response, Bourdieu

(Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) contends,

Habitus is not the fate that some people read into it. Being the product of history, it is

an *open system of dispositions* that is constantly subjected to experiences, and

therefore constantly affected by them in a way that either reinforces or modifies its

structures. It is durable but not eternal! (Italics in original, p. 131)

Consequently, our habitus influences how we recognize, and utilize, our social and cultural

capital. The habitus can, however, be transformed through "socio-analysis, i.e., via an

awakening of consciousness and a form of 'self work' that enables the individual to get a

handle on their dispositions" (p. 133 n 86). Thus, through socio-analysis one can recognize

their position within the dominant paradigm, and in turn transform their habitus.

Everyone, regardless of social class, has cultural and social capital. What differs, however, is the relationship that exists between these forms of capital and that of economic capital. The amount of economic capital one possesses allows them to define appropriate cultural capital, such as manners of speaking, dinner etiquette, fashion, "good" art, or appropriate leisure activities. This can occur covertly through advertising or school curricula, and overtly through legislation like PRWORA. The relationships, or social capital, the elite possess with people who have similar cultural and economic capital help them maintain, and reproduce, their dominant position in society (Bourdieu, 1996; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Thus social classes that have rich stores of economic, social, and dominant cultural capital are able to distinguish themselves from everyone else. Paradoxically, the social and cultural capital that families living in poverty possess is meaningful and important, but not recognized as valuable by dominant society given their lack of economic capital.

The social and cultural capital that Elizabeth and the Johnson's possess, therefore, is non-dominant. They have, as Yosso (2005) describes, non-dominant forms of capital like aspirational, familial, navigational, and resistant capital, or what she calls community cultural wealth. Unfortunately, these forms of capital are not linked to sufficient stores of economic capital, which prevent people living in marginalized communities from "becoming" part of dominant society, or at least escaping marginalization. This is where much of the current emphasis on social capital lacks the depth possible by utilizing a Bourdeuean approach (e.g. Putnam, 2000).

In the context of this study, social capital is not only about having relationships or voluntary associations, which some people living in poverty do have, but having relationships and associations that can potentially provide access to economic or dominant

cultural capital. Subsequently, dominant social classes reproduce themselves and maintain dominance in a number of different manners. Two significant examples are by passing their economic capital and social ties on to their children as well as through investing time in teaching dominant cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1996). Both COS circles demonstrated how these exchanges took place between allies and participants in the program.

Social capital

Through creating meaningful relationships, both Elizabeth and the Johnson's acquired social capital in ways that helped them cope with living in poverty and could potentially help them leave poverty. Elizabeth poignantly reflected her new social capital when she asked her financial ally, Andrew, to help her rectify her Section VIII housing crisis. In March 2005 Elizabeth experienced a series of housing conflicts, raging from being overcharged to facing eviction and finally culminating her Section VIII landlord being charged with selling narcotics. Throughout this ordeal Elizabeth made numerous fruitless phone calls to the caseworker in charge of her housing, all to no avail. In each of these circumstances, after Elizabeth's calls failed, Andrew contacted the caseworker and helped rectify the situation. He identified that Section VIII was overcharging Elizabeth in part because of his budgeting experience as a financial consultant. He was able to help get Elizabeth quickly transferred to new housing upon her landlord's conviction because he called in a favor from a friend who happened to be the director of the Department of Human Services (DHS). Andrew possessed these skills and relationships prior to participating in COS. As a member of COS and Elizabeth's ally, he was able to give her access to his skills and social networks, which expanded Elizabeth's own social capital. Elizabeth did not know the director of DHS, but then again social capital is not limited to direct, linear relationships. In this example,

Elizabeth's relationship with Andrew gave her access to his social network, which, as a friend, he would facilitate when necessary.

Mike and Amy's relationship with their allies also allowed them to compile an impressive store of real and potential social capital. In terms of real social capital, or tangible benefits gained from the relationship, Mike's reliance on Thomas' expertise in creating a budget is a perfect example. Before meeting Thomas, Mike had nowhere to go for budgeting advice. Thomas attributed this to Mike and Amy not having "parents that were able to teach them how to do things like budget." Although knowing *how* to budget effectively is more an example of cultural capital, which I will describe later, having *someone* to contact for help, like asking Thomas for advice on developing a budget, in this context represents a network of support providing tangible benefits.

Earlier in this chapter, and in Chapter 6, I contend that, in current academic and community organizing circles, social capital has come to mean everything and nothing at all (Weis & Fine, 2004; Portes, 1998). Mike and Amy exemplify how utilizing Bourdieu, informed by Yosso, can remind us how useful the notion of social capital can be. For example, Erin and Lori specifically possessed uniquely powerful networks of social support. As an employee of an organization dedicated to helping marginalized groups obtain affordable medical care, Lori possessed stores of social contacts the Johnson's could call upon if necessary. This actually occurred, albeit in a tangential circumstance, when, as Lori said, "I actually took her to a place where I think she would have been hired." Lori's wealth of community connections and resources did not result in a new job for Amy on this occasion, but their relationship gave Amy possible future access to some of Lori's social connections. Similarly, Erin's position as a director of human resources represented

significant stores of social capital. Responsible for coordinating human resources for a large company that employs hundreds of people, Erin had accumulated an impressive array of social contacts. Erin's friendship with Mike and Amy represented the potential possibility for them to call upon Erin's social capital. This occurred in a situation similar to that described by Lori, when Erin gave Amy hints and tips on job interviewing.

Dominant cultural capital

The possibility of helping Amy or Mike acquire a new job by calling upon their allies' social connections was an example of the Johnson's newly acquired social capital. Teaching Amy how to interview well, Mike how to budget, or both of them how to parent, however, were examples of acquiring dominant cultural capital (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Brantlinger, 2003). Isserles and Dalmage (2000), applying Bourdieu to their introductory college sociology courses, describe cultural capital as "a set of tools and skills acquired through experience that includes knowledge about how to present oneself vis-à-vis relations of power. Basically, cultural capital is information necessary to get ahead: knowing how to present oneself for certain rewards" (p. 160). Erin knew how to prepare for a job interview in part because it was in her job description to know. She was also taught, however, how to interview. Amy did not know how to interview, as evidenced by Erin's comment "I asked Amy to explain a typical day in her current job. Amy replied with 'I do whatever they tell me to do that day… .We worked really hard and eventually got to a good point in her interviewing." Similarly, Thomas knew how to budget because he was taught how to budget. Budgeting and interviewing were part of Erin and Thomas' habitus. Spending time teaching budgeting or interviewing can transfer this cultural capital. Ideally,

it becomes part of Mike and Amy's habitus in the same way it is part of Thomas, Lori, or Erin's.

Perhaps the most poignant example of this transfer of dominant cultural capital occurred in Erin and Amy's relationship, specifically related to Erin's notions of acceptable parenting. During Erin's interview, she repeatedly mentioned parenting. She felt as though Amy was "just not a disciplinarian" and her children needed to "understand the consequences of their actions." Thomas agreed with Erin, demonstrated in his remark "What the heck do you expect…they don't know any better." Erin also believed Amy needed to take steps to improve her children's performance in school. Erin took it upon herself to take Amy and her children to the library and set up summertime tutoring. Eventually, Erin remarked, "I think the kids' behavior is better, and that is due to a lot of work with Amy." Erin felt compelled to teach Amy, and her children, the dominant view that life is about choices and consequences. To help them leave poverty, Erin explained, "They [Amy's children] need to know that some choices are good and some are not… .We've got to get this corrected for the next generation."

Acquiring social capital and transferring dominant cultural capital from allies to participants reflects a liberal approach to community education. It answers the question, how do we help these families become more like us? If the ally/participant relationships only involved the passing of social and cultural capital from allies to participants, the liberating goals of COS could not be achieved. In order for COS to achieve what it set out to do, participants and allies must collectively organize to eliminate the structural barriers to poverty alleviation. The next section, therefore, will analyze the seeming contradiction between becoming middle-class and challenging the existing paradigm. Because both liberal

and liberating goals were simultaneously valued, the competing objectives created tension, or a space of liminality.

Liberatory Capital

In the course of fieldwork and data analysis for this dissertation, I struggled to understand, and explain, individuals within the field of COS who possessed or valued both dominant and non-dominant forms of capital. Richard, Elizabeth's academic ally, was a perfect example. A successful, middle-class professional, Richard inhabited two spaces simultaneously. He verbalized his recognition of structural barriers and identified the manners in which Elizabeth defied dominant stereotypes, but also invested time and energy into helping her improve her skills in the hopes of attaining better paying employment to become middle-class. I initially posited that Richard, and others, possessed conflicting consciousnesses that led to an unhealthy tension between dominant and non-dominant discourse. Upon deep reflection and analysis, however, I identified the potential for a liminal, third space within this tension where a new liberatory form of capital could emerge. If a community, for example, shared this mix of dominant and non-dominant cultural capital, they could collectively organize to eliminate institutional oppression while concurrently helping marginalized individuals acquire the skills necessary to leave poverty. Instead of taking either an oppositional or assimilationist position, perhaps the most effective liberating community education needed to recognize both dominant and non-dominant forms of capital.

Part of the initial stated mission of COS, and in large part what made it a liberatory form of community education, was the recognition that real structural barriers stand in the way of families leaving poverty and its simultaneous commitment to eliminate them (Martin and Allen, 1992). COS allies, for example, were expected to be

Willing to learn about the public assistance system- what is useful and available to support the transition from welfare to work, what gaps exist in the system, and, if appropriate, supports participant leaders in advocating for system changes. (Smidt & Miller, 2004, p. 9)

Conversely, in Chapter 4 I describe how the public school system represented a liberal form of community education, where their focus centered on working within the current socio-political-economic structure to help students become middle-class. This liberal logic rests on the belief, as part of the dominant discourse, that formal education was the best solution to end poverty (Brantlinger, 2003). Thus, the partnership between COS and the public school system represented a merging of the liberatory and liberal models of community education. I contend that as long as the two programs maintained their respective liberating and liberal goals, a healthy tension and subsequent liminal space existed which created the potential for a new liberatory capital. During the weekly meetings, however, I demonstrated how the liberal goals of the public school system, especially as the ACHIEVE Program took over management of COS, eliminated this tension and instead perpetuated the oppressive dominant discourses of PRWORA. This section will seek to illuminate the negotiation of this tension and analyze whether or not a liminal space fostered the creation of liberatory capital. I contend that when allies and participants demonstrated a shared recognition of structural barriers, validated participant families' non-dominant capital, and simultaneously worked to transfer practical middle-class skills to participants, liberatory capital was created.

Recognizing Structural Barriers and Validating Non-dominant Capital

COS consciously worked to expose and teach the community about the structural

barriers that low-income families face in their struggle to leave poverty. The publicized

mission of COS, for example, included the hope that "As we build Circles of Support that

eliminate household poverty, we build a constituency to address systemic barriers that hold

poverty in place" (Smidt & Miller, 2004, p. 4). The constituency COS referred to included

allies, participants, and community organizers. Allies in both individual circles demonstrated

a recognition and awareness of structural barriers. All three of Elizabeth's allies, for

example, recognized the structural barriers Elizabeth faced in her struggle to leave poverty.

Andrew reflected this in his comment, referring to Elizabeth's budget, "There wasn't any

extra money…. she impressed me with the way she worked with her lack of income," and

Richard's statement that "my experience has been that these individuals do not waste a lot of

money." Andrew demonstrated more than just an awareness of structural barriers, he

actually took action on behalf of Elizabeth and in his encounters with Section VIII housing,

learned first-hand how difficult navigating the bureaucracy could be. Referring to what

prevented Elizabeth from leaving poverty and showing he recognized that Elizabeth's work

did not earn her a living wage, Andrew replied, "Some of that's beyond her control. I'd say

she would have to go from making $8 an hour to $14 an hour to make it financially."

Despite Mike acquiring better paying employment and Amy developing more

independence and self-confidence, they still struggled to leave poverty. Lori recognized

Mike and Amy's structural barriers, namely affordable health care, when she commented, "I

think having four children and their recent medical expenses have prevented them from

getting ahead." Erin also recognized and affirmed this structural barrier in her reflection

"they haven't made the progress…because of all the medical issues in their family….just when they reach a point where they are doing better they have a crisis." Furthermore, Thomas' observations that "they were the perfect family" and "both wanted to work" expressed an awareness that, based on his and PRWORA's logic, this patriarchal, heterosexual, and market-driven family should not have been poor. Finally, Erin and Lori's comments about "Amy's work situation" validated the reality that two incomes do not guarantee family sustainability (Hawkins, 2005).

Elizabeth's allies' comments also reflected a validation of various forms of non-dominant cultural capital, described by Yosso (2005) as not being "mutually exclusive or static, but rather are dynamic processes that build on one another as part of community cultural wealth" (p. 77). Affirming Elizabeth's navigational capital, Mary expressed how Elizabeth impressed her she "Even facilitated one weekly meeting where she explained to participants how to get involved in the community!" Richard shared Mary's admiration for Elizabeth, and also recognized her navigational capital, when he remarked, "It's important to note Elizabeth could teach social support. She knows all the programs and how to access them. She also knows the problems with the programs and those obstacles you run into." Andrew referred to navigational capital when he said, "She's not only learned about different job and educational opportunities, she's been able to teach others about government assistance programs and how to get the things they need in unconventional ways." This comment is particularly important: by referring to Elizabeth's navigational capital as "unconventional," Andrew confirms Yosso's (2005) point that "There are forms of cultural capital that marginalized groups bring to the table" that mainstream society does not recognize as valuable (p. 77).

Mary's comments, referring to how hard it must be for Elizabeth to care for her children with little sleep, validated Elizabeth's familial capital, what Yosso (2005) describes as "those cultural knowledges nurtured among *familia* (kin) that carry a sense of community…[and] engages a commitment to community well-being and expands the concept of family kinship" (Italics in original, p. 77). This was especially evident when Mary said, "I can't imagine myself trying to raise three boys on a minimum wage job… .Elizabeth only makes $8 an hour and it's the most she's ever made." Additionally, all three allies' recognition of Elizabeth's work ethic in her battle to get ahead, as well as her goal of owning her own house, affirmed her aspirational capital, or "the ability to hold onto hope in the face of structured inequality and often without the means to make such dreams a reality" (Yosso, 2005, p. 77).

The Johnson's circle also recognized and validated non-dominant community cultural wealth. Thomas' belief that Mike "is so honest and tries really hard" and that both Mike and Amy "work really hard" recognized the Johnson's aspirational capital: they worked and tried hard in the hopes of creating a better life, despite the structural barriers they faced. Lori's statement that Amy "had signed up to take some college classes this fall. She doesn't want to be a C-N-A forever" specifically recognized and confirmed Amy's aspirational capital. Both Erin and Lori commented on Amy's familial capital. Lori noticed Elizabeth "wasn't sleeping…[was] working nights and getting up early. Basically, she was managing a family of four kids and a dog on no sleep" and Erin's observed Amy resisted changing jobs in part because "she really wants to be with her kids," to which Lori agreed in her remark that Amy wanted to make sure "that when the kids came home someone was there." Lori demonstrated a particularly deep recognition of this, reflected in her comment "My husband and I had

small children and we both worked, so I appreciate trying to find that delicate balance."

Thus both Elizabeth and the Johnson's allies' comments simultaneously demonstrated

awareness and understanding of structural barriers as well as valued non-dominant cultural

capital, or community cultural wealth.

Liberatory Capital

By recognizing Elizabeth, Amy, and Mike's structural barriers and validating their

non-dominant cultural capital, Richard, Mary, Andrew, Lori, Erin, and Thomas represented

the useful merging of dominant and non-dominant cultural capital. As allies, they already

possessed the dominant social and cultural capital that came with being middle-class. All

were employed professionals and lived comfortable and financially secure middle or upper

class lives. Now, however, their understandings of the structure of our economic system and

recognition of the undervalued skills and knowledge people in living poverty posses formed

a new form of capital, what I referred to in Chapter 6 as liberatory capital.

Richard's epiphany represented this liberatory capital when he said, "I used to think if

you work harder you could overcome anything. I now know better" and "I have gained so

much from the experience…It has benefited me personally to know…the issues of poverty

and [that] those who live on the margins with no resources in many cases work harder than

those who make the resources." This capital is liberatory because reliance only on dominant

forms of capital reproduces existing structures, while reliance on only non-dominant forms of

capital fosters the creation of oppositional cultural models that ultimately perpetuate

oppression (Lundy, 2003; Ogbu, 1987; Willis, 1977). Furthermore, complete overemphasis

on non-dominant forms of capital ignores the reality that "dominant cultural capital facilitates

success within mainstream institutions and organizations" (Carter, 2003, p. 139).

Elizabeth and the Johnson's allies were not the only ones, however, who exhibited this liberatory capital. Elizabeth, Mike, and Amy's new social and dominant cultural capital acquired through their allies, combined with their own non-dominant capital, and represented liberatory capital as well. Possessing liberatory capital, then, can potentially both liberate the ally from the middle-class lens, or dominant discourse, in which they view the world, and simultaneously potentially liberate the marginalized by learning the skills and making the connections necessary to leave poverty. As Carter (2003) puts it, "Those individuals who choose the balancing act of maintaining both dominant and non-dominant capital are likely to acquire valued status positions within both their lower status community and the wider society" (p. 139).

As I outlined in Chapter 6, liberatory capital represents the healthy tension created between adopting dominant cultural and social capital and simultaneously recognizing structural barriers and non-dominant forms of capital. The tension is healthy when we can find within it a liminal space that welcomes the possibility of liberatory understandings. In Chapter 6, I identified the presence of this liminal space in the weekly meeting and suggested that liberatory capital represented a hybridized version of merged dominant and non-dominant capital. In this hybridized, liminal space, participants and allies may be transformed, or in the words of Vincent and Warren (2001), "the relationship between professional and non-professional may succeed in opening up spaces in which dominant understandings can be disrupted, thereby producing political counter-hegemony" (p. 41).

These findings demonstrate that liberatory capital was created both as a community during the weekly meetings and outside them in one-on-one interactions between allies and participants. This liberatory capital contributed to the construction of what McLaren and

Farahmandpur (2005) call a "revolutionary working class pedagogy" (p. 182). Revolutionary working class pedagogy,

> Seeks to transgress the boundaries that set high culture apart from popular culture and that privilege the former over the latter…[and] giving them an opportunity to interrogate theoretically forms of both high culture and popular culture to that they can analyze, articulate, express, and construct meaning from multiple positionalities located in their lived experiences. (p. 183)

In the case of COS, however, both the working class *and* middle-class collaborate to "control the means of production of their symbolic economies" (p. 182).

Thus, instead of being an unhealthy tension, where oppressive dominant discourses were imposed on participants regardless of their non-dominant capital, this liminal space represented the potential for liberation within the specific field of ally/participant interactions. My analysis of the meetings, however, also problematized the moments in which the lack of tension subsequently eliminated the possibility of creating liberatory capital and instead led to a perpetuation of the dominant discourse.

<div style="text-align:center">Closing the Liminal Door: Ally and Participant Symbolic Violence</div>

Participants and allies in both circles demonstrated that while negotiating the tension involved in becoming middle-class and simultaneously organizing for structural change they constructed new, liberatory capital. Analyzing the interview data, however, also uncovered the closing of this liminal door. At times the dominant discourse, reflected in various ally comments, threatened to eliminate the tension and instead further marginalize the participant families. An additional note on theory is necessary here, given that not only did many of the

ally comments reflect dominant myths and stereotypes, but some of the participant comments did as well.

Referring to my earlier claims, the language of PRWORA acts as a form of Governmentality in a Foucauldian (1994) sense by not only constructing the popular identity of the poor, but also simultaneously encouraging the poor to view themselves through this constructed lens. Although Foucault's work is especially useful in a macro analysis of the language of PRWORA, other theoretical lenses are useful in uncovering similar phenomena on an interpersonal level. In many studies of this nature, where marginalized groups are not only oppressed by dominant groups but perpetuate their own marginalization and engage in victim blaming, this phenomenon is explained by employing Gramsci's (1971) notion of hegemony (Broughton, 2003; Weiss & Fine, 2004; Fraser, 1990; Jakubowski & Burman, 2003). Hegemony is a complicated and multi-faceted concept, described by Schubert (2002) as,

> A situation in which a provisional alliance of certain groups can exert a 'total social authority' over other subordinate groups, not simply by coercion or by the direct imposition of ruling ideas, but by 'winning and shaping consent' so that the power of the dominant classes appears to be both legitimate and natural. (p. 1092)

Hegemony has been appropriated, employed, and so often misemployed that scholars have made efforts to re-introduce us to Gramsci's original theorizations (Fischman & McLaren, 2005; Schubert, 2002). Instead of a re-introduction of Gramsci here, as I have attempted to do with Bourdieu and social capital, I will further develop a more useful analysis I began in Chapter 6 utilizing symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 1996, 2001; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). Here I agree with Moi (1991) that,

Where Gramsci will give us a general theory of the imposition of hegemony,

Bourdieu will show exactly *how* one can analyze teachers' comments on student

papers, rules for examinations and students' choices of different subjects in order to

trace specific and practical construction and implementation of a hegemonic

ideology. (Italics in original, p. 1019)

Furthermore, Schubert (2002) claims that symbolic violence is more useful because,

unlike hegemony, it takes into consideration "the strategizing practices of members not only

of dominant groups but of those in subordinated groups as well" (p. 1092). Bourdieu (2001),

therefore, describes symbolic violence as a situation where "The dominated apply categories

constructed from the point of view of the dominant to the relations of domination, thus

making them appear as natural. This can lead to a kind of systematic self-depreciation, even

self-denigration" (p. 35). Subsequently dominant social classes, through their habitus,

mobilize their social, cultural, and economic capital to create the objective structures of

domination. The dominated, through their own internalized habitus, subsequently

misrecognize their position within these objective structures. As a result,

The effect of symbolic domination is exerted not in the pure logic of knowing

consciousness but through the schemes of perception, appreciation and action that are

constitutive of habitus and which, below the level of the decisions of consciousness

and the controls of the will, set up a cognitive relationship that is profoundly obscure

to itself. (p. 37)

Finally, I rely on symbolic violence because Gramsci (1971) theorized hegemony as

often, if not always, occurring through a conscious effort by dominant groups to dominate.

Brantlinger (2003) employed a theory of hegemony in this manner while analyzing ways the

middle-class parents negotiate and rationalize school advantage for their children and found that "dominant classes actively pursue advantage and that social class formation depends on the discursive and actual development of subordinates" (p. 3). I agree that dominant social classes actively pursue advantages, but my analysis of the individual circle interviews demonstrates that neither the allies nor the participants consciously attempted to perpetuate or reproduce marginalizing stereotypes. Therefore, because "[Symbolic] violence can occur even if it is not intended and even if it is not realized… a conceptual shift from hegemonic practices to symbolic violence will help us see such things" (Schubert, 2002, p. 1095).

Analyzing the interview data uncovered examples where ally comments, instead of providing social support, transferring social and cultural capital, or creating liberatory capital, ignored structural barriers and reflected oppressive and marginalizing dominant stereotypes of the poor. For example, although allies in both circles recognized some of the structural barriers Elizabeth and the Johnson's faced, they attributed the inability to leave poverty in part to personal faults, like fear. When asked why Elizabeth had not left poverty, Andrew cited her "lack of initiative" and "fear of the unknown." Mary agreed, reflected in her comments "I've shown her where there are classes online and tried to help her computer skills… but she won't. She doesn't have the motivation to improve herself…. Sometimes it's like dealing with a teenager" and "I like her and think she works very hard, but I can't get her to step into something new she hasn't done before." Richard stated similar feelings, when he said "I think the opportunities are there for her and she's not optimizing them in all cases… She's reluctant to move forward and look for other opportunities."

Amy's allies expressed analogous views. They unanimously agreed both that Amy's work situation played significant factor keeping Amy and Mike in poverty and that fear

prevented her from making a change. "I tried to expose her to some other work environments," Lori explained, "With normal hours and benefits…but she resisted. I'm not sure whether it was fear or not wanting to commit to full-time hours… .I don't know if it's the psychological fear of success or of going into a completely different work environment."

Although not intentional, Richard, Andrew, Mary, and Lori's comments made personal failings the cause of Amy and Elizabeth's reluctance to change jobs. Elizabeth, however, resisted finding different employment for three reasons: she enjoyed her job, needed the overnight hours to be home during the day for her youngest son, and lacked the skills necessary to earn higher wages. Elizabeth affirmed this in her statements "I love my job because I can help the women… .I'm kind of like a role model" and "I just can't afford to switch jobs now… .I work the graveyard shift so I can take care of my kids during the day." Rather than lacking initiative, Elizabeth wanted to be a good mother. Caring for children also influenced Amy's work decisions, exemplified in her comment "Working for a pool allows to take care of the kids during the day and go to their school if I need to. That way we don't have childcare to pay for."

Instead of lacking initiative, fearing the unknown, or not wanting regular hours, Elizabeth and Amy resisted changing jobs because they were trying to balance the demands of work and mothering while living in poverty. Amy and Elizabeth's desires were not uncommon, as McCormack (2005) contends that, "According to the dominant discourse, welfare mothers who turn down jobs do so because they are lazy, lack willpower, and would prefer to be on the dole…[but] Rather than shun work, these women…want to fulfill the role of the good mother" (668).

In fact, by not changing jobs Amy and Elizabeth simultaneously challenged the dominant discourse and perpetuated it. As McCormack (2005) also describes in her study of reproduction and resistance among mothers collecting welfare, "To constitute themselves as good mothers, women relied on a variety of discursive strategies that often simultaneously challenged the dominant discursive practices and accommodated them" (p. 666). They do this by "putting children first, spending time with their children, providing for their children, keeping their children out of trouble, and keeping their children safe" (p. 666). Elizabeth's desire to keep her sons out of trouble supports this theory, especially when she said, "With Jonathan, this is the age he started getting in trouble and I want to be home so I can crack the whip. I've learned from my past mistakes." Mary referred to this issue of Elizabeth and her sons, particularly related to money, and stated, "Sometimes she doesn't make wise choices as far as spending her money. For example, her boys are constantly her asking for money and she gives it to them." We can effectively contexualize this comment by linking it to Elizabeth's observation that her son Roger "tries to pretend like he's rich for his friends…he wants to have the things his friends have." In fact, instead of making poor choices with her money, Elizabeth did what many single mothers living in poverty do, she

> Made every effort to provide [her] children with some of the markers of a middle-class upbringing, despite the obvious lack of money and access to resources…[because] Putting [her] children first required spending money on them first, preserving their image and ego before satisfying one's own. (McCormack, 2005, p. 670)

Thus, to be the mothers society expected them to be, and they aspired to be, they resisted seeking better paying jobs that may have provided them with more financial security (See also Mink, 1998a).

Thomas and Erin's comments about Amy and Mike's parenting crossed the line between transferring dominant cultural capital for the purposes of empowerment and instead reflect the imposition of oppressive stereotypes. Erin's frustration with the Johnson children's lack of discipline and unacceptable public behavior demonstrated this. Thomas' answered with, "What the heck do you expect, you've seen the girls, they don't know any better. Just thinking that these kids are going to be like all the other kids you've been around, with good parents and such, just isn't the case." Thomas may have avoided directly calling Mike and Amy bad parents, but his comment nonetheless expressed this belief. Perhaps Mike and Amy's children lacked discipline and awareness that their actions had consequences, but Thomas and Erin's approach was not from a position of solidarity, but of superiority. Children living in poverty do not always lack discipline or the ability to understand consequences; children in all social classes exhibit these characteristics.

Erin's approach to helping Amy, however, reflected the symbolic violence of the dominant view that these qualities perpetuate poverty. "They need to know that some choices are good and some are not," Erin said. "If you teach children early to make the better choice, then they'll realize they are going to have a better life and they are going to have a better chance… .We've got to get this corrected for the next generation." Therefore, making good choices and understanding consequences will give one a better life, regardless of the structural barriers they might face. This was painfully evident when Erin said, "You have to be prepared for the consequences of poor choices. If participant families are not

making progress, there has to be a consequence. You have to change the behavior!"

Referring to her ability to use money to solve the Johnson's financial problems, Erin stated,

"I could correct their problems. But, it's not going to make them better people and it's not

going to make their children better people." The obvious implication: whether or not the

Johnson's are good people in part depended on their ability to make good decisions and leave

poverty. Although Thomas and Erin's comments describing Amy's parenting were meant to

be helpful, they were instead symbolically violent: they reflected both the imposition of

dominant definitions of appropriate parenting and the dismissal of structural barriers.

Framing the Johnson's situation as a result of poor choices, while ignoring other factors

beyond their control, has been part of the dominant discourse since the 1980s (Solinger,

1998). Participants in COS were particularly vulnerable to this marginalizing discourse, as

they were required by the program to spend time with their allies. Given this time outside of

the weekly meeting lacked structure and supervision by community organizers, great

potential for asymmetrical power relations existed.

Erin and Thomas' comments took this symbolic violence even a step further and

perpetuated the medicalization of welfare (Schram, 2000). This occurred when Thomas

referred to the Johnson's as the perfect family because "They really don't have any of the

mental health problems that would prevent an ally from working with them," and Erin

remarked, "If you always dig them out you are enabling them. It's just like an alcoholic. I

just don't think enabling should be there." These comments reflected the medicalization of

the poor because they "de-emphasize the allocation of income and emphasize the treatment

of poverty in terms of correcting personal problems and monitoring behavior" (Schram, p.

60). Symbolic violence such as this, enacted by the allies, is "an effective way to locate the

problems of low-income families in their behaviors rather than in the broader political economy"(p. 60). Even though this marginalization may not have been intentional, comments equating poverty to alcoholism or mental illness reflected the stereotypes upon which PRWORA was enacted.

Dominant stereotypes of the poor have become so pervasive that many people living in poverty have themselves internalized the dominant discourse. Amy, Mike, and Elizabeth, for example, each made critical and disparaging comments about other families living in poverty. Their reflections represented the "self-denigration and self-depreciation" of symbolic violence when they attributed other people's poverty to personal failings (Bourdieu, 2001, p. 35). For example, despite evidence that proves otherwise, one common stereotype in the dominant discourse is that women living in poverty continue to have children even if they cannot take care of them (Mink, 1998c; Seccombe, James, & Walters, 1998). Elizabeth's comment poignantly reflected this symbolic violence when she said, "If you're going to have a bunch of kids you need to learn how to feed them. Some people come to the meetings just for free food and childcare… .Sometimes you have to work for things in life." Although Elizabeth was a single mother who at one time received subsidies, she had no sympathy for other single mothers in similar situations.

Mike and Amy each made similar remarks, although they specifically referred to work. Amy observed that, "I think some people say, 'I have a low end job, and I'm better off collecting government assistance.' They're taking advantage of the system and it frustrates the people like us who are actually working" and Mike agreed, "It frustrates me when you see people out there who slack and want a handout from the government… .There are too many people who abuse the system… .What we get is what we work for, and if we don't

work we don't get it." Elizabeth, Mike, and Amy's remarks reflected their perception that other families in the program abused the welfare system and did not work, which perpetuate many of the myths upon which PRWORA rests. Only twelve of the original twenty-five families, however, collected welfare subsidies, and the vast majority who did engaged in at least twenty hours of work per week (COS E-Bulletin, March 3, 2005). Ethnographic research suggests this phenomenon, where families living in poverty attribute other people's poverty to "laziness, personal shortcomings, or other inadequacies," is "a coping mechanism for dealing with [the] stigma…[thereby] disassociating oneself from others" (Seccombe, James, & Walters, 1998, p.861). Instead of a coping mechanism, however, the participant comments are similar to those found by Seccombe, James, & Walters (1998), who contend

Our respondents fail to see the shared political nature of their problems and, instead, internalize them. Poverty is relegated to the realm of the personal problem, rather than the social problem… .Class conflict is averted because they have internalized the commonsense ideology that a need for welfare represents a personal inadequacy, rather than a weakness or contradiction within the social structure. (p. 862)

The commonsense ideology they refer to is the result of the dominant discourse's symbolic violence. Participants unwittingly perpetuated marginalizing stereotypes despite the fact that their own lived experiences contradicted them. I use "unwittingly" because these are excellent examples of the participant's habitus operating "below the level of the decisions of consciousness and the controls of the will, set[ting] up a cognitive relationship that is profoundly obscure to itself" (Bourdieu, 2001, p. 37). There is no evidence to suggest that Elizabeth and the Johnson's exhibited this symbolic violence only after they became involved in the program. The symbolic violence enacted both during the meetings and

outside them by their allies, however, helped perpetuate symbolic violence rather than eliminate it.

Conclusions

My analysis of the two individual circles demonstrates that participant/ally interactions outside of the weekly meetings both achieved and subverted the community education goals of COS. The relationships that formed between allies and participants created deep, meaningful friendships that made formulating new understandings possible. Reciprocal relationships let the lived experiences of Elizabeth, Mike, and Amy act as liberating community education. By speaking back to dominant assumptions of the poor, teaching their allies that poverty persisted for them despite their hard work, self-reliance, personal responsibility, or marital status, they showed their allies first-hand how welfare reform rested on false assumptions. These relationships also reflected the WPSS liberal goals, as allies transferred useful dominant social and cultural capital to participants in the hopes that they would become middle-class. Finally, when allies learned of participant's structural barriers and validated the non-dominant cultural capital they possessed, a liminal space emerged and liberatory capital formed to create the possibility of a shared or collective class-consciousness (McLaren & Farahmandpur, 2005).

Liberatory capital has limitations, however, as the liminal space does not guarantee action to eliminate institutional barriers (Anthias, 2001; Werbner, 2001). There is no guarantee that a middle-class ally, or participant, who recognizes both dominant and non-dominant forms of capital, would be moved to take action. Both Thomas as Erin, for example, made statements that hinted at a greater understanding of structural barriers within seconds of making marginalizing and stereotypic comments. Furthermore, in the field of the

weekly meeting, community organizers often overemphasized or constructed participant's personal deficits in ways that ignored structural barriers and in turn closed the liminal door. Outside the weekly meeting, in the field of relationships between allies and participants, liberatory capital was also diminished as symbolic violence emerged. Symbolic violence perpetuated by both participants and allies eliminated the tension between becoming middle-class and recognizing both structural barriers and non-dominant forms of capital. No tension equaled the absence of a liminal space. What caused this to occur in ally/participant interactions?

Perhaps a brief evaluation of the diminishing tension could effectively be accomplished by contrasting the two circles. Through an analysis of each circle interview data I identified a number of common themes. For example, both circle participants spoke back to the dominant discourse embedded in PRWORA and demonstrated how the ally/participant relationships reduced social isolation, transferred social and cultural capital, and created a space for liberatory capital. Despite these similarities, however, an additional theme emerged: the two circles functioned quite differently. Here I use the word "functionality" to describe the ways in which the allies interacted with the participants as well as with each other in manners desired by the principles of COS.

Elizabeth's circle functioned the way the program intended. Each of her allies operated within the clearly defined roles established by the program: Mary as the community-building ally, Richard as the academic ally, and Andrew as the financial ally. Membership in her circle was consistent: all three allies remained active participants throughout her involvement in the program. At least one of Elizabeth's allies, and usually two, attended every weekly meeting for nearly three years. Regular attendance at weekly

meetings helped keep Elizabeth's allies informed of her progress and connected to her plans of action. This allowed them to coordinate their efforts and to learn from each other, reflected in fewer instances of symbolic violence among Elizabeth's allies.

By contrast, it may not even be appropriate to name Erin, Lori, and Thomas as Amy and Mike's allies. Thomas did not consider himself the Johnson's ally, rather as Mike's ally. Similarly, Lori and Erin worked exclusively with Amy. Consequently, they did not have specific, clearly identified roles. Thomas explained, "I always felt my role was as more of a mentor, especially to Mike," although he primarily helped Mike with budgeting. Erin explained her understanding that allies could "all can work with the family across the board," although she considered herself a community-building ally. Lori, felt that

> Because of my knowledge of the many non-profits in town, the thing I really felt I offered would be in trying to help the family link with existing resources in the community. But in the end they needed an academic ally, so I focused on being the school-family liaison.

Lori felt best suited to be the community-building ally, but Erin had already apparently filled that role. Contributing to the vagueness of their roles, the Johnson's allies did not coordinate their efforts. Erin commented on this, and referring to the fact that all three allies had only met together with the Johnson's on one occasion, stated, "I really don't think there's been any collaboration in our circle." Furthermore, Lori, Erin, and Thomas rarely attended weekly meetings, and after a year, Mike explained, "With his busy schedule, he [Thomas] had to drop out."

Consequently, Thomas, Erin, and Lori operated in isolation. I believe their isolation prevented them from learning from each other, which, unlike each individual's friendship

with Amy and Mike, limited the depth of the relationship they developed with each other. This ultimately resulted in more instances of symbolic violence. Had they worked together as a circle, perhaps Lori's struggle with imposing her values on the Johnson's might have impacted, something like a "teachable moment," Thomas and Erin. For example, Thomas and Erin's comments about mental health and poor parenting demonstrated their willingness to impose their beliefs on the Johnson's, while Lori felt,

> My value system may not be their value system. Is it really up to me to say 'that's a stupid way to spend money. Why are you paying a monthly fee to rent a rickety old couch? I didn't know if it was my role to say that.

The interview data illuminated the creation of liberatory capital in the Johnson's circle, but its effects were limited. Paradoxically, a liminal space existed during the weekly meeting in large part because the meeting provided a structured opportunity for it. An entire meeting, prior to the ACHIEVE Program taking over management, was devoted to identifying and organizing to eliminate structural barriers. Additionally, during the weekly meetings both community organizers and an ACHIEVE Case Manager helped facilitate ally/participant interactions. Conversely, the interactions outside of the meetings lacked the structure necessary to consciously recognize, and validate, structural barriers and non-dominant cultural capital. Not functioning as a circle and instead as individuals compounded this lack of structure in the Johnson's circle, diminished the learning potential, and instead the assumption was often made that Mike and Amy's "values" needed to change.

Ineffective collaboration with the WPSS also contributed to the lack of structure in the Johnson's circle. Because Elizabeth's two sons were teenagers and did not have significant academic or behavioral concerns, in addition to her adeptness at navigating the

social service system, school representatives did not play a significant role in her circle.

Conversely, the Johnson's four children were younger and had more academic and

behavioral concerns. Lori's comment, referring to the ACHIEVE Case Manager Assigned to

COS, Carrie Thomas, demonstrated a lack of school support when she said,

> I don't think the changes from the original COS liaison to ACHIEVE was as clear as
>
> it could have been. I don't think our roles were clearly defined, and I don't think that
>
> Carrie knew what we could be offering. Carrie didn't know when she should and
>
> shouldn't call on us. So, I think role clarification was a problem between parents,
>
> allies, and case managers.

The fact that Lori, who often took on the role of academic ally, acted surprised at hearing the

Johnson children were struggling in school demonstrated a breakdown in the school-

community partnership. Lori continued,

> I felt like the few we would have team meetings with the ACHIEVE worker, allies,
>
> and Sharon there were some things that would come up behavior-wise or school-work
>
> wise that we didn't know about.

Another factor may have contributed to the frequency of symbolic violence enacted

by both allies and participants. When the ACHIEVE Program, and the public school system,

took over the management of COS in the fall of 2005, they relied heavily on the work of

Ruby Payne (2005) to train allies and inform their understandings of poverty. Payne's work

supports the theory that a culture of poverty does indeed exist and that poor children develop

differently from their middle-class peers both cognitively and socially (Payne, 2005). One of

Thomas' final comments illuminated his belief in a culture of poverty when he said, "In this

program you could be dealing with families who have been in poverty forever…how is that going to work real well with a mentor who may not understand the culture very well?"

The symbolic violence of the allies and participants perpetuated the dominant discourse by affirming the false notions that individuals can only blame themselves for their poverty. In preparation for the conclusion to this study, a return to the culture of poverty theory is necessary to elucidate what was perhaps the most influential moment in the history of COS. In the summer of 2005, the ACHIEVE Program, facilitated by the public school system, took over management of COS. The ACHIEVE Program and the public school system, as I described in Chapter 4, represented a liberal approach to community education: they sought to help children and families become middle-class in order to be more successful in mainstream society. As long as COS and ACHIEVE acted as partners in this endeavor at community education, a healthy tension and potential liminal space existed.

When the ACHIEVE Program took over sole management of COS, however, what happened to the potential for liberatory capital? The superintendent of the WPSS, the director of the ACHIEVE Program, and the ACHIEVE Case Manager assigned to COS were trained in the work of Ruby Payne (2005) and supported the belief in the existence of a culture of poverty. Once ACHIEVE took over management of COS, current and new allies were trained using Payne's *A Framework for Understanding Poverty*, and the final weekly meeting once dedicated to structural barriers was eliminated. In order to understand the impact of a culture of poverty approach on the liberating community education goals of COS, the conclusion to this study will problematize the impact of Ruby Payne on liberating community education partnerships.

Conclusion

Cause for Concern, Cause for Hope

Circles of Support (COS) and the Walden Public School System's (WPSS) partnership and collaboration represented a fascinating and relevant approach to community education. The weekly meetings and individual interactions between allies, participants, community organizers, and WPSS representatives reflected the skillful negotiation of liberating and liberal community education goals. In both the weekly meeting and individual circle analyses, I contend that efforts made to help low-income children and their parents acquire skills and useful social networks reflected the WPSS-initiated goals of liberal community education. This occurred specifically in two sets of interactions: during the educational portion of the weekly meeting when participants learned practical budgeting, community-building, academic, or job-related skills, and outside the meetings when allies invested time and effort into transferring dominant social and cultural capital to participant families. Concurrently, liberating goals, reflected in COS' stated mission, were fostered during the Big View or system's change meetings and within individual circles when participants defied the dominant discourse, demonstrated the structural barriers they faced, asserted their non-dominant capital, and collaborated with their allies for structural change.

Although the tension that exists between dominant perceptions of the poor and the actual lived experiences of low income families is ignored by legislators, the mainstream media, and I would contend the majority of Americans, that tension was covertly recognized and navigated by all those involved in COS. I believe the presence of this tension prevented COS from being both ignored as merely a radical threat to institutional structures or just another oppressive and marginalizing welfare-to-work program (Sandlin, 2003). Instead of

an unhealthy tension, which of course can occur when someone recognizes their lived experiences contradict what society says about them but is not empowered to do anything about it, COS negotiated this tension productively. Within this tension, a liminal space existed where new identities and collective class awareness's could be created.

For COS, however, the liberating possibilities were severely threatened when the WPSS assumed both fiscal and operational management of COS. I consider this a threat because upon the change in management the two organizations no longer represented a collaboration: the WPSS now paid for and managed the entire program. With the WPSS and the ACHIEVE Program operating the program, COS' founding liberating goals were de-emphasized in favor of the liberal goal of helping low-income children and families become middle-class. This de-emphasis was reflected in the introduction and reliance on the work of Ruby Payne (2005). In what follows, therefore, I provide a warning to school administrators, teachers, social workers, community organizers, and even pre-service teacher educators as to the dangers of utilizing Ruby Payne if any liberating community education is to occur.

Aha!? Oh No! A Manifesto Against a Framework for Understanding Poverty

Richard, one of Circles of Supports most dedicated allies, asked with frustration evident in his voice, "I feel overwhelmed by the complexity of the struggle our participant family is facing, and honestly, I don't know how to be helpful. Do you have any advice on how I can learn more about poverty?" Caroline Johnson, the Program Coordinator for all of the WPSS Learning Supports, which included the ACHIEVE Program, replied, "You should read Ruby Payne's research on the poor, especially her book *A Framework for Understanding Poverty*. She does a great job explaining the culture and mindsets of poverty." Hearing Caroline suggest allies read Ruby Payne's work gave me a sick feeling in

my stomach. Instead of helping allies understand the complexity and structural nature of

social class inequality in America, promoting Ruby Payne's work supports static,

essentialized notions of a culture of poverty while advocating strategies to helping poor

children overcome the cognitive, social, and emotional deficits she contends are produced by

poverty (Gorski, 2006: Osei-Kofi, 2005).

The above dialogue took place on July 26th, 2005, during one of COS' weekly

meetings. Actually a focus group for forty-five COS allies, the meeting was facilitated by

Caroline Johnson and Maggie Stewart, Director of Training and Development for Move the

Mountain Leadership Center (MTM), an organization that provided technical support to

COS. During this focus group, Caroline announced that COS would now be administered by

the WPSS, with the ACHIEVE Program continuing to provide direct support to participant

families. From the inception of COS to July 2005, the ACHIEVE Program, a grant funded

program under the broad umbrella for programs operated by the WPSS to provide learning

supports, had served to represent the public school system and link COS families with formal

and informal human services. Because the WPSS had recently assumed fiscal management

of COS, this focus group served as an opportunity for Caroline to gather data on why allies

initially became involved in COS, what challenges and successes they had experienced

during their involvement, if they felt as though they had enough support, and what the WPSS

could do to improve the program.

I first became aware of Ruby Payne in the fall of 2004; my life-partner Andrea, a

school social worker for a local education agency, asked me if I planned on attending the

Ruby Payne training being offered to local public school teachers, social workers, and school

administrators. "Who is Ruby Payne?" I asked. "Apparently she's an expert on helping

schools improve the performance of students living in poverty. I though for sure you'd know of her," Andrea replied. Andrea knew I had spent the previous year, as part of my doctoral program of study, obsessively immersing myself in any and all literature I could find that interrogated the issue of poverty in the United States. I had not come across Ruby Payne, not even in a footnote. Initially I thought there had to be a gaping hole in my knowledge and understanding of the literature on welfare reform, poverty, and its impact on schooling. There had to be: I was oblivious to the current expert on understanding poverty. My feeling of paranoia intensified as I read the cover of her seminal book, *A Framework for Understanding Poverty*: *"The Leading U.S. Expert on the Mindsets of Poverty, Middle-class, and Wealth."*

Subsequently, I spent the next year immersing myself in the work of Ruby Payne. In that year I made a number of interesting discoveries: dozens of schools across the state had actually written Ruby Payne training sessions into their School Improvement Plans, as had the State Department of Education itself. I also learned something else: All ACHIEVE Case Managers and WPSS employees received training in Ruby Payne's framework. The understandings I gained from the manners in which Ruby Payne advocates helping the poor were what caused the sick feeling in my stomach when I heard Caroline recommend her books to COS' allies.

The first section of this conclusion is a manifesto dedicated to proclaiming the dangers of utilizing Ruby Payne's (2005) work in community educational settings. Given that her aha! Process Inc. is a multi-million dollar corporation that trains hundreds of school districts each year to operate within her framework, an examination of its impact in an actual educational setting is long overdue. I do not contend, however, that Ruby Payne's work

invented the culture of poverty approach or that her work directly eliminated COS' overt critique of the structural barriers to eliminating poverty. Instead, I contend that using her work to train middle-class allies reinforced the dominant discourse and obscured the ways in which our socio-politico-economic system reproduces the existing class structure. Furthermore, the work of Ruby Payne is reflective of the broader goals of liberal community education models, which emphasize working within current institutions to help marginalized communities (Brookfield, 1985, 2005).

In the first sub-section of this chapter, I describe the phenomenon of Ruby Payne. Through staff development trainings, teacher workbooks, manuals, and numerous books on poverty, her aha! Process Inc. has gained national popularity and become a multi-million dollar enterprise. Following a brief description of Ruby Payne and her work, in the second sub-section I present a thoughtful critique of the assumptions upon which her work rests and the potential for perpetuating false stereotypes and essentialized understandings of the poor. The third sub-section describes ways in which Ruby Payne's "framework for understanding poverty" influenced COS and ultimately led to the elimination of most structural critique within the program. Ending this manifesto, I suggest that a turn to cultural studies, instead of Ruby Payne, would be more effective in advancing the goals of liberating community education.

Understanding Ruby Payne

The material presented in *A Framework for Understanding Poverty* (2005) rests on a certain set of assumptions. These include the assertions that "an individual brings with him/her the hidden rules of the class in which he/she was raised" and "the two things that help one move out of poverty are education and relationships" (p. 3). Payne claims poverty

is also about a lack of resources, and she defines poverty as "the extent to which an individual does without resources" (p. 7). These resources include financial, emotional, mental, spiritual, physical, support systems, relationships/role models, and most importantly the knowledge of hidden rules. The hidden rules that govern schools, according to Payne, are middle-class rules. She contends children living in poverty display culturally specific registers of language, discourse patterns, and story structures that prevent them from succeeding in schools operating under middle-class rules. Children living in poverty, therefore, embody a culture that is distinct from the middle and upper class. This culture is unique to poverty, and it governs all aspects of life from role models, emotional resources, support systems and discipline in the family, cognitive ability, and educational achievement (Payne, 2005, p. 63-86).

In light of these assumptions, Payne claims schools must take special action to help poor students succeed. Although, she writes, "being in poverty is rarely about a lack of intelligence or ability," she also contends that "many individuals stay in poverty because they don't know there is a choice—and if they do know that, they have no one to teach them hidden rules" (Payne, 2005, p. 62). If teachers understand the culture of poverty poor students bring to school and commit themselves to teaching the hidden rules of the middle-class, poor students just might escape poverty. With this in mind, Payne proposes specific strategies and approaches to help poor students succeed that hinge on the belief that they have distinctly disadvantaged cognitive abilities (p. 87).

Critique

The trouble with Ruby Payne's framework is two-fold: she supports the stereotype that there is a tangible culture of poverty preventing the poor from succeeding, and she

ignores any structural or institutional barriers that prevent people from leaving poverty.

Related to the first, Payne utilizes essentializing and homogenizing language to create a

demeaning caricature of the poor. Poor people, according to Payne, are especially adept at

knowing "how to get someone out of jail, physically fight, how to get a gun, and how to use a

knife as scissors" (p. 38). Her chapter titled "Hidden Rules of Poverty" asserts that the poor

value people as possessions, do not manage money well by choosing entertainment over

security, and possess a culture of poverty that prevents them from "moving upward in a

career" (p. 44). Payne goes on to describe generational poverty by asserting that the poor

feel "society owes one a living," do not consider the future ramifications of their actions, are

promiscuous, and that men in generational poverty typically "have two social outlets: bars

and work" (p. 59).

Instead of validating the community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) that low-income

families possess, or recognizing that the poor "tend to amplify and reiterate American

mainstream values such as the importance of hard work, personal responsibility, and a dislike

of the welfare system" (Rank, 2001, p. 887), Payne lays the blame for poverty squarely on

the shoulders of those marginalized by it, claiming poor students just do not know "the rules

of the middle-class" (p. 45). Forty years of empirical investigation has discredited the culture

of poverty argument, although you wouldn't know it from reading Payne (see Wilson, 1987,

1996; Anderson, 1990, 1999; Duncan, 1984; Goodwin, 1972, 1983; Rank, 1994; Seccombe,

1999; Solinger, 1998).

Whereas Bourdieu (1996) uncovers the ways elite social classes reproduce their class

positions by arbitrarily defining culture and subsequently ensuring their position of power,

Payne makes no mention of the manners in which social inequality is the product of

structural failings or injustice. In fact, Payne's work would make a perfect example to prove Bourdieu's argument on social reproduction. Lisa Delpit (1992) also advocates learning the rules of the middle-class, but does not ignore systemic injustices. Delpit (1992) encourages educators to teach marginalized students

> The "superficial features" of Dominant Discourses… and if placed in proper context, acquiring those skills need not be "bowing before the master." Rather, the acquisition can provide a way both to turn the sorting system on its head and to make available one more voice for resisting and reshaping an oppressive system. (p. 301-302)

Although Delpit encourages educators to teach students how to succeed in the middle-class, two critically relevant theme in her work, absent from Payne's corpus, are the recognition that our institutions, especially schools, reproduce classism as well as the call for "resisting and reshaping an oppressive system" (p. 302). Payne's emphasis on describing, or constructing, the culture of poverty, supported by her numerous references to the work of Oscar Lewis (1966), however, ignores the structural barriers that families in poverty face. According to Gorski (2006), Payne's problem is that,

> The root of her framework—that poverty persists because people in poverty don't know the rules of the middle-class—exemplifies deficit thinking by suggesting that the best way to address class and poverty in schools is to facilitate change in poor students while ignoring the structural inequities of schools. (p. 8)

Consequently, not only do Payne's books and workshops "present a superficial and insulting picture of children and families in poverty," Payne's "facile answers allow teachers and administrators to place the blame for low-income children's lack of academic success entirely outside the schools" (Bohn, 2006, p. 3). Focusing solely on changing children

"effectively prevents social change… It makes us believe that we can reduce the problem of poverty without needing to make any changes in society or our own lives" (p. 3).

Payne and COS

Ruby Payne did not invent the culture of poverty argument, nor was she responsible for the middle-class values COS' allies brought with them to the program. The belief in a culture of poverty has shaped the dominant discourse and influenced welfare policies for more than forty years (Katz 1995). Many of COS' allies, representative of middle-class America, joined the program believing in these stereotypes and exaggerated caricatures. As Caroline Johnson said, "During the focus group we heard a lot of real judgmental comments from allies that were really them expressing their middle-class values."

The goal of this section is to demonstrate that while Payne did not invent the culture of poverty, relying on her work to train ACHIEVE Case Managers, community organizers, and middle-class allies perpetuated the dominant discourse and obscured the structural barriers families in COS faced when leaving poverty. Upon learning that the WPSS would take over direct management of COS, I scheduled and conducted interviews with Steve Waterson, the Superintendent of WPSS, Caroline Johnson, who directed the ACHIEVE Program, and Carrie Thomas, the ACHIEVE Case Manager assigned to COS families. The interviews lasted more than one hour and I asked each person to describe the role Ruby Payne played in influencing their views on poverty. After carefully analyzing their narratives, two themes emerged from their reflections: education, not structural change, would solve the problem of poverty, and poor families share a certain mentality that must change in order for them to leave poverty. I have included excerpts from each interview that

exemplify these themes, followed by a separate section analyzing on the real and potential impact of Payne's work on the program.

Finally, I would like to make it clear that I honestly believe these three respondents genuinely cared about helping the participant families leave poverty. Dr. Steve Waterson proposed the WPSS assume management of COS because he believed in the program and felt the program could be more effective. When he left the WPSS in 2006, the new superintendent did not share his commitment to and the program ultimately collapsed. Caroline Johnson had dedicated nearly twenty years to the city's most marginalized children, and I personally witnessed Carrie Thomas advocate for participant families for more than a year. The dominant discourse reflected in their statements is a product of the society we live in, one that is willing to ignore the actual lived experiences of millions of America's most marginalized citizens. Their support of Ruby Payne's prescription-like cure for poverty demonstrated their desire to help low-income families, albeit misguided. Unfortunately, when few propose solutions to the problem of poverty, teachers are more inclined to listen to those who do.

Dr. Steve Waterson

I interviewed Dr. Steve Waterson, Superintendent of the WPSS on April 29th, 2006. After explaining the purpose of the study, where I outlined my desire to describe and analyze the unique partnership represented by COS and the WPSS, I asked Dr. Waterson to describe how this partnership evolved and the role the schools played in helping families leave poverty. I vividly remember the excitement in Dr. Waterson's voice as he explained the significance of the partnership, and his reflections exhibited tremendous personal

commitment and hope that the collaboration would succeed in helping marginalized students succeed in school.

After Dr. Waterson described the roles the ACHIEVE Case Managers initially played in presenting case studies to the original Name Each Child (NEC) group, and then in linking the COS participant families to social services and the schools, I asked him if he was aware of Ruby Payne's work. "I first learned of Ruby Payne a couple of years ago at a Superintendent's conference in Chicago, Illinois," Dr. Waterson recalled. He continued,

> Many superintendents were expressing concerns about accountability through No
>
> Child Left Behind (NCLB) and how we could help our most at-risk students, those
>
> living in poverty, meet proficiency. One superintendent I was talking to mentioned
>
> Ruby Payne and how his school district used her framework to help develop
>
> strategies for helping these students.

After reading her book, *A Framework for Understanding Poverty,* Dr. Waterson recommended it to his school administrators and learning supports coordinators. "How has her work influenced your practices?" I asked. Dr. Waterson explained,

> We, the public school system and NEC, adopted a very clear bias or belief that the
>
> key out of poverty was really an education…quite frankly, we may not be able to
>
> address and overcome every issue their family is dealing with. But, if we can give
>
> families enough help and support so their children can get an education, that's where
>
> we break the cycle of poverty.

Dr. Waterson continued, and explained that the WPSS was committed to the partnership with COS because he knew the only way to improve graduation rates and close the achievement gap was to keep students in school and make sure they received an education. He concluded,

It's not necessarily the school that's causing the achievement gap, or the school that's

causing the child not to learn to read, or the school that's causing the child to drop

out. There are so many other things going on in the family and in that child's life that

we haven't been successful in addressing so they can stay in school and be successful.

Caroline Johnson

Caroline Johnson served as the director of all programs the WPSS defined as

Learning Supports, including the ACHIEVE Program. Upon taking over fiscal management

of COS in the summer of 2005, it too became known as one of the public school system's

learning supports under the direction of Caroline Johnson. ACHIEVE Program Case

Managers operated in thirty-one local elementary, middle, and high schools, and were not

constrained by much of the bureaucracy that is common with most social services.

Reflecting on dozens of interviews with COS participant families, all recommended to the

program by their ACHIEVE Case Managers, this program was truly unique. Participants

consistently praised ACHIEVE Case Managers and spoke of the bond they had created,

while they just as regularly chastised their Department of Human Services (DHS)

caseworkers or Section VIII Housing representatives. Despite my belief that the ACHIEVE

Program served as the glue to connect COS participant families with the public school

system, two significant changes had taken place since the WPSS took over management of

the program: allies were being trained utilizing Ruby Payne's work, and the final meeting of

the month, the systems change meeting, had been eliminated. I hoped interviewing Caroline

Johnson, who served as the WPSS representative in charge of COS, would help me

understand why the changes took place.

Caroline Johnson co-facilitated the ally focus group mentioned in earlier in this chapter, and by the time I sat down to interview her, on October 18, 2005, allies had been encouraged to read Ruby Payne's work and the systems change meeting had been eliminated. After discussing the role the ACHIEVE Program played in COS, which included the case manager's specific functions within the public schools, I asked her to talk about the current direction of the program and the role Ruby Payne's work played in guiding decision making. Caroline explained, "The kids, for us as WPSS, are the priority in terms of goals we want to achieve." As an example, she described a report one of the WPSS career counselors had given based on interviews with unemployed COS participants. She said,

> Realistically, if you look at their skills, and their background, a lot of them had
>
> criminal involvement that prohibited them from seeking some of the kinds of
>
> employment that they might have skills to pursue, what do you do with those folks?

Caroline did not want to give up on the parents, "But their kids, we can certainly have greater hope for their kids. We could give them something better for their lives." Caroline continued,

> I think a piece of this, and this is where Ruby Payne is so helpful, is that it's really
>
> hard for families living in generational poverty to break the mindset. I think Payne
>
> says it takes three generations before you truly break that mindset.

Describing what she believed to be the common feeling for families living in poverty, she said, "If a child does achieve more they may be looked down upon as a traitor, or 'you're too good for us now.' Breaking those kinds of mindsets can be really difficult." If COS could help "the family make movement towards some different thinking processes" and instill in

their children "some different thinking, like it's O.K. for them to do better and go to college," perhaps this generation of children could achieve "self-sufficiency and beyond."

I then asked Caroline, "What is the status of the systems change piece? I noticed there isn't a Big View or systems change meeting anymore." She responded, "One of our aha! moments was that we discovered the meetings were top-down, as if we knew what was best for people. We decided the systems change piece would be more successful if it were driven by participants themselves." The example Caroline gave related to housing, "If we don't have adequate housing, then the families need to bring it to our attention, we'll learn about it from the people who know about it, and then we'll go figure out if we can take action." Instead of community organizers "telling people this is what we're going to work on," she felt "It's more empowering if it bubbles up naturally. You can't force people to have energy and passion for something."

"Do you feel the participants will come forward with the barriers they are facing," I asked. She answered, "I think we already know what the barriers are… .What I heard about those meetings is that a lot of the time it turned into a complaining session… .It was not a very productive use of the time."

Carrie Thomas

Carrie Thomas became the ACHIEVE Case Manager assigned specifically to COS families in October 2005, and our interview took place on June 6, 2006. Prior to the WPSS taking over COS, ACHIEVE Case Managers from Lincoln and Washington Elementary Schools worked both with COS families in addition to their regular caseload of more than twenty families. As the ACHIEVE Case Manager assigned to COS, however, Carrie was able to focus solely on COS families, and over the course of 9 months I saw her periodically

at COS weekly meetings, where she interpreted for Spanish speaking participant families. Her unwavering commitment to COS families impressed me, and because we had met before my questions regarding Ruby Payne and systems change were somewhat more pointed.

"One of my serious concerns with the current direction of the program is the lack of emphasis on systems barriers," I commented, "How do you feel about that?" Carrie answered,

> Systems change is a quirky word that's thrown out at our administrative meetings and people laugh. To be honest with you, it's kind of like "we have to do that systems change crap." It almost seems like a thorn or a pain.

Given systems change was at the core of COS' original philosophy, her response shocked me. I then asked Carrie what she knew about Ruby Payne, and she told me she had read her book *A Framework for Understanding* Poverty. I continued, and described what I saw as a problem when a program like COS, dedicated to eliminating the structural barriers that families face in leaving poverty, became operated by a school system informed by the work of Ruby Payne, that ignores structural barriers while supporting the idea that a static, essentialized, culture of poverty exists. 'Where do you stand on those issues?" I asked.

"I agree with both positions, because there are definitely earned and unearned privileges we are all born into," she began, and continued, "But I do believe there is a culture of poverty. I do believe that families in poverty have a certain set of priorities and norms that govern their thoughts and behaviors."

Carrie then asked me, "What are your thoughts on Ruby Payne?" I proceeded to critique Ruby Payne, describing my disagreement with the culture of poverty argument. I told her I felt most families defied the stereotypes and generalizations that welfare policies

rested on. "But don't you think some of those rules are to hold people accountable?" she replied, and continued,

> I think people are free willed and make choices. It's easy for a convicted felon to come to me who can't get a job and say, "poor me." I think the social service system has created a climate of just handing things to people.

Responding to her comment about choices, I said, "One of my favorite quotations is that we all make choices, but not under the conditions of our own choosing." "Before I took this job I spent a year in Mexico," Carrie retorted, "To me, the people in poverty there weren't used to people giving them things. To be honest, I'm usually 100% on your side, but I do feel like there is a certain mentality with people I work with." Carrie went on,

> I don't think there is a biological gene that makes people poor or rich, but I agree with Ruby Payne that no matter how many resources you give some families it's not going to help. It's not about resources, but it's more their mental state, like a lot of unresolved mental health issues, or they live for the day. I feel like I'm presenting this as an us versus them situation and that's not how I am whatsoever!

> She asked what my solution would be, and I explained how I felt that regardless of how well students do in school it did not change the fact that their parents did not make living wages, an education did not guarantee a job in a globalizing, free market economy, and that often the schools themselves reproduced the existing social structure.

> "Don't you think it's important for kids in poverty to value education?" Carrie questioned. I said, "Absolutely, do you feel the families you work with don't value education?" Carrie thought for a minute, and responded,

I would never say they don't value education, but it's not a priority. I think statistics

would show that kids living in poverty have more truancy. I know there's a lot going

on with the lack of food or mom's getting beat up, but I think those circumstances are

more rare with the families I'm working with. But as I'm hearing myself it's really

making me think.

As our interview came to an end, I asked Carrie if she had anything else to add. She said,

I think it's too easy to take accountability away from families. Children learn how to

interact in the world and how to relate to people based on the family they grow up in.

I think the thought process or mindset has to change. If you give any of my families a

million dollars, they would not think for the future. I do think their priorities are

different.

"I do think people make choices, and sometimes maybe they're bad choices," I remarked. "I

don't think there is anything wrong with accountability or responsibility as long as there is

the recognition that structural change must occur as well. Ruby Payne ignores structural

issues all together." Carrie interjected, "I agree with you completely on that."

Speaking Back to Payne

These three interview narratives reflect the work of Ruby Payne. In the following

two subsections, I elucidate how structural barriers are de-emphasized and the poor are

described as exhibiting mentalities that prevent them from leaving poverty.

De-emphasizing structural barriers

Each public school representative expressed the belief that ultimately only an

education could eliminate poverty. This is exemplified in Dr. Waterson's comments "the key

out of poverty is an education" and "if we can give families enough help and support so their

children can get an education, that's where we break the cycle of poverty." Caroline Johnson concurred, reflected in her statements "The kids, for us at WPSS, are the priority" and explaining that although many of their parents may never move forward, "But their kids, we can certainly have greater hope for their kids. We could give them something better for their lives."

Their sole reliance on education to solve the problem of poverty de-emphasizes, in fact ignores, the structural barriers that many of the families are facing. An emphasis on merely educating children living in poverty will not make childcare more affordable, low wages enough to live on, or Section VIII housing safer and health care more affordable. Not only to these comments de-emphasize structural barriers, they blatantly disregard them. Despite COS' foundational goal of eliminating structural barriers, Carrie explained that school representatives laughed at the mention of systems change and questioned why they had "to do that systems change crap. It's almost like a thorn or a pain." Caroline Johnson's statements also reflected the diversion of attention from structural barriers. Her contention that the meetings would be more empowering if the structural critique "bubble[d] up naturally" may have had good intentions, but never occurred. Instead, I observed the stifling of structural critique at the weekly meetings.

For example, during the first meeting I attended after the WPSS took over management of COS, on September 20th, 2005, a number of participants shared their frustrations after recent encounters with the Department of Human Services (DHS). Their frustrations included the manner in which food stamps were distributed. Pam, a participant, explained that she was paid bi-weekly, and that there were some months in the year where she received three paychecks. The DHS responded by reducing her food stamps in the

following month because on paper her salary looked higher, when in fact her overall income had not increased. Jennifer Sullivan, a former ACHIEVE Case Manager and the current community organizer employed by the WPSS, responded by saying, "Let's just focus on what's new and good so we don't use being victims as an excuse." The meeting continued and the food stamp question was never addressed.

Later in the same meeting, a guest presenter gave advice on how parents could develop better relationships with their children's teachers and schools. COS participants asked several vitally important questions, including Beth, who asked "What do you do when you go to a conference and you feel like the teacher is looking at you and judging you?" Jennifer Sullivan expressed frustration and asked participants to let the speaker continue with the presentation, and said, "Please don't ask questions, just listen." I do not believe Jennifer intentionally shifted attention away from structural issues because she hoped to further marginalize the participants, but de-emphasizing and dismissing participant frustrations resulted in the same outcome.

The approach to institutional barriers I observed at weekly meetings after the change in leadership reflected Caroline Johnson's remark during her interview, "[that] I think we already know what the barriers are…What I heard about those meetings is that a lot of the time I turned into a complaining session…. It was not a very productive use of the time." I completely disagree, however, with Caroline's statement. The system's change meetings *were* productive. For example, in March 2005 one of the barriers participants identified during system's change meetings was affordable childcare. After lengthy discussions, participants and allies agreed to take action and lobby for both affordable childcare and early

childhood education. One of COS' participants, Shannon, led lobbying efforts for funding at the state capital. Shannon told me,

> A child's greatest learning occurs between birth and five years old, but the least amount of state money is spent for those children. If more money is spent for children up to age five, more kids will stay in school, graduate, and go to college and not go on welfare.

Shannon and COS' lobbying efforts paid off. On March 10th, 2005, the Governor attended a special weekly meeting in which participant families and allies described the structural barriers they faced while trying to leave poverty, which included affordable, quality, childcare and early childhood education. The governor also spoke at the meeting, and explained that programs like COS were integral in creating a community of caring. After spending a great deal of time talking to community leaders about these issues, he said "We need to make a comprehensive commitment to early childhood in order to uphold our responsibility to ensure every child in Iowa reaches for his or her full potential." Later that year, in May 2005, after negotiations in the legislature, $22 million in new funding established a quality rating system for childcare and new, explicit funding for preschool education. COS could not claim complete responsibility for the increase in funding, but their lobbying efforts certainly contributed to its success.

Perpetuating marginalizing stereotypes and the culture of poverty

Rather than recognizing institutional classism or the failings in our social-economic-political system, Steve, Caroline, and Carrie's comments turn attention towards the perceived deficiencies of those living in poverty. Dr. Steve Waterson, who I believe genuinely cared about helping children escape poverty, nonetheless absolved the public schools from any

responsibility in perpetuating the class system when he observed, "It's not necessarily the school that's causing the achievement gap, or the school that's causing the child not to learn to read, or the school that's causing the child to drop out." Instead, he felt "There are so many other things going on in the family."

As described in Chapter 4 of this study, I support the position that formal schooling often reproduces existing class inequalities by operating under the assumption that if the poor would only become more like the middle-class there would be no poverty (Bourdieu, 1986, 1996, 2001; Bowles & Gintis, 2002; Willis, 1977). Adopting dominant forms of cultural capital, according to Giroux (1996), "schooling often functions to affirm the Eurocentric, patriarchal histories, social identities, and cultural experiences of middle-class students while either marginalizing or erasing the voices, experiences, and cultural memories of so-called minority students" (p. 43). Taking this concept further, Brantlinger (2003) contends,

> [School officials] attribute stratified school structure and outcomes to the essentially superior traits of higher social classes and the natural result of fair competition in meritocratic schools, and job markets…they insist that for life to become more equitable, the poor must become more like themselves. (p. 188)

All three interviews reflected the belief that the poor are themselves to blame for much of their marginalization. Comments like Caroline's, referring to how helpful Ruby Payne had been in demonstrating that "It's really hard for families living in generational poverty to break the mindset… .I think Payne says it takes three generations to truly break the mindset," contribute to essentially blaming the victims. Caroline continued and implied that parents of children living in poverty did not want their children to be successful, because "If a child does achieve more they may be looked down upon as a traitor, or 'you're too good

for us now.'" Carrie Thomas' remarks parroted Caroline's, like "I do believe that families in poverty have a certain set of priorities and norms that govern their thoughts and behaviors," and "I agree with Ruby Payne that no matter how many resources you give some families it's not going to help…. it's more their mental state…they live for the day."

These comments mirror Ruby Payne and perpetuate broad generalizations and stereotypes of the poor. In *A Framework for Understanding Poverty,* Payne asserts, "Generational poverty has its own culture, hidden rules, and belief systems…Often the attitude in generational poverty is that society owes one a living" (Payne, 2005, p. 48). Payne also contends the poor do not value education and "Discussion of academic topics is generally not prized" (p. 51), an idea Carrie supported in her statement, "I would never say they don't value education, but it's not a priority." My findings, developed over the course of three years of attending weekly meetings and interviewing dozens of participants, support the contention that COS families cared deeply about their children's education and future success. The earlier reference to COS participants asking questions about advocating for their children in schools is just one of many, and I did not witness one incident or situation where a participant family "looked down upon [their child] as a traitor" for wanting to "do better and go to college." Thus, my findings mirror Bloom's (2001), who states "What needs to be made visible are not the failures of poor single mothers, but the failure of the schools to support poor single mothers" (p. 313).

Impact on COS

Although Ruby Payne did not invent the culture of poverty, her work perpetuates false and demeaning caricatures of the poor and simultaneously ignores structural injustices. Prior to the WPSS taking over management of COS, any attempt to help participants become

middle-class was balanced by both the overt affirmation of non-dominant cultural capital and the naming of structural barriers. Helping participants become middle-class included focusing on acquiring dominant cultural capital, in the form of skill building, and social capital in the form of creating real and potential cross class relationships. The dominant discourse did enter the conversations during weekly meetings, and community organizers and allies sometimes framed structural barriers in terms of individual failings. The monthly Big View or systems change meeting, however, consciously created a space to recognize the failings in our system and organize for structural change.

While analyzing my field notes, reflective journal, and interviews with allies, participants, and school officials, I uncovered the potential closing of the liminal window. The diminishing of the Third Space occurred primarily because, once the school system took over management of COS, no weekly meetings focused on overt systemic critique and the allies were trained in the work of Ruby Payne. Additionally, COS' new community organizer, Jennifer Sullivan, sent out frequent email updates to all participants and allies that always included quotations from Ruby Payne's books, like "Many individuals stay in poverty because they don't know there is a choice-and if they do know that, have no one to teach them the hidden rules," and "We can neither excuse people from poverty or scold them for not knowing the hidden rules." She often included her own comments, like "We are often asked how to help the ally and participant solve a problem. Often exploring choices and teaching the hidden rules is a goal."

In Chapter 4, after comparing liberatory examples of community education that recognize systemic inequalities and work to eliminate them to liberal examples that seek to operate within the current paradigm, I asked the question, "Would the tendency for schooling

to reproduce social inequalities change, however, if a public school system was to collaborate with a community-based organization (CBO) from the liberating tradition such as COS?" ACHIEVE and the WPSS' reliance on the work of Ruby Payne, as a training tool for allies and as a window into the "mindsets of the poor," eliminated much of the potential to create liberatory capital. As long as public schools, working within the liberal community education model, proffer formal education as the best answer to inequalities inherent in a capitalist economic system, "Truly equitable, integrated, and high-quality comprehensive schooling could never be accomplished" (Brantlinger, 2003, p. 189). This is primarily because advocating for structural change "threatens the interests of those who are already well served by the dominant culture" (McLaren, 1999, p. 50).

Ruby Payne's work "Offers the path of least resistance" (Bohn, 2007, para. 5). Instead of inventing the culture of poverty, her work perpetuates stereotypes and generalizations that have been part of the dominant discourse for years. Parroting the dominant discourse while providing a prescription for one of society's greatest injustices, Payne excuses the current system. In doing so, she legitimates arbitrary middle-class values by blaming poverty on poor students' inability to think and act middle-class. As Bohn (2007) clearly and succinctly describes, Payne tells us

> We're all right. Our values and practices as teachers and administrators, the school district's curriculum and testing systems, the state's school funding practices, the government educational policies, and society's economic and social structures are not responsible for these students' lack of success. There's no need to feel the discomfort that comes with the realization that we all participate, willingly or unwillingly, in a system designed to faithfully reproduce the existing class structure. (para. 5)

I contend that neither the WPSS nor the ACHIEVE Program are poverty alleviation programs. As part of a larger institutional structure, they approached poverty alleviation in the same way that Ruby Payne does, from within the current paradigm by teaching their idea of "appropriate" behavior and cultural capital while ignoring structural failings like affordable and safe housing, childcare, healthcare, and living wages. The school system's approach undermined the founding principles of COS: recognizing the structural barriers that families in poverty face and organizing to alleviate them. By relying on Ruby Payne, any preconceived notions or stereotypes allies had about people living in poverty were reinforced by a framework that emphasized changing the individual while ignoring structural injustices.

Furthermore, Ruby Payne's influence on COS, at the time of this writing, has been formalized. In the fall of 2007, Scott Miller, co-founder of COS and CEO of Move the Mountain (MTM), announced, on his website, a partnership with Ruby Payne and her aha! Process, Inc. In this partnership, Scott Miller will present the circles concept to communities that are contracted with Payne as "Bridges Sustainability Models." These are communities that have made a three-year commitment to aha! Process, Inc. for "achieving sustainability." Bridges Sustainability Models must follow strict guidelines that include more than a dozen mandatory trainings, including one in *A Framework for Understanding Poverty*, in addition to cooperating with aha! consultants (www.movethemountain.org; www.ahaprocess.com). Thus, although not all of these Circles Initiatives cooperative with public school systems, partnering with Ruby Payne makes the possibility for liberating community education unlikely.

Turn to Cultural Studies

Rather than relying on a culture of poverty approach to inform community educators, I agree with Giroux (1996), who believes "cultural studies is a field that holds enormous promise for progressives who are willing to address some of the fundamental issues of our times" (in Giroux, Lankshear, McLaren, and Peters, 1996, p. 42). Although a thorough treatment of cultural studies and how it can be applied to community education is necessary to move from theory to practice, here I will only briefly introduce a few useful themes.

Applying cultural studies to community education is relevant, because of its usefulness in helping interrogate relationships of power, knowledge, and culture. Cultural studies, according to Giroux (1996), "Challenges the alleged self-ascribed ideological and institutional innocence of mainstream educators by arguing that teachers always work within and speak within historically and socially determined relations of power" (p. 43). Whereas a culture of poverty approach rests on false and demeaning stereotypes and ignores relations of power, cultural studies begins by recognizing asymmetries of power. When applying a cultural studies approach, Giroux proposes a list of six considerations: culture, language and power, student knowledge, identity and representation, history, and pedagogy. In such a short section, I will focus only on culture, language and power, and pedagogy.

One consideration relates to manner in which cultural studies addresses the notion of culture itself. Contrasting the culture of poverty's static, essentialized notions of the poor,

> Cultural studies has been traditionally concerned with culture as something that is
> unfinished, incomplete, and always in process. In this approach, the study of culture
> is grounded in a continual analysis of local, national, and global conditions as they

enable or prevent possibilities for human dignity and critical agency in others.

(Giroux, et. al., 1996, p. 48)

COS represented the merging of different discourses, both dominant and non-dominant, and created new discourses. A cultural studies approach could help community organizers strive to consciously acknowledge and validate participants community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005). A culture studies approach could also encourage, and value, the fluid and changing understandings constructed by allies, participants, and community organizers while identifying opportunities to eliminate structural barriers.

A second consideration is that cultural studies emphasizes language and power, and "how language is used to fashion social identities and secure specific forms of authority" (p. 48). Utilizing a cultural studies approach for community education could expose and disrupt the dominant discourse. Making a conscious effort to frame the educational portion of COS' weekly meetings or the ally trainings around ideas of power and identity construction could deepen both the ally and participant awareness of how the dominant discourse serves those in positions of power. This would show community educators that,

The value of language is based not merely on its possibilities for expanding the range of textual literacy but on understanding how people and social groups use language as a way of mobilizing resistance, challenging dominant forms of cultural authority, and creating democratic social relationships. (Giroux, et. al., 1996, p. 49)

The final consideration I would like to mention is expanding the notion of pedagogy. Pedagogy acts as a form of power in that it can construct knowledge. Because this process is arbitrary, pedagogy can operate to define appropriate morals, values, or personal identities, much like the way the culture of poverty thesis operates to teach educators about the poor.

Cultural studies identifies the ways pedagogy operates to construct and inform, thus preventing pedagogy from being reduced to "the mastering of skills or techniques" (p. 52). Redefining pedagogy would empower community educators to hold their pedagogy "accountable for the stories it produces, the claims it makes on social memories, and the images of the future it deems legitimate" (p. 52). The pedagogy of Ruby Payne and other cultural of poverty supporters also need to be held accountable for the false stories and images they perpetuate. Re-imagining culture, language, power, and pedagogy, with the help of a cultural studies approach, will allow community educators to re-direct their attention away from changing or fixing poor people towards creating a collective community commitment to social justice.

A framework like Ruby Payne's, one that emphasizes the cultural characteristics that prevent people from leaving poverty, has no place in poverty alleviation programs, public schools, or teacher pre-service programs that seek real empowerment and liberation. Community-school partnerships aimed at empowering marginalized communities must understand the complexity of poverty, work with those marginalized by it to foster the development of an awareness that recognizes their position within the dominant paradigm, and organize across class lines to advocate the structural change necessary to afford the poor a real chance to achieve family sustainability (Bloom, 2001; Bloom and Kilgore, 2003a, 2003b; Broughton, 2001). Empowerment must include "developing a more positive self-concept and self-confidence, a more critical worldview, and the cultivation of individual and collective skills and resources for social and political action" (Stall and Stoeker, 1998, p. 741). Instead of adopting prescriptive plans for "teaching poor kids" as many schools districts are doing, community organizations that partner with public schools must recognize

not only what individuals can do in an attempt to leave poverty, but also how political and economic structures must be altered in order to make poverty alleviation a reality.

<div align="center">Reflections on Research</div>

Beginnings

I first met Scott Miller, one of COS' co-founders, in November 2003. Beginning this reflection with Scott is important; his commitment to structural change led many allies, participants, and school representatives to describe him as a visionary. I remember leaving that first weekly meeting feeling as if I were flying; it was one of the most empowering moments of my life. Before I give the impression that I'm a little weird, or that my life has been uneventful, let me describe that first meeting in more detail. After talking with Leslie Rebecca Bloom, who I had just asked to be my major professor, about possible dissertation ideas she told me about an exiting possibility. A program she had been involved in for years, Beyond Welfare, was beginning a new collaboration with the WPSS. Interested in investigating education in a different, less institutionalized, community context, this program was perfect.

I arrived at that first COS weekly meeting, on November 25, 2003, about a half an hour before the meeting started. I introduced myself to Scott Miller, and we sat down and began talking. Scott proceeded to explain his vision for COS, which included his aim to, as he put it, "End poverty in this city." "I honestly believe," he said, "that we can create meaningful cross-class relationships where middle-class allies see how incredible these families are, and they will be inspired to take action." He went on to explain his goal of recruiting 25 participant families and 75 allies in the first six months, with the hopes of having 50 participant families and 150 allies by June 2004. During that first meeting I was

welcomed by participants and allies and felt a sense of community connectedness I honestly

have never felt before. I remember calling Leslie a few days after that meeting and telling

her about this great new community-school collaboration that was going to end poverty in the

city. I vividly remember what I initially believed to be her lack of enthusiasm, but quickly

realized was a healthy skepticism meant to keep me grounded as a first-time ethnographer. I

never forgot the way that first meeting made me feel and the hope it gave me that a

community could unite for social justice, but from that point on I was careful not to let my

excitement about the program's vision obstruct what I observed in practice.

Research as praxis

Beginning with that first meeting, my goal was to become a member of the program.

I didn't like the image I conjured up of an anthropologist voyeuristically sitting in the corner

observing the activities of people in a far off, disconnected manner. Although I didn't know

exactly what becoming a member of the program would look or feel like, in the meantime I

committed myself to Lather's call for "research as praxis," or "the dialectical tension, the

interactive, reciprocal shaping of theory and practice" (Lather, 1986, p. 258; Tricoglus,

2001). For me, research as practice included an intense reflexivity and dialogical

relationship between my reflective journaling, field notes, conversations with professors, and

the struggle to find myself within, or between, critical and Postmodern theories. To provide

stability and direction, I chose to use Lather's (1986) five principles of critical inquiry along

with Tricoglus' (2001) method of applying them. Three of these principles were especially

influential both in conducting fieldwork and organizing analysis.

"*Critical Inquiry Focuses on Contradictions as a Starting Point for the Process of*

Ideology Critique" (Lather, 1986, p. 268). The contradictions between the language of

PRWORA and the lived experiences of low-income families served as the starting point for this study. These contradictions manifested themselves during meetings where participants described their barriers, ranging from affordable childcare, unavailable legal aid, child support recovery, living wages, or low-income housing. I eventually identified other contradictions, like the ways allies and community organizers embodied the dominant discourse while developing relationships with participant families that challenged those very discourses. This awareness of conflicting goals and understandings led me to problematize the existence of a liminal space between dominant and non-dominant discourses.

"Critical Inquiry Provides an Environment that Invites Participants' Critical Reaction to Researcher Accounts of their Worlds" (Lather, 1986, p. 268). Inviting critical reaction to my findings was certainly easier and more productive early on in my research. For example, Sharon Cunningham, COS' first community organizer, welcomed questions and critiques of what I observed in the program's first six months. We spoke frequently, and she often commented on how important reflecting on her own practices improved her effectiveness.

After the first year of my involvement, community organizers, and Scott Miller, exhibited less interest in reflecting on the program and instead became quite defensive. I believe this occurred primarily because COS' institutional funders, the Annie E. Casey Foundation, United Way, and the Greater Walden Partnership, pressured Scott Miller, Lois Smidt, and the community organizers to graduate the initial participants from the program. Despite the progress many of the original participant families made, which included improving wages and developing community, none of the initial families were near leaving poverty. I wasn't the only person who expressed concerns, in July 2005 Richard, Elizabeth's

academic ally, wrote a letter to COS' leaders in response to the change in management from COS to the WPSS. Richard wrote,

> I have been an ally for Elizabeth since the program's inception in 2003… .During that period of time, the program has deteriorated significantly in quality, vision, and philosophy… .Participant's goals have been established with little program commitment… .No one has graduated from the program… .I would attribute the decline to an absence of program leadership, trained facilitators, structured/planned/educational agendas as well as a lack of program expectations, goals, and follow-through… .I believe that failure to address the above obstacles in a meaningful, immediate, and substantive way will signal the end of the program

Richard received no response to his letter. Although he continues to provide support to Elizabeth, in January 2006 he stopped attending meetings.

"Critical Inquiry Stimulates a Self-sustaining Process of Critical Analysis and Enlightened Action" (Lather, 1986, p. 268). COS' allies displayed a great deal of critical analysis and enlightened action. At weekly meetings, many allies expressed frustration and confusion at the way the human service system worked, and didn't work, for participant families. Especially evident during the final weekly meeting of the month, or Big View meeting, participants shared their barriers and along with allies and community organizers, developed action plans to remove them. In many respects, COS' success in creating a community of caring dedicated to structural change depended on this critical analysis and enlightened action.

Becoming an ally

Two months after I began fieldwork, on February 10, 2004, Scott Miller asked me to become an ally. I declined his request, although I had become quite close to a few of the participant families. I struggled with this decision, as I knew many of the initial families still needed allies, and I felt the program deserved reciprocity for welcoming me as a member. It was too early in my research, however, to justify making such an important commitment to a single family. A year into fieldwork, I had developed what I would consider a friendship with three participant families: Elizabeth, Amy and Mike Johnson, and Anne, single mother of two small children. I looked forward to seeing them each week at the community meeting, and would often give advice, encouragement, and support as if I were an ally.

Initially my way of feeling like I was giving back to the program, after two years my involvement, with Elizabeth's circle in particular, increased to the point that I used my truck to help her move, gave her driving lessons, and attended her yearly goals setting meetings. During her August 2005 interview, she referred to me as her ally for the first time. Hearing her say that surprised me, but only because I realized that despite my efforts to the contrary, I was indeed her ally. Upon reflection, I am happy with the way our relationship developed. I conducted two years of fieldwork and made other close friendships before I joined Elizabeth's circle. Additionally, joining her circle as an ally gave me new insights into how these cross-class relationships operated.

Finding myself in COS

One of the weekly meetings I attended focused on creating a learning-friendly environment for participant's children. During the group discussion participants and allies talked about their childhoods, and I talked about some of my experiences growing up in a working class family. After the meeting, while I helped wash dishes in the church hall

kitchen, I overheard one participant say, "That Chad, he's got more poverty culture than we do!" The observation surprised me; I didn't know what she meant by poverty culture, let alone if I should be glad that I had a lot of it.

I did know that I was just as comfortable relating to participants as allies or community organizers. In many respects my own life story demonstrates the relevance of social and cultural capital to community organizations, as well as the potential of liberatory capital. As a child growing up in a predominantly white, middle-class community, I struggled to understand my family's hidden poverty. We were not like the poor people we knew: we lived in a three-bedroom house, did not collect welfare, and knew how to blend into middle-class society. Behind closed doors, however, we were often members of the working poor. My dad worked on commission in various white-collar jobs, from selling commercial generators to working as a purchasing agent for an electrical contracting company. My mom provided childcare out of our home when I was young, and later worked grueling hours in the local bakery, bearing the scars of hot ovens and carpal tunnel syndrome. A combination of my parent's substance abuse and modest annual incomes made it difficult to live our middle-class life, especially with three children to feed.

I knew what it was like to come home in the winter and have the heat shut off and to wear the same clothes on the first day of school year after year. I even remember stealing clothes from my cousin because we didn't have the money to buy new ones. When things got bad, instead of going to the Department of Humans Services, we went to my dad's parents. My dad grew up in a middle-class family and my grandparents always stepped in to make sure we didn't lose our house or go without food. They were our welfare, and we were so incredibly lucky to have them.

One of my heroes, historian Howard Zinn (1997), recalls an event in his youth when he was struck in the head by a police officer during a demonstration in New York City's Times Square. He says,

> From that moment on, I was no longer liberal, a believer in the self-correcting character of American democracy. I was a radical, believing that something fundamental was wrong in this country—not just the existence of poverty amidst great wealth, not just the horrible treatment of black people, but something rotten at the root. (p. 154)

Conversely, I didn't grow up class conscious; instead I grew up confused about class. Confused by our struggle to pay the bills juxtaposed with the middle-class community in which we lived. My confusion often manifested itself in anger, and I perpetuated the dominant poverty discourse into young adulthood.   After years of reflection and a tremendous amount of self-work, I now recognize the dominant cultural capital I learned from my parents, grandparents, and childhood community. I learned simple things like which fork to use for each course while eating in a fancy restaurant, or how to interview effectively for a white-collar job. I also learned many of the non-dominant forms of community wealth Yosso (2005) describes.

All COS' community organizers demonstrated similar understandings. They each collected welfare at one time, but now lived comfortable middle-class lives. They related to both allies and participants because they possessed, and valued, both dominant and non-dominant forms of capital. Seeing myself in them helped me interrogate the possible existence of a liminal space at the meetings. Reflecting on my own positionality led me to

believe this liminal space did not have to be one of confliction or confusion, but could be liberating.

Conclusion

Although this study began within the tradition of critical institutional ethnography (Smith, 1987), I end it with the hope that it also contributes to the formation of a revolutionary working class pedagogy. A revolutionary working class pedagogy "sets as its goal the transformation of existing social and economic relations by encouraging marginalized social groups both to critique and to transform capitalist social relations of production" (McLaren & Farahmandpur, 2005, p. 179). Subsequently, I have attempted to heed McLaren's (1999b) call for ethnographers to "emphasize the importance of locally produced knowledges and concepts drawn from the everyday experiences of the oppressed." (p. lxii). In doing so, we may act as revolutionary ethnographers who "recognize the necessity of contingency, yet at the same time affirm the undeniable and irreducibility of difference in forging a concrete space for liberation in the center of that hurricane we call the social" (p. lxiv). The center of that hurricane, in this study, has been the point of intersection between the dominant poverty discourse and the actual, lived experiences of low-income families.

I have attempted to address Maskovsky and Morgen's (2003) concern that, "There is too little research on the everyday resistance or political mobilization of the poor in the face of welfare-state retrenchment or the increasingly punitive state" (p. 332). This critical, revolutionary ethnography of a school-community partnership, therefore, contributes to a more concrete understanding of the processes of community education. This study demonstrates how cross-class relationships can be formed for the purpose of helping low-

income families achieve personal and family sustainability. It also shows how cross-class

relationships can inspire collective community action to eliminate the structural barriers

prohibiting families from leaving poverty. Community education, facilitated within the

relationship between a public school system and a grassroots CBO, provided a site of

contestation where dominant and non-dominant discourses were negotiated. The title of this

study, *Schooling Each Other*, refers to this negotiation. By teaching low-income families

how to navigate middle-class society, allies and community organizers sought to liberate

participants from poverty. Teaching allies to validate their non-dominant cultural capital and

recognize institutional failings, participants sought to liberate allies and community

organizers from their support of the dominant discourse. In essence, allies, community

organizers, and participants developed a pedagogy to potentially liberate each other from

oppressive circumstances.

Relevance of School-Community Partnerships

In light of privatization movements and the rapid government devolution of human

services, conducting a revolutionary, critical institutional ethnography is especially important

at this historical moment. In this atmosphere of uncertainty, school-community

collaborations like COS can play an invaluable role in linking marginalized communities to

their children's schools. The schools and the participant families in this study had a constant,

or a common anchor: the success and well being of the participant family's children.

ACHIEVE Case Managers, as WPSS employees, served as the glue that bound participant

families together with their children's school. ACHIEVE Case Managers attended weekly

meetings where they identified the concerns and issues of participant families, and then acted

as liaisons, when necessary, with the public schools. This relationship created a community

of caring, evident during interviews, where school officials and participant families repeatedly emphasized the positive impact COS had on the children's performance in school.

I would like to make two important points about COS' school-community collaboration, and collaborations of this kind in general. First, for this collaboration to be empowering, it needed to remain a partnership. As long as COS collaborated with the WPSS and remained autonomous, the founding principle of creating cross-class relationships to spark collective action for structural change was evident. Jennifer Sullivan, COS' final community organizer, told me that after the merge, the WPSS "tried to stay true to the original principles of Beyond Welfare." Once the collaboration turned into just another program under the WPSS umbrella of learning supports, however, the emphasis on structural change disappeared. I do not contend this disappearance was the result of relying on Ruby Payne's (2005) work, but that her framework served as another excuse for ignoring structural inequalities. School-community partnerships cannot serve liberatory ends without a conscious recognition of, and commitment to, eliminating the failings of our social, political, and economic systems. Second, school-community collaborations cannot replace formal human services. My research mirrors the findings of other ethnographies, where despite fostering important relationships and providing vital social support, the problem of poverty was too great to solve without the commitment of significant federal resources (Bloom & Kilgore, 2003b; Eisenger, 2002; Reisch & Sommerfeld, 2003).

Contribution to Qualitative Theory

This study demonstrates that in order for community education to empower those marginalized and oppressed by poverty, the dominant discourse must be exposed and a transformative space must be created to formulate new understandings. During both COS'

weekly meetings and in outside encounters within individual circles, participants, allies, and community organizers constantly negotiated the dominant poverty discourse. Given "research focused on the investigation of social networks and social capital reveals that welfare policies that ignore or rely solely on social capital-enhancing strategies often do not help families escape poverty" (Maskovsky & Morgen, 2003, p. 327), and in order to illustrate how this negotiation occurred, I advocate a return to the entire corpus of Bourdieu's work (1986, 1996, 2001; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Utilizing Bourdieu allowed me to identify the ways in which allies and community organizers worked to help participants in the program acquire the necessary dominant cultural and social capital to successfully navigate middle-class society, and ultimately acquire more economic capital.

During the weekly meetings, and within the individual circles, however, allies and community organizers were confronted with the participant families' lived experiences. Participants consistently demonstrated the manners in which they defied dominant stereotypes and possessed meaningful cultural capital not recognized or validated by dominant society. By relying on the work of Carter (2003) and Yosso (2005), I was able to expand Bourdieu's critique of cultural, social, and economic capital and identify specific examples of the non-dominant cultural community wealth possessed by COS' participants. Thus, allies, participants, and community organizers simultaneously recognized, and validated, both dominant and non-dominant forms of capital.

This study, however, takes the work of Bourdieu, Carter, and Yosso a step further. Beginning with Bourdieu, informed by Yosso and Carter, I identified a liminal, Third Space, in which new, liberatory capital emerged. This capital was liberatory because if COS were to rely solely on helping participants acquire dominant forms of capital, as evidenced in

Bourdieu's work, the existing social, political, and economic structure would be reproduced. By contrast, if COS were to rely solely on validating the participant's non-dominant capital and only work to eliminate structural barriers, participant families would not achieve family sustainability in the present, reproducing the dominant paradigm (Bowles & Gintis, 2002; Willis, 1977). By simultaneously validating both dominant and non-dominant capital, creating a dual awareness of the pragmatics of acquiring dominant capital and the necessity of validating non-dominant capital while concurrently working for structural change, participants, allies, and community organizers created a new, potentially liberatory form of capital.

There is much we can learn from listening to the voices of those families who participated in Circles of Support. Their stories mimic the stories of millions of Americans who speak back to the dominant discourse in the hopes that their lived experiences will be recognized and validated. Millions of Americans work hard, care about their children's future, exhibit personal responsibility, and make good choices while toiling in dead-end jobs that do not pay livable wages. They struggle to find safe, affordable childcare, wait for years on low-income housing lists, and do without health care. We also must listen to the voices of those allies and community organizers who learned about structural barriers and were compelled to act against them. If we choose to be silent and ignore their voices, replacing them with stories like Chris Gardner's in *The Pursuit of Happyness*, then we choose to be complicit in their oppression. This study demonstrates that there *are* people willing to cross class lines and work to build relationships that may eventually lead to the creation of a more just, equitable society.

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Appendix A

Acronyms

BW- Beyond Welfare- A grassroots, community organization founded in the mid 1990s as a
result of welfare reform to help primarily low-income single mothers. Co-founded by
Lois Smidt and Scott Miller, this program served as a model for Circles of Support.

CBO- Community Based Organization- For the purpose of this study, I considered
grassroots, non-profit and not-for-profit organizations as CBOs.

CFPS- Children and Family Policy Center- The Child and Family Policy Center (CFPC) was
established in 1989 to "better link research and policy on issues vital to children and
families and to advocate for evidenced-based strategies to improve child outcomes."
www.cfpciowa.org

COS- Circles of Support- This is the title of the school-community partnership researched in
this study

DHS- Iowa Department of Human Services- State program responsible for implementation
and oversight of TANF funds

DRA- Deficit Reduction Act- Reauthorized TANF block grants and modified limited
flexibility provisions

FaDSS- Family Development and Self-sufficiency program- Designed to help FIP recipients
who are labeled "at risk." Some of the barriers FaDSS attempts to address are
domestic violence, sexual abuse, child neglect, substance abuse, mental health issues,
having a child with special needs, and lacking a high school diploma/GED or literary
skills.

FIA- Family Investment Agreement- A contractual agreement between welfare recipients and

    DHS in the state of Iowa.

FIP- Family Investment Plan- Iowa's specific utilization of TANF block grant funds,

    provides direct services to qualifying families.

HHS- Department of Health and Human Services- Federal government division responsible

    for overseeing TANF.

IDA- Individual Development Account- Some states, like Iowa, allow welfare recipients to

    invest money in these accounts. Some states match a percentage of the investment,

    and the funds are meant for medical expenses, first home purchases, post-secondary

    education, and business capitalization.

IHSPA- Iowa Human Services Planning Alliance- Organization designed to help bring

    initiatives to strengthen children, families, and neighborhoods in Iowa.

ISED- Institute for Social and Economic Development- Organization dedicated to

    strengthening the social and economic well-being of individuals and communities.

    www.ised.org

LBP- Limited Benefit Plan- Welfare recipients in the state of Iowa who violate their FIA, or

    refuse to sign one, are seen as choosing the LBP, which immediately terminates

    benefits until a new FIA is signed.

MOE- Maintenance of Effort- Funds that states must allocate for welfare recipients, from

    their own coffers, in order to receive federal TANF block grants. MOE revenues are

    most often used for child welfare services

MTM- Move the Mountain Leadership Center- Directed by Scott Miller, co-founder of COS, this non-profit organization provided technical support to COS. www.movethemountain.org

MTA- Metro Transit Authority

NCLB- No Child Left Behind- Federal legislation passed in 2001 intended to hold school districts accountable for student performance.

NEC- Name Each Child- Name of the first group of Walden community leaders that met to discuss how to help children and families living in poverty. NEC was also the first title of the school-community collaboration, which was eventually changed to COS.

NNPS- National Network of Partnership Schools- National organization dedicated to creating effective community-school collaborations.

PCLP- Polk County Learning Partnership- Group that presented Walden's proposal to neighborhood leaders for an Annie E. Casey *Making Connections* grant.

PROMISE JOBS- Promoting Independence and Self-Sufficiency through Employment- In order to receive FIP, families must cooperate with this program which provides work and training services.

PWRORA- Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act- This was the federal welfare reform legislation signed into law in 1996.

TANF- Temporary Aid to Needy Families- These are block grants given to individual states by the federal government to implement PRWORA's policies.

WPSS- Walden Public School System- The public school system operating in collaboration with COS. Participant families were identified through two of its elementary schools, Lincoln and Washington.

Appendix B

Participants, Allies, Community Organizers, and School Officials

Circles of Support's Community Organizers
Sharon Cunningham- November 2003 – July 2004
Donna Driscoll- July 2004 – May 2005
Margaret Neumann- November 2004 – December 2005
Jennifer Sullivan- August 2005 – Spring 2007

Circles of Support's Co-Founders
Lois Smidt
Scott Miller

Walden Public School Employees
Dr. Steve Waterson- Superintendent of schools
Caroline Johnson- Director of Learning Supports/ACHIEVE Program
Carrie Thomas- ACHIEVE Case Manager assigned to COS

Elizabeth's Circle
Elizabeth- Participant
Johnathan- Elizabeth's 24 year old son
Roger- Elizabeth's 18 year old son
James- Elizabeth's 13 year old son
Richard- Academic ally
Mary- Community-building ally
Andrew- Financial ally

Amy and Mike Johnson's Circle
Amy Johnson- Participant
Mike Johnson- Participant
Mike Jr.- Johnson's 12 year old son
Amelia- Johnson's 10 year old daughter
Justin- Johnson's 8 year old son
Sally- Johnson's 7 year old daughter
Thomas- Financial ally
Lori- Academic ally
Erin- Community-building ally