

*Case Studies in Compassion: Need Interpretation, Gender, and Family in an Era of
Faith-Based Provision*

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Single mothers face what sometimes seem like never-ending demands on their schedule. The homeless often find themselves daily shuffled from agency to agency, with a sea of social workers, bureaucrats, and other professionals to engage, many times waiting multiple hours at each location for a hurried meeting in which they may or may not be

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Dedication

-For Jason, and for my biological and chosen family, in whom I have always placed my ultimate faith.

Abstract

As a result of provisions codified in the 1996 PRWORA, and later, through presidential Executive Order, many Americans now encounter the welfare state through small programs run by local churches. Both liberal and conservative worship communities in the US have embraced and maintained a ‘traditional’ family ideology in which nuclear family ideals are normative—despite increasing levels of diversity in the way the majority of Americans organize their family lives. The central concerns of this dissertation revolve around whether and how programs receiving funds associated with the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives (OFBCI) are organized around the needs of families that do not fit the traditional nuclear male-breadwinner ideal. I pose three primary questions: 1) How do institutionalized models of family and gender in faith-based organizations inform service providers’ interpretations of clients’ needs? 2) Do the models of family circulating in faith-based organizations have consequences for the ways these organizations become gendered social spaces? 3) In environments where models for the “Ideal Family” exist in tension with other forms of family life, will organizational rhetorics about family and gender reflect this diversity? To answer the above questions, interviews and participant-observation in four case study organizations (one theologically liberal, two theologically conservative, and one “community-based”), as well as 39 interviews with program authorities in 27 different organizations (drawn across a Midwestern, metropolitan area) were conducted.

Although the organizations profiled exhibited a good amount of practices accommodating family diversity, organizational rhetorics did not always reflect the full diversity of

participants' family lives. Significantly, I observed a deep ambivalence surrounding non-nuclear family models, a pattern I argue is attributable to the way such family forms call into question dominant beliefs and practices related to the social construction of gender. Furthermore, I found that in settings of community and faith-based social service provision, rhetoric associated with the ideology of religious neoliberalism is pervasive, and extends beyond the discourse circulated by the theologically conservative coalition of elites with which it is normally associated. I argue the pervasiveness of religious neoliberalism is driven by structural conditions compelling organizations to resort to individualistic "moral resources" in the absence of material resources, which limits providers' capacity to promote and access alternative discursive resources that might otherwise reference structural inequality. Lastly, my data indicates that organizations' self-definition as either community-based or faith-based does not indicate "more" or "less" religion, as many other analyses otherwise presuppose. The boundaries between organizations with religious characteristics and those with "non-religious," or more secular, self-presentations are porous, in that they shift over time and in both directions (i.e., organizations become more explicitly expressive of their religious character, or they choose to consciously abandon elements of their religious identity as time passes and their structure develops).

Keywords: Gender, family, race, class, religion, welfare state, neoliberalism, and culture.

Table of Contents

List of Tables	pg. vii
1. The Changing Landscape of Social Welfare Provision in the United States	pgs. 1-41
2. State-Sponsored Social Ministry in Broader Context	pgs. 42-91
3. Questions and Methods: Developing Design, Site Previews, and Social Location	pgs. 92-136
4. The Program Director Interviews: Religiosity, Devolution, Remoralization, & the Gender/Family Nexus	pgs. 137-169
5. “A Hand Up, Not a Hand Out:” Family, Faith, and “Relationship Building” at <i>Integrity Intervention</i>	pgs. 170-218
6. “They Are Ours at the End of the Day:” Family, Gender, Race, and Need Interpretation at <i>Graceful Girls</i>	pgs. 219-257
7. “Just You Wait Until Your Heavenly Father Gets Home!” Ministering to Single Mothers at <i>Parenting Without Partners</i> and <i>Mastering Motherhood</i>	pgs. 258-307
8. Gender, Family, and Religious Neoliberalism: Acceptance, Rejection, and Reiteration at the Local Level	pgs. 308-352
Endnotes	pgs. 339-351
Works Cited	pgs. 369-386
Appendix A: Background Form for Program Directors	pg. 387
Appendix B: Interview Guide for Staff & Volunteers	pgs. 388-392
Appendix C: Interview Guide for Staff & Volunteers	pgs. 393-396
Appendix D: Focus Group Form & Questions for <i>Integrity Intervention</i>	pgs. 397-400
Appendix E: Focus Group Form & Questions for <i>Graceful Girls</i>	pgs. 401-403
Appendix F: Focus Group Form & Questions <i>Parenting Without Partners</i>	pgs. 404-407

List of Tables

Table 3.1: Field Site Overviews	pg. 136
Table 4.1: Religious Identity, Views on Devolution and Poverty, and Family/Gender Ideals by Organization Type	pg. 169

1. THE CHANGING LANDSCAPE OF SOCIAL WELFARE PROVISION IN THE UNITED STATES

The goal of these faith-based groups is not just to provide services, it is to change lives (President George W. Bush 1999; qtd. in Biebricher 2011)

Over the course of the last two decades, and particularly since the George W. Bush presidency, faith-based social services have received increasing amounts of attention from government officials, policy analysts, advocacy groups, news media outlets, religious leaders, academics, and other public figures. “Charitable Choice” provisions codified in the 1996 PRWORA (The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act, or “welfare reform”) ushered in a period of significant change in social service provision in the US, and ended universal entitlement to government aid for the poor. As a result, many Americans now encounter the welfare state through small programs run by local churches.

Both liberal and conservative worship communities in the US have embraced and maintained a ‘traditional’ family ideology in which nuclear family ideals are normative—despite increasing levels of diversity in the way the majority of Americans organize their family lives. Taken together, these realities raise important questions about how religiously-based family ideals shape social service provision in the contemporary landscape of the US welfare state.

In many ways, this dissertation constitutes a continuation of prior research on family programming in diverse congregations in the Twin Cities (Edgell & Docka 2007). From the winter to the summer of 2003, my co-advisor Edgell and I profiled an African-

American Protestant congregation, a Latino parish, and a GLBT-friendly church—all identified as innovative in their approach to family ministry. Furthermore, all three congregations had received some sort of funding from the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives. Mainly, we sought to identify the ways in which people (both leaders and congregants) in three different service-oriented faith communities defined “the family.” Although we found considerable symbolic affirmation of the value of traditional notions of family and gender roles, we also found a level of innovation in family-oriented rhetoric and ministry, including a range of gendered practices considerably more inclusive than those identified in previous research. The definition of “family” within religious institutions was examined in hopes of being able to entertain larger, practical questions about the extent to which faith communities might be able to innovate to accommodate changing family structures.

While conducting fieldwork for the project profiled in Edgell & Docka (2007), I began to think about the ways in which the accommodation of family structure is central to the question of needs provision—an important line of inquiry, given worship communities’ historic and changing role in providing social welfare programming. I also wondered at the capacity of small worship communities to talk about and serve families that do not meet widespread, prescribed cultural models for family life.

The central concerns of this dissertation revolve around how programs receiving funds associated with the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives (hereafter, OFBCI) are organized around the needs of families that do not fit the traditional nuclear male-breadwinner ideal. The capacity of programs offered in small

and mid-sized houses of worship to deal effectively with changes in the structure of the American family is an especially important concern, given two important realities. First, the rapid growth of worship communities in the 1950s resulted in an entrenched institutionalization of what Edgell (2006) refers to as ‘Ozzie and Harriet’ familism, as rhetoric and practice in ministry and programming were organized around prominent family ideologies of the day. Second, new legislation developed and implemented roughly over the last decade has eased prior restrictions on the terms under which small and mid-sized worship communities may engage in partnership with government entities to deliver social services to local communities.

Given the reality of rapid change in U.S. family structures in decades since the 1950s, the programs that seek to serve the American family must grapple effectively with the structural forces driving such change if they are to remain relevant and effective for the ‘real life’ of the individuals and families they target. There is the potential for a disjuncture between the structural forces behind increasing family diversity and the gender and family ideologies and practices prevalent in social service programs administered by OFBCI-associated, small religious groups partnering with government.

In this dissertation, I pose three primary questions: 1) How do institutionalized models of family and gender in faith-based organizations inform service providers’ interpretations of clients’ needs? 2) Do the models of family circulating in faith-based organizations have consequences for the ways these organizations become gendered social spaces? 3) In environments where models for the “Ideal Family” exist in tension with other forms of family life, will organizational rhetorics about family and gender reflect this diversity?

This research makes an intervention in a number of ongoing conversations. Scholars of gender, family, and religion will find content addressing the ways in which more flexible family practice and rhetoric—in both liberal and conservative religious environments—do not necessarily lead to more flexible social constructions of gender. Welfare state analysts will find a description of processes through which family ideals, associated gender constructions, racial stereotypes, and religious ideology intersect and influence the ways local social service program authorities, acting in partnership with the state, interpret and service the needs of clients. In turn, these interpretations of need have important consequences for client outcomes. Scholars of culture will find insight on the ways contradictory ideological elements are embedded and enacted in institutions and individual actors’ ‘roadmaps’ for social life. Policy scholars will find an exemplar of the merits of examining the discursive, as well as the material, components and consequences of policy outcomes. In particular, analysts who study small, faith-based and community social service programs partnering with government will find interest in my conclusions regarding the processes through which organizations strategically self-identify as either “faith-based” or “community-based.” In so doing, program authorities present alternate ‘public faces’ in different forums and for different audiences. As well, I interrogate the utility of conceptualizing the content and character of community and faith-based organizations as existing on a continuum that ranges from religious to secular—a false divide that should instead be conceptualized as porous, multidimensional, and shifting over time in order to best capture the texture of such organizations’ ‘on the ground’ practices and rhetoric.

Overview of Findings

While many of my findings were consistent with conclusions drawn in Edgell & Docka (2007)—another exploration of the relationship between family and gender in three diverse, service-oriented worship communities—the contours of my data and analysis extend the conversation on family, gender, and religion in unique ways, which I explore further in the conclusion. In addition, although I found a good amount of practices accommodating family diversity, organizational rhetorics did not always reflect the full diversity of participants' family lives. Organizational models for family life all evidenced some degree of flexibility, though these realities did not lead to correspondingly progressive understandings of gender. Significantly, I observed a deep ambivalence surrounding non-nuclear family models, a pattern I argue is attributable to the way such family forms call into question dominant beliefs and practices related to the social construction of gender. Gender and family were decoupled for unique reasons in each of the sites I profiled, which I further develop in subsequent chapters profiling each of the case studies.

Furthermore, I found that rhetoric associated with the ideology of religious neoliberalism is pervasive, and extends beyond the discourse circulated by the theologically conservative coalition of elites with which it is normally associated. The United States is a nation with deeply held religious beliefs. A recent Gallup survey found that 91% of American profess a belief in God (Newport 2011). The high level of religious belief in the U.S. provides the potential for religiously-grounded discourses—be they conservative or liberal—to achieve broad-based appeal due to ideological resonance among the

American public. Many (though not all) of the leaders in mainline and liberal Protestant organizations included in the study articulated a view of the state as failing to provide *and* inhibiting individual choice, a commitment to an ethic of individualism as evidenced by a felt need for “holding people accountable” and inspiring “personal transformation,” and cited the role of markets in promoting individual choice. The true power and broad reach of discourse associated with religious neoliberalism lies in the fact that associated rhetoric appears in both conservative *and* liberal religious institutions, across theological divides.

In the end, I argue the pervasiveness of religious neoliberalism is driven by structural conditions compelling organizations to resort to individualistic "moral resources" in the absence of material resources, which limits providers' capacity to promote and access alternative discursive resources that might otherwise reference structural inequality. Although the individual cases are similar in that they all reflect broad discourses of neoliberalism, dominant ideologies of race, gender, and family intersect with neoliberal ideology in particular ways in each setting. These intersections result in distinctive formulations of the moral categories of deservingness and undeservingness, produce gendered client outcomes, and influence how organizations define successful clients. I further argue that to truly understand the ways religious neoliberalism influences social service provision, scholars must move beyond the concept's original focus on elite discourse and policymaking contexts and instead shift their gaze to the practices and rhetorics deployed across diverse, local-level contexts.

Lastly, my data indicates that organizations' self-definition as either community-based or faith-based does not indicate "more" or "less" religion, as many other analysts otherwise presuppose. As well, the boundaries between organizations with religious characteristics and those with "non-religious," or more secular, self-presentations are porous, in that they shift over time and in both directions (i.e., organizations become more explicitly expressive of their religious character, or they choose to consciously abandon elements of their religious identity as time passes and their structure develops).

Findings regarding such organizational self-definition processes did not emerge from an explicit research question I had at the outset of the study, but instead arose through the course of efforts to address the questions I articulate in the above section. Initially, my research design compared faith-based organizations with small non-profits more secular in their approach, but this line of inquiry was revised as it became increasingly clear that neat distinctions between the two were false and untenable. Subsequently, my research design was revised to compare theologically liberal, theologically conservative, and community-based organizations.

I argue this finding is an especially important contribution to the literature on the faith-based and community initiatives, as many other analysts (especially those who do survey research) generally take organizational self-definitions as either "faith-based" or "community-based" at face value (this is often a matter of necessity for those who work with large datasets).¹⁷ As well, as many studies of the faith-based initiative draw conclusions from expenditure data that conflates the two, yet represents them as separate, which leads to a superimposition of a false divide on the shifting boundary between those

organizations that identify as faith-based and those that identify as community-based.

This practice leads to an underestimation of funds flowing to faith-based organizations, and perhaps more importantly, further contributes to the tendency to overlook processes through which organizations shift in their religious content and self-identification over time.¹⁸ I explore my findings regarding the religious self-identification of small non-profits in both the methods chapter and the 4th chapter, the latter of which includes an exploration of interview data with program authorities providing services in a large, Midwestern metropolitan area.

Charitable Choice and Welfare Reform

The enactment of welfare reform law in 1996 constituted a policy sea change that “ended welfare as we know it” (Clinton, qtd. in Vobejda 1996:A01). In the wake of the PRWORA, “faith-based” strategies, or partnerships between religious organizations and government bodies, (re)emerged as viable solutions for dealing with poverty in America. Between 1996 and 2000, Congress enacted a series of laws designed to allow the state to fund approved religious and charitable social service organizations in their provision of public services. Programs eligible for funding included counseling, drug treatment, marriage and parenting education, youth mentoring and tutoring, child care, housing assistance, and job training. Collectively, these laws were referred to as “Charitable Choice,” and they were primarily significant in that they allowed faith-based organizations to openly display religious symbols; communicate religious principles while delivering services; receive exemption from civil rights laws governing discrimination in hiring and firing in state-funded programs; and amended existing law so

as to no longer require religious organizations to establish separate, secular subsidiary organizations. According to Neal (1999), “Charitable Choice enabled Bush to forward ‘the underlying message of traditional values and allowed it to be presented in a nontraditional way that [was] caring and nonjudgmental’” (qtd. in Mink 2001). Mink (2001) argues that Bush’s faith-based strategies marked a new peak in government-sponsored religious moralism, while simultaneously signaling the retreat of government responsibility: “...Charitable Choice represents a fusion of the neoliberal urge to privatize and the hard Right’s urge to moralize” (9).

Ralph Reed, former Christian Coalition director and advisor to President George W. Bush, noted that the Charitable Choice concept was key for the promotion of Bush’s domestic policy platform that extolled the virtues of “compassionate conservatism”—an ideology that advanced the notion that because receipt of social welfare funds from government promotes “dependency,” “compassionate” solutions to poverty should involve cooperation between business, private charities, and religious institutions, as contrasted with the direct disbursement of resources to individuals.¹

Additional components of compassionate conservative philosophy and practice, such as “workfare,” the increased surveillance of assistance recipients’ behaviors to encourage “personal responsibility,” other punitive measures designed to encourage morally desirable behavior, and tying fiscal support to “results-based” programming, share in common an underlying logic that argues for a return to traditional familism. A White House document titled, “Fact Sheet: Compassionate Conservatism” cites Bush’s insistence that “It is compassionate to actively help our citizens in need. It is

conservative to insist on accountability and results" (<http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2002/04/20020430.html>).

One of the key texts associated with articulating and furthering this ideology is Marvin Olasky's *Compassionate Conservatism* (2000), which was distributed to all members of the Republican party and their political allies by former Speaker of the House, Newt Gingrich. Olasky argues that government has failed in lifting citizens out of poverty partially because it has created a massively inefficient and impersonal bureaucracy, and partially because in its misguided pursuit of impartiality, the state abandoned its duty to engage in the moral reformation of the materially and spiritually destitute. Instead, Olasky insists, the answer to contemporary social ills lies in our nation's houses of worship and religious charitable organizations, as religious institutions are especially well-positioned to partner with government in addressing the needs of the poor through moral reform, as "Man is sinful and likely to want something for nothing. ... Man's sinful nature leads to indolence" (1996:64, 41). Olasky constructs his argument by mining the past to illustrate the church's greater capacity to provide, maintaining that the poor, those serving them, and the nation overall were better off for leaving social provision in the hands of the church. Some criticize the text for "cherry picking" favorable exemplars from history, and ignoring the harsh realities that uneven social provision created in 18th and 19th century America (Hackworth 2012). Controversy aside, the body of Olasky's work has served as a key discursive resource for those arguing for a return to church-based social welfare provision.

President George W. Bush's Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives & President Obama's Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships

As governor of Texas, George W. Bush began implementing the Charitable Choice provisions of 1996 welfare reform legislation to support the work of faith-based groups in Texas. As President, Bush created the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives through a series of executive orders on January 29, 2001.²

Statements by leaders in law and policy established a discursive field which drew on important historical precedent for government-religious partnerships in order to establish a space for dialogue about the possibilities presented by state and religious partnerships. Much of the rhetoric used in these debates revolved around the constitutionality of the expansion of government contracting relationships with faith-based organizations in solving social ills. Support for faith-based organizations from Bush's White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives was represented by many as tapping organizations with a strong desire to aid government in the task of caring for the poor, who were at the time being 'turned away at the gate.' "Discrimination" against religious organizations and the favoring of more secular institutions by government entities were seen as major barriers that required legislative action. Despite a sizable amount of initial opposition, Bush and other OFBCI supporters aimed to "level the playing field" between secular and religious providers by codifying "nondiscrimination" principles in law, and by extending direct invitations and distributing information to faith-based leaders through conferences, requests for proposals (RFPs), and public statements. In conjunction with a wave of successive legislation designed to encourage charitable giving and the increased participation of religious organizations³, the involvement and insight of faith-based

groups were now welcomed by government entities with open arms and financial resources.⁴ Ultimately, however, the greatest impact of the initiative lay not in dollar amounts or percentages of congregations participating, but instead in the transformation of the discursive landscape in which secular providers compete alongside religious organizations for government resources.

The primary fiscal vehicle of the OFBCI was the Compassion Capital Fund (CCF), administered by the Department of Health and Human Services. Despite supporters widely touting new funding opportunities for faith-based organizations, the CCF constituted the only pool of resources directly associated with the OFBCI, and created by the presidential Executive Orders.⁵ All other associated funds and programs were established and disbursed through the reduction of budgets for existing programs. One such example is the massive decrease in funds allocated for the Head Start program, which served to ‘create’ financial resources earmarked for faith-based and community partnerships. The Bush Administration’s practice of shifting assets from existing social programs to cabinet-level funding pools designated for faith-based and community programming was widespread (Kuo 2006). Therefore, the criticism that the OFBCI did its intended work at the expense of established programming is not an unfounded one.

The CCF’s annual budget was \$30 million in 2002, and nearly doubled to \$57.8 million in 2007. In addition, hundreds of mini-grants (up to \$50,000) were awarded directly to local faith-based and community organizations via the CCF (Chaves & Wineburg 2010). Dozens of “intermediary organizations” across the country were also granted funding under the CCF to provide training and technical assistance to small faith-based and

community organizations seeking public funds. Those same intermediary organizations were also given federal resources to make capacity building sub-awards⁶ to local organizations, and have awarded hundreds of grants to local congregations and small faith-based non-profits (Kramer, Finegold, De Vita, & Wherry 2005).

In February of 2009, in order to fulfill one of his pre-election promises, President Barack Obama signed an executive order establishing the new “White House Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships” (Sullivan 2009). Echoing Bush’s earlier statements on the inadequacy of state capacity to solve our most pressing contemporary social ills, Obama argued: “No matter how much money we invest or how sensibly we design our policies, the change that Americans are looking for will not come from government alone. ...There is a force for good greater than government” (qtd. in Zeleny & Goodstein 2009). Amidst continuing public concerns about employment discrimination and the separation of church and state, other public statements from Obama affirm the constitutionality of the program and his commitment to prohibiting *client* discrimination and proselytization (Sullivan 2009). Continuing champions of government-religious partnerships have acknowledged a historical tendency to privilege organizations affiliated with more mainstream religious denominations, though they also voice a belief in the administration’s commitment to extend increased support to minority-associated (both racial and religious) faith institutions (Zeleny & Goodstein 2009).⁷

Religious Organizations and the Provision of Social Welfare: Change and Continuity in Faith-Based Partnerships

Religious organizations have long partnered with state entities to provide social welfare programming. However, practices and discursive structures associated with the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives (and Obama's 'reincarnation' of the program) represent a departure from historical patterns of partnership in four main ways. First, the scope of faith-based organizations' involvement in social welfare provision has broadened. Faith-based organizations are now engaged in providing a far broader array of services, receiving state resources channeled through such unlikely places as Homeland Security, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the Small Business Administration, and the U.S. Department of Commerce (see <http://www.whitehouse.gov/administration/eop/ofbnp/offices/federal> for more details).

Second, although faith-related groups have a long history of providing social services to local communities in the United States (Salamon 1995), government's practice of partnering with both small houses of worship and overtly religious environments distinguishes more recent faith-based collaborations from earlier government-religious relationships. In the 19th century, many social service groups were somehow affiliated with organized religion (Smith & Lipsky 1993). In the 1960s' War on Poverty, a number of faith-based social service providers played key roles in terms of needs provision and community organizing (Wuthnow 1998). Many of these religious leaders were associated with the civil rights movement and operated under a "liberation theology" framework—a doctrine originating in Catholicism which looks to the teachings of Jesus Christ for prescriptions on how people of faith are called to engage in efforts to 'liberate' the poor from unjust economic, political, and social conditions. As part of broader civil

rights efforts, Community Action Agencies in particular (established by the Johnson Administration's Economic Opportunity Act of 1964) invited religious leaders, religious organizations, other community activists, and social welfare recipients into partnership with government to provide a wide range of human services at the local level to help individuals "rise out of poverty" in efforts to "build self-sufficiency" (Piven & Cloward 1977).

Ultimately, the boundary between church and state has been permeable to some degree throughout the history of social welfare in the United States (Twombly 2002). Many faith-related groups have received funds over long periods of time, and have also participated in setting the public agenda regarding the distribution of resources in local areas (McCarthy and Castelli 1998). Since the New Deal era, this role had been largely restricted solely to large, bureaucratized, and secularized organizations such as Lutheran Social Services and the Salvation Army, both of which continue to partner with government.⁸ However, social service organizations with historically overt religious orientations—such as Catholic Charities and Jewish Family Services—gradually became secularized from the mid-20th century onward. In particular, the Great Depression necessitated a dramatic and rapid expansion of the U.S.' social service infrastructure—a task that was largely undertaken by federal government under the impetus of the New Deal—which resulted in secular institutions "crowding out" religious institutions in local economies of service provision (Cnaan 1999). Correspondingly, the topics of religion and spirituality grew increasingly scarce in social work literature and practice, which Tangenberg (2003) attributes to a variety of causes: the mandatory separation of church

and state in services provided through public funds (Cnaan 1999); Euro-American authority within the profession of social work (Schiele 1997), and increasing ethical and scientific concerns associated with professionalism (Tangenberg 2000; Wineburg 2001).

Third, new legislation has also granted greater levels of freedom to religious organizations by permitting faith-based organizations to express their faith through displaying religious symbolism and discussing “religious principles” with recipients of services. Under Charitable Choice, religious groups receiving government funds are prohibited from proselytizing, but need not strip their religious character. In the past, however, religious organizations delivering services with public funds were required to establish separate, secular, subsidiary organizations with their own 501.3C status, distinct governance structure, and independent bookkeeping. Despite provisions that allow for the display of religious symbols, however, faith-based organizations are not allowed to dictate church membership or coerce religious conversion among clients. Yet providers are within their legal right when they communicate religious principles in counseling, job training, or other services, or hold voluntary prayers (Mink 2001:6).

Through the course of data collection, I discovered the boundary between proselytization and the communication of religious principles in programming is a complicated and porous line. Unruh & Sider (2005) illustrate the point well in their description of providers’ use of testimonies, or

...sharing faith from personal experience, often highlighting the role that one’s faith has played in helping with needs similar to those of beneficiaries. ...Testimonials speak of faith in the subjective, stopping short of directing to listeners what *they* should believe, though that message may be implied. ...the key distinction is whether the religious discussion is brought to the personal level and framed in terms of a decision. This element involves laying out a set of beliefs

or course of action intended to lead the beneficiary to a spiritually transforming experience (91-93).

Unruh & Sider's equating proselytization with leading participants to a "spiritually transforming experience" is an apt yet murky description, and definitions of what constitutes proselytization is not explicitly codified into existing law. As a "safeguard" provision, Charitable Choice mandated that government provide an alternative for clients who object to receiving services from faith-based providers, though the specific requirements for satisfaction of this provision remain unclear to this day, especially in rural environments where religious charities may be prevalent, and alternatives may be limited (Hodge 1998).

Overall, the provision of funds to religious providers with overtly religious characters has become increasingly normative, which has made attempts at contestation less frequent and less resonant. This represents a significant departure from the pre-reform welfare landscape through dictating what is permissible, and what is preferable, in the context of social provision in the U.S. Supporters at the level of elite discourse have established powerful claims that small religious organizations have greater levels of access to the most marginalized in our society, the capacity to build trust in fragmented communities, and the flexibility needed to develop innovative solutions to the unique problems local communities face. Taken together, widespread political support for such arguments has created a discursive environment where detractors of the practice lose rhetorical footholds.

Fourth, and finally, written into Charitable Choice legislation is the right of religious organizations to exercise discretion in hiring and firing due to their historic exemption from Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Though religious organizations have always enjoyed historical exemption from civil rights laws governing hiring and firing, they can now do so in conjunction with receipt of public funds.

In addition, and perhaps most significantly, post-Charitable Choice partnerships between small houses of worship and government entities occur in a broader social context marked by the rise of “religious neoliberalism.” Religious neoliberalism refers to both an ideological orientation and a coalition of elites, and is explicated in greater detail below. Taken together, the above institutional and historical shifts—in conjunction with discourses and practices associated with religious neoliberalism—serve to alter both structures of meaning and repertoires of action in the field of U.S. social service provision.

“Religious Neoliberalism” Defined: Ideology & Political Coalition in Welfare Reform Efforts and Beyond

Neoliberalism refers to “an economic policy, [an] expression of political power, and [an] ideational hegemony,” that together “[stress] the necessity and desirability of transferring economic power and control from governments to private markets (Centeno & Cohen 2012: 317; cf. Brown 2006). In addition, the doctrine of neoliberalism holds that the market should act as a compass for all human action. Neoliberalism rose to the world stage beginning in the 1970s with the policies of Ronald Reagan, Margaret Thatcher, Deng Xiaoping, and Augusto Pinochet serving as its primary vehicles—though early

roots can be traced to backlash against Depression era Keynesian economics (Harvey 2005). The term itself involves a combination of the liberal tradition's commitment to autonomy and the operation of the free market, and anti-state interventionism promoted in neoclassical economics. The formula is as follows: trade and markets should flow freely, entrepreneurs should operate unencumbered, and government should maintain active support through limiting regulation and upholding property rights.

Harvey (2005) details that following the conclusion of the Cold War, neoliberalism spread to nations across the globe, with Chile and China serving as forerunners (cf. Centeno & Cohen 2012). The consequences of neoliberal policies have often been negative, including the redistribution of wealth from the poor to the rich, widespread commodification, environmental degradation, economic crisis and collapse, and heavy public costs for 'bailouts' to major financial institutions and industry. Harvey also associates neoliberal doctrine with the emergence of neoconservatism, a related ideology that criticizes the welfare state as inhibiting the moral regulatory functions of the free market, promotes the primacy of individual autonomy, and calls for U.S. intervention in international affairs in order to actively promote the spread of similar models of governance.

The rise of *religious* neoliberalism serves to contextualize political developments associated with recent partnerships between government and small faith-based programs and related ideology.⁹ Similar to neoliberalism in general, religious neoliberalism is a tripartite concept involving a political ideology, specific policies modeled to enact those ideals, and a concrete coalition of political and religious elites. Hackworth (2012) relates

that the ideology of religious neoliberalism represents a marriage of interests between fiscal conservatives and theological conservatives. At the elite level, fiscal conservatives' desire for "small government" dovetails well with religious conservatives' dictates to achieve Christian control of secular institutions and interject strict social values 'back' into the public sphere through the return of practices attaching biblically-anchored, normative behavioral expectations to poverty relief (Kaplan 2004; Lindsay 2008). A strong commitment to ethics of antistatism and individualism is a primary, unifying thread that binds the two groups together.

Religious neoliberals' calls to downsize take on new meaning in the context of neoliberal 'Reaganomics,' which include policies designed to roll-back post-New Deal government-provided entitlements. Relatedly, calls to "privatize" government functions via public-private partnerships should be viewed through the lens of the post-New Deal social service secularization processes described above—developments decried by a cadre of theologically conservative public figures referred to as "dominionists," who seek to reinsert religious values in social life through gaining Christian control of public institutions (Goldberg 2007). Overall, religious neoliberalism represents a significant departure from the pre-PRWORA landscape through dictating what is permissible, what is preferable, and what is possible in the repertoire of social welfare practices in the U.S.

Biebricher (2011) claims relations of care established in government-sponsored faith-based programming should be understood as representing a departure from traditional conceptualizations of neoliberalism, insofar as they defer to biblical precepts as authoritative, and therefore reintroduce religious values into the purportedly 'value free'

marketplace. Such relationships of need provision hearken back to earlier forms of religious moral authority, and “combine the activating rhetoric of neoliberalism with religious (spiritual transformation) and illiberal (supervisory intervention) elements” (Biebricher 2011:399).

Biebricher begins his analysis by tracing Foucault’s juxtaposition of two models of governance: one rooted in ancient Greek democratic tradition that posits the city or territory as object of authority, and the other grounded in ancient Hebrew traditions that rule through a “shepherd and flock” analogy, in which the gaze of governance is shifted onto the individual. Subsequent Christian mobilizations of the pastoral model implied “the birth of an absolutely new form of power” (Foucault 2007:183; qtd. in Biebricher 2011). Though Foucault’s application of the descriptor “new” to the extension of pastoral power is questionable, the two models nevertheless provide a useful conceptualization of the operation of authority in state-sponsored faith-based social services, and offers insight into the distinction between neoliberalism overall and *religious* neoliberalism in particular.

As in neoliberalism, individualism is a central part of the religious neoliberal formula, as calls to cultivate “personal responsibility” draw on material and spiritual elements to motivate “clients to become personally invested in their own treatment or resolution of their situation” (Steckman 2009:2). However, whereas under neoliberal doctrine, individuals are to be disciplined by the consequences of ‘market failure,’ religious neoliberalism calls for *self*-discipline as “subjects are not constituted as hard-nosed utility maximizers who could be governed through external cash (dis-)incentives; they are,

rather, in need of spiritual and moral guidance...” (406). Therefore, the underlying logic in government-religious social service partnerships presupposes a perceived failure in previous efforts to discipline the poor, as the targets of the policy are not constructed

...as the inherently enterprising selves of neoliberalism that can be steered through cash incentives and they are not fully autonomous victims of structural discrimination either; rather, they are characterized by a thorough lack of basic competences that will not be remedied through incentives or the removal of barriers” (Biebricher 2011:407).

Therefore, both social democratic and classical neoliberal models are represented as inadequate.

Despite the “novel subjectivities as well as novel forms of governing” Biebricher argues are constructed within state-funded faith-based programs, it is important to emphasize that the policy’s foundation in moral supervisory elements builds on important historical precedent. For example, Rosenberg (1985) details the ways mid-nineteenth century middle class moral reformers involved in New York City’s mission movement found a renewed awakening of idealism in the evangelistic revivals of local religious leaders. Moral surveillance rooted in religious principles was central in the New England Federalist aristocracy’s “symbolic crusade” against “the drinker, the ignorant, the secularist, and the religious revivalist” during the first wave of the temperance movement of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, with subsequent waves using alcohol consumption as a vehicle for anti-immigrant sentiments and associated agendas (Gusfield 1986:5). Zurcher et. al (1971) extends Gusfield’s concept of the symbolic crusade to the efforts of anti-pornography groups, finding that upwards of 70% of their respondents attended church once or more per week, with many citing religious belief in their rationales for action.

In particular, an examination of the efforts of an elite coalition of proponents of ideas generally associated with religious neoliberalism to support and facilitate the passage of the PRWORA serves to demonstrate the reach and power of the ideology. This group is broadly referred to as the “Christian Right,” and includes an informal network of political organizations and think-tanks seeking to influence law, policy, electoral politics, public debate, and authority in public institutions through activism that focuses mainly on mobilizing voters courted in the context of individual worship communities.¹⁰ In particular, legislators, local-level religious and other community leaders, and members of a ‘grassroots’ political constituency were targeted by the Christian Rights’ pro-PRWORA efforts.

It is important to note that not all affiliates of the Christian Right, nor all economic conservatives, nor all members of the Republican party, subscribe wholesale to the tenets of religious neoliberalism. The ideology represents a contested terrain, and the groups and individuals involved at different levels of analysis should not be conflated. The fact that religious neoliberalism is primarily an *elite* ideology deserves attention as well—rank-and-file evangelicals and other conservative Christians do not replicate the texture of the doctrine as it is articulated by national leaders.

In addition, although moral and fiscal conservatives played central roles in the passage of the PRWORA, religious neoliberal ideology codified in welfare reform law could not have achieved widespread legitimacy without some level of support from both moderate and liberal politicians, as well as an ample proportion of the general public. This fact also speaks to the broad resonance of the ideology with a number of moderate and liberal

Americans. It is important to remember that with each unique, successive campaign to implement religious neoliberal principles, the boundaries dividing supporters, detractors, and those who *rearticulate* stated goals shift. Overall, however, the discursive backbone of the legislation was established by a coalition of actors espousing religious neoliberal ideals, as disseminated by policymakers and public figures.

Some brief historical context proves useful in making sense of the developments that led up to the passage of the PRWORA. Oldfield (1996; cf. Regnerus & Smith 1998) delineates that the period between the 1930s and the 1960s was characterized by evangelical elites' calls to withdraw from the political world, though this began to shift in the 1970s amid religious conservative ideologues' mobilization of their constituencies around the perceived social ills presented by modernization, secular humanism, and the pluralization of the public sphere. The late 1980s and early 1990s saw the rise of the Christian Right to a position of considerable public influence. The power of this loose coalition became apparent when leaders associated with the movement began to win control of state and local Republican parties, which further cemented the relationship between political and religious conservatives, and granted the coalition heightened levels of power in the public sphere.

Notably, however, leaders and community members in local contexts do not adopt the ideology of elites wholesale, and instead, they often reformulate elements of political discourse in creative and multifaceted ways. While some argue the "culture wars" divide is important, or indeed, central in the lives of 'everyday' Americans (Hunter 1991), others argue that citizens in the US are characterized more by the similarities than by the

differences in their political thinking—even among those who explicitly claim personal status as either “conservative” or “liberal” (Wolfe 1999). In addition, although the language and practices of the Christian Right imply that politics and theology coincide, the similarities and differences between political and theological divides are often far more slippery, especially at the level of ‘everyday’ rhetoric and practice.

Both of the above arguments are made by Edgell (2006), whose study of gender and family in local-level, largely white, middle class worship communities demonstrated that while there are important differences between theological liberals and conservatives, significant similarities between the two should mitigate claims of substantial difference. In particular, liberals and conservatives shared important elements of their definitions of what constitutes ideal family life, as well as understandings of changes in family life that present ‘problems’ to be solved (such as the “time bind” (Hochschild 1997)].¹¹ Despite these similarities, important differences remained. For instance, whereas most all leaders expressed the need to be “inclusive” of individuals living in non-nuclear family forms, liberals and conservatives differed on the extent to which they defined such forms as evidence of “brokenness” and individual moral failure, which in turn, dictated important differences in the strategies congregational authorities deployed in efforts directed at inclusion. There was mutual agreement that the “time bind” and changes in the American family structure presented “new” family needs to be met, but theological differences dictated the extent to which doing so should go so far as to couple such efforts with redefining the family itself to include non-nuclear structures. Edgell (2006) also found differences in family rhetoric and practice within the theological conservative

category itself. Whereas some conservatives were “responsive” in meeting and talking about the “new” needs of families, others (most often fundamentalists) saw these “new” needs as stemming from poor choices, skewed values, or individual moral failings (114).

The work of Edgell and others demonstrates the centrality of questions surrounding gender and family in need provision. Given religious conservative leaders’ central involvement in the development of welfare reform, the PRWORA should be seen as a primary legislative success for proponents of the codification of fiscal and theological conservatives’ shared goals to reduce social spending so as to discourage “dependency”—a term with myriad gender implications (Fraser & Gordon 1994). The PRWORA also represents the culmination of the above agenda in that it institutionalizes normative visions of family structure and gender roles. The text of the PRWORA explicitly states the promotion of heterosexual, two parent households was a major goal of the policy, given the following “findings:”

(1) Marriage is the foundation of a successful society. (2) Marriage is a central institution of a successful society, which promotes the interest of children. (3) Promotion of responsible fatherhood and motherhood is integral to successful child-rearing and the well-being of children (qtd. in Reese 2005:190).

To discourage out-of-wedlock childbearing, Congress allocated \$50 million annually in an “illegitimacy bonus,” \$10 million to reward the ten states with the highest annual percentage increase in the number of children residing in married, two-parent households, and \$50 million for abstinence-only sex education and marriage promotion. Such provisions were further augmented by state-level programs which awarded funds for the programmatic implementation of clergy-developed community marriage standards, as

well as granting additional public assistance funds to families upon the establishment of a legal marriage in the household.

The passage of the PRWORA was a watershed moment in the US welfare state. Aside from including Charitable Choice provisions, welfare reform also ushered in a number of other changes to the unraveling social safety net, including an end to universal entitlement, increased rewards for behaviors deemed consistent with the goals of policy, more punitive approaches to perceived moral transgressions, and increased levels of surveillance—all of which had moral implications for the family structure and gender roles of recipients, in one fashion or another. For example, full-time mothering was no longer deemed a priority worthy of government support, as mothers were now expected to meet work requirements or face state sanction. For single parent households, incentives to marry were built on the assumption that marriage would eventually reduce women's "dependence" on state resources.

Looking to the elite discourse articulated in the "Contract with America," precursor to the PRWORA, highlights the ways gender and family are pivotal elements of principles and practices associated with religious neoliberal ideology. The "Contract with America," a document released by the Republican Party in 1994, served as the basis for much of the objectives and language included in the PRWORA. The text was co-authored by Gingrich, DeLay, Boehner, and others, and much of the content was informed by contributions from The Heritage Foundation, a prominent conservative think-tank. The Christian Coalition endorsed the "Contract," claiming it as a mandate for their own efforts, which served to explicitly bind the agenda of the Christian Right to the

Republican party. Founder Ralph Reed remarked: "We have finally gained what we have always sought: a place at the table, a sense of legitimacy and a voice in the conversation we call democracy" (qtd. in Durham 2000:107).

Indeed, in 1995, Ralph Reed released the "Contract with the American Family," a 10-point legislative proposal intended to supplement and augment Gingrich's "Contract with America." The 10 points of the contract, assembled in collaboration with fellow Christian Coalition co-founder Pat Robertson, are summarized as follows:

Religious equality; Local control of education; School choice; Family-friendly tax policy; Restoring respect for human life; Restricting pornography; Privatizing federal funding of culture; Support for private charities; Protecting parental rights; [and] Punishing criminals, not victims (www.publiceye.fileferrets.org/ifas/fw/9506/contract.html).

Among the proposed legislation in the Republican Party's "Contract for America" was the "Personal Responsibility Act," which served as a resource and template for much of the language and agenda codified in the PRWORA, and detailed a strategy for discouraging nonmarital and teen childbearing by reducing direct cash assistance and related programs. The logic of the "Contract" was based on the presumption that refusing public assistance to mothers under 18, denying increases in AFDC benefits for families bearing additional children while on welfare, requiring a five year lifetime limit on AFDC, implementing work requirements to promote "individual responsibility," and revoking the driver's licenses of those who fail to pay child support would—alongside other institutionalizations of "family values"—encourage nuclear family structures among the poor.

"Remoralization" & Religious Neoliberalism: Contemporary Policy & Historical Context

Overall, the decline of universal entitlement has created an environment where a variety of proposed solutions to the state's fiscal crisis are actively considered. Faith-based initiatives¹² represent one such alternative to universal entitlement, and are represented as institutions where approaches to poverty relief are "remoralized." Essentially, the philosophy of remoralization holds that assistance should come with 'strings attached' in the form of normative expectations for behavioral and attitudinal changes on the part of beneficiaries (Unruh & Sider 2005). To return to Biebricher's (2011) invocation of the shepherd-flock analogy, "relations of care" prescribed by the faith-based initiative establish that "unconditional obedience from each member of the flock is required just as much as the absolute commitment of the shepherd who is accountable for each and every sheep" (404). Such relations therefore establish the expectation for reciprocation.

Questions associated with remoralizing practices have been long entertained in the liminal space between church and state. Since the passage of the PRWORA, they have been increasingly spotlighted. As Hughes (1998:74) asserts, "The moral communitarian appeal to the community as the basis for the remoralization of society and a new welfare order... emerged in the 1990s in the USA," which is represented as "the new common sense" among prominent conservative thinkers.¹³ Biebrecher (2011) argues that although moral assumptions are nearly always built into social welfare policy, they had been relatively marginalized "ever since Prohibition failed and the Great Depression made the claim that poverty was a matter of individual conduct and morality implausible at best" (402). Although the extent to which moral assumptions in social welfare policy had been "marginalized" (especially with regard to vilified groups such as African Americans,

single mothers, and immigrants) during the period extending from the Great Depression to welfare reform is questionable at best, it is clear the important shifts in the moralizing content of social welfare policy happened during the times that ‘bookend’ this period.

Morgan (2006) argues religious ideology was especially influential in shaping the U.S. welfare state throughout the 1960s and ‘70s—a fact she attributes to the political power achieved by religious conservatives, though this fact alone does not fully explain the presence and pull of religious values in social policy. According to Morgan (2006), one must also consider the resonance of such religious values among the general American public, given relatively high levels of national religious commitment. Taken together, the power of religious elites and the strength of religious values among the American public both served to play important role in the codification of traditional gender roles and the male breadwinner family model in social welfare policy during the aforementioned time period. Though Morgan’s estimation most closely approximates my own, I do contend that relative to the pre-Depression era, there was a downward overall trend in moralizing impulses over the time extending from the Depression to the PRWORA-era, and changes wrought by policy associated with the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives represent an especially dramatic comparative arc in the *religious* remoralization of the welfare state.

Religious strategies for addressing poverty that place moral reform at center stage have important historical roots—hence the “re-“ that prefaces “remoralization.” Such moralizing impulses also extend beyond the liberal-conservative religious divide, tapping into mainstream American sentiments. Gowan (2010) argues that the Protestant

Reformation ushered in a revolutionary change in moralizing approaches to poverty relief. Prior to the Reformation, Catholic transcendental ideology dictated that to refuse almsgiving and other assistance to the poor was akin to risking dangerous outcomes on Judgment Day. Therefore, one could achieve spiritual renewal by engaging the needs of the impoverished. Poverty was not yet deemed a threat to the social order, and indeed, was a taken-for-granted aspect of this-worldly life under Catholic doctrine. In addition, widespread disease, population growth, and mobility ensured that piecemeal and uneven support resulted in a network of provision that could never fully meet the needs of the population—though distinctions between the “deserving” and “undeserving,” and the “able-bodied” and weak or infirm had not yet taken root in the public consciousness. However, the Protestant Reformation institutionalized the aforementioned distinctions through the dictates of the Protestant work ethic and prosperity theology, which served to represent poverty as an outward manifestation of moral deficiency, spiritual weakness, and sinfulness. Therefore, Protestant religious elites and local leaders argued “beggars,” “vagrants,” and “vagabonds” should be closely monitored by religious and government authorities. In Luther’s own words: “If each town would only keep an eye upon their paupers, such knaveries would soon be at an end” (qtd. in Gowan 2010:31). Luther’s orientation was soon adopted on a widespread basis, and served to represent poverty as associated with criminality and a host of other social ills.

Distinctions between the “deserving” and the undeserving persisted into the 17th and 18th centuries, whereby those deemed most morally upright or exhibiting the greatest capacity for rehabilitation—generally, women—were awarded “outdoor relief,” or assistance that

did not require institutionalization. Confinement to the poorhouse (institutions generally overseen by local government and worship communities) was reserved for the sick, vagabonds, and drifters, where abusive treatment and filth were widespread. A third strategy was auctioning off care for the poor to the lowest private bidder, individuals who generally sought to reduce costs by keeping their dependents in similarly deplorable conditions. Such practices persisted into the late 18th and 19th century, and poverty relief continued to be administered on an uneven, localized basis (Katz 1986). Need associated with the social upheaval and unrest wrought by the industrial revolution necessitated a further expansion of local institutions: jails, asylums, and orphanages sprang up alongside the traditional poorhouse to warehouse the growing numbers of the destitute.

Gowan (2010) further relates that 19th century elite positions on the causes and consequences of poverty were heavily informed by the writings of classical economists Jeremy Bentham, David Ricardo, and Thomas Malthus, the last of whom lent ideological foundations for the eugenics movement, positing the failings of the poor in inherent biological defect. Together, these thinkers “saw the roots of poverty in insufficient discipline, illegitimacy, and the pernicious effects of relief on the labor market” (32-33). Institutionalization and hard labor were the proposed remedies for moral restoration, in which some reformers saw a potential for rehabilitation, particularly through new medicalizing, therapeutic discourses that sought to sort the truly reprehensible from the elderly, children, and the physically and mentally ill. However, a lack of resources worked to thwart these impulses, as evidenced by the barriers faced in establishing separate institutions for those convicted of criminal offenses and for the non-criminal

poor. Where infirmaries did arise, fiscal constraints dictated the removal of ‘transients.’ Moral reform projects, and corresponding formulas for punishment, often superseded the provision of medical care. Local variation in settlement laws worked to further restrict access to relief through establishing increasingly stringent residency requirements, bolstering distinctions between the “deserving” and “undeserving.”

Skocpol’s (1992) analysis of the unique contours of US welfare state policy represents a landmark exploration of such moral categories of entitlement. Writing against depictions of the early US welfare state as a “laggard,” Skocpol argues that US social policy should instead be viewed as prematurely developed due to relatively generous outlays for “soldiers and mothers” in civil war veterans’ and widows’ pension programs (1992:1). According to Skocpol, veterans and single mothers represent two identity-based categories deemed especially worthy of public support, though provision for other groups such as the elderly, the unemployed, the disabled, and the working poor were historically subject to greater levels of contestation.

Mohr (1994) builds on Skocpol’s analysis, examining charity directories to determine which Progressive era status identities were deemed entitled, which groups were “out of favor,” and the ways gender informed the delimitations of “status domains” that worked to establish entitlement on moral grounds (330). In general, his findings further bolster Skocpol’s central claims, “with soldiers anchoring the core position in an achieved status domain, and mothers occupying the core position in an ascribed status domain” (353). His discursive mapping further illuminate that “the unemployed, ex-convicts, and female immigrants occupied a common role position” (354). Mohr also concludes that

“ungendered immigrants [were] located in a different discourse role than female immigrants” (354). He attributes this difference to ethnic community-led relief organizations’ emphasis of common cultural bonds above gender differences, versus Nativist organizations’ tendency to address “the dangerous moral implications of female immigrants” with domestication and Americanization projects (354). Though ancillary to Mohr’s stated agenda for inquiry, his coding scheme uncovers the ways “good moral qualities” were associated with religious themes, many of which were also tied to gender via the language of female piety and purity and male adherence to the Protestant work ethic.¹⁴

Beisel’s (1997) work further demonstrates the salience of moral categories of worth among reform movements in the Victorian era US. She maintains that middle class social reformers’ efforts to protect the ‘moral purity’ of children through organizations such as the “New England Society for the Suppression of Vice” represented broader anxieties about the “imperiled” status of their offspring’s chances for upward social mobility, given a perceived threat to political power posed by the rapid influx of immigrants (38). The “vice” and crime that proliferated among urban slum dwellers were interpreted by the reformers as evidence of a lack of sufficient moral foundation tied to religious virtue, and were “not blamed on low wages and periodic economic recession but on... presumed ‘shiftlessness’ and ‘intemperance’” (106).

Historical precedent delineated in works such as Skocpol’s (1992), Mohr’s (1994), and Beisel’s (1997) helps explain the robust appeal of the remoralizing impulse for religious neoliberal elites, which lies in the echoing of long-standing discourse on the perceived

necessity of drawing distinctions between the “deserving” and “undeserving” as a religious imperative. The aforementioned constituency claims small faith-based organizations can best meet the needs of individuals in local contexts, in part because in their view, unnecessarily expensive state-based welfare encourages dependency precisely because it fails at moral reformation. Such claims are amplified by fiscal conservatives’ criticisms of ‘wasteful’ government spending, which purportedly results in ineffective and unwieldy bureaucracy.

Aside from criticisms of faith-based approaches that cite problematic outcomes associated with sorting the “deserving” from the “undeserving,” critics also cite an additional morally ‘sticky’ element implicit in the promotion of faith-based initiatives: the abdication of government responsibility for providing for the poor through foisting such responsibility onto the church. Olasky and other supporters of faith-based aid argue that by expanding social welfare programs administered in small houses of worship, Charitable Choice’s state funding of social ministries could “decrease the need for government action” (Leonard 2001; qtd. in Mink 2001). Indeed, it is hard to argue against the claim that Bush’s call to “rally the armies of compassion” during a time of government crisis implies that funneling state resources to social ministries will allow government to rely on the unpaid work of volunteer worship community members. Some question the extent to which doing so is a morally sound practice, especially in the context of amplified need in a failing economy.¹⁵

As there is diversity among programs that participate in the initiative, scholars agree there is no ideal-type faith-based organization. However, certain kinds are venerated by

religious neoliberal discourse as especially valuable, which in turn comes to shape grant-making and program administration practices: Those that shun state funds, those that explicitly communicate religious principles, and those that emphasize personal responsibility. It is important to note that local community leaders working in faith-based organizations do not unilaterally represent the interests of religious neoliberalism, much less the interests of a monolithic state. However, white, conservative Protestant groups have been explicitly targeted by the faith-based initiative from the inception of such policies (Chaves & Wineburg 2010). Funds in early years were channeled to the Republican administration's political allies (Kuo 2006). Pat Robertson's "Operation Blessing," an international group providing disaster relief, medical aid, food, clean water, community development, and orphan care, was one of the 21 recipients of the very first round of grants issued by the Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives via the Department of Health and Human Services. In two years' time, the group's annual revenue from government grants went from \$108,000 to \$14.4 million (Sizemore 2006). Indeed, an initial interview I conducted with the Director of an intermediary organization indicated that concerns regarding a lack of diversity in the nation-wide grant recipient pool are not unfounded.¹⁶ I explore the nation-wide demographic characteristics of faith-based initiative funds in greater detail in the following chapter, which includes a discussion of limitations in existing data.

Gender, Family, & Race; Religious Neoliberalism; & Remoralization

Elite calls to (re)introduce or 'tighten' the moral reins tied to welfare policy reverberate throughout history, and have had important consequences for 'on the ground' practices in

local contexts of service provision. However, a good amount of the literature on remoralization does not explore the ways in which the ideology of religious neoliberalism intersects with traditional familism, despite an evident preoccupation with the primacy of nuclear family structure among ‘compassionate conservatives.’

Significantly, the consequences of the moral understandings embedded in social policy are most deeply felt by the working class and women of color (Fraser 1989; Mink 1998; Skocpol 1992; Gordon 1994; Padamsee & Adams 2001)—groups also historically denied the benefits of full-time domesticity associated with the traditional nuclear family model (Stacey 1990; Roberts 1997; Borris 1999). Social policy is often gendered and racially coded (Quadagno 1994; Neubeck & Cazenave 2001; Watkins-Hayes 2009). In particular, Campbell (2000) argues that discourses invoking the themes of dependency, femininity, and deviant sexuality are deployed by policymakers and other cultural authorities in order to scrutinize the behaviors of the ‘dangerous classes’ while dismissing indiscretions among the middle class. As Naples (2003) notes, impoverished white women and women of color are placed at a distinct disadvantage in their dealings with the welfare state because of institutionalized cultural constructions of morality formed within white, middle class cultural ideals. A good amount of the social welfare policy that targets women was designed to assimilate those considered to have the potential for becoming citizens, yet excluded African Americans as “Blacks stood entirely outside the elite white women’s paternalistic concept of the national community” (Roberts 1997:205). Welfare state scholars working in the interpretive tradition, after the ‘cultural turn’ in the subfield, point to the ways in which moral assumptions are embedded in

policy and have gendered and racialized consequences for distributive outcomes (Stryker & Wald 2009).

Family ideals are another important normative component of welfare state configurations, and also inform ‘on the ground’ practices and rhetoric produced in religious institutions. As in the welfare state, familism is a central organizing device in both local religious life and in the discourse promulgated by authorities. In other words, religion and family exist in symbiotic relation with one another, as religious cultural models both situate the family as a bedrock institution in American life and establish particular configurations of the ‘good family’ (Pankhurst & Houseknecht 2000; Christiano 2000; Edgell 2006; cf. Edgell & Docka 2007).

Religious institutions generally privilege the conventional, white, middle-class nuclear family form, owing in part to the fact that religious institutions experienced a ‘boom’ in their development during the mid-20th century—a time period when the nuclear family ideal enjoyed an especially influential position (Coontz 1992; May 1999; Edgell 2006). Middle class, nuclear family ideals are deeply entrenched in many worship communities, a reality which can potentially result in stigma and exclusion for those whose family lives do not meet the prescriptions of such models for family life (Edgell & Docka 2009; Sullivan 2009). However, nuclear family structures and associated traditional gender roles have been either unattainable or undesirable for many of the socioeconomically and racially marginalized in American society (Coontz 1993; Passaro 1996; Hill 2009). Therefore, the extent to which faith-based organizations have the capacity to effectively provide services for the poor depends on their ability to break with convention and

develop alternative cultural models and associated practices with the potential to accommodate diverse family formations.

Structure of the Dissertation

In the chapter that immediately follows, I first provide a review of existing literature relevant for contextualizing my three guiding research questions, listed above. This chapter is split into two main components, the first of which explores insights from more traditional sociological subfields, and the second of which engages existing research on the impact and limitations of the faith-based initiative.

In the first section of the literature review, I engage insights from early feminist welfare state theory, which includes a discussion of the implications of the “politics of need interpretation” (Fraser 1989) and the “feminization of poverty” literature (Pearce 1983) for my research questions. Next, I discuss the broader literature on gender, family, and race in the “two-tiered” welfare state (Nelson 1990). Then, I provide an overview of insight from the sociology of culture—namely, the concept of “cultural schemas” from Sewell (1992) and others—in order to contextualize the concept of the “SNAF,” or Standard North American Family (Smith 1993). Lastly, in this first half of the literature review, I examine the literature on gender, family, and religion in the service of mobilizing arguments about how rhetoric and practice associated with the “Ideal Family” (Edgell & Docka 2007) is deployed in worship communities, other religious institutions, and elite religious discourse. Throughout this first section, I delineate the unique

contribution of an interpretive approach that directs attention to the level of on-the-ground, daily practices in service provision environments.

In the second half of the literature review, I provide an overview of existing research on the faith-based initiative—a diverse field of inquiry incorporating the voices of sociologists, social work scholars, policy researchers, political scientists, and legal analysts. In so doing, I highlight the gaps in existing knowledge and frame my overview around questions that cluster around four broad themes: First, how has the faith-based initiative impacted politics in general, the broader US welfare state, and congregations? Relatedly, and secondly, what kinds of religious groups receive—or are likely to receive—government funds; what kinds of worship communities offer social services; and what was the impact of the faith-based initiative on congregations and local communities? Third, under what conditions are faith-based initiatives likely to ameliorate or bolster structures of group-based inequality? Fourth, how does the public feel about faith-based initiatives, with what consequences, and how has that changed over time?

In the next chapter (3), I describe my methods, choices, and analytical approach. This section provides an overview of the fit between my research questions and methods, describing my approach to the field in detail. I delineate the contours of my data, and provide a description of the history and activities of each of the four organizations I profiled.

My fourth chapter includes an analysis of interview data from the first phase of my data collection, which includes the voices of organizational leaders from community-based organizations and two types of faith-based organizations (theologically liberal and theologically conservative). The three following chapters provide my analysis of each of my case studies—one on a theologically liberal faith-based organization designed to minister to the poor and homeless (Chapter 5); one on a “community-based,” youth mentoring organization (Chapter 6); and one on two theologically conservative organizations designed to meet the needs of single mothers (Chapter 7).

I finish the dissertation with a conclusion (Chapter 8) that provides a broader overview of my findings. I begin that final chapter with generalizations from my case-study findings, including an exploration of the unique contours of the representations of poverty and subsequent interpretations of need that served to inform the texture of the overall relationships I discovered between faith, family, gender, and race in each case study. Next, I describe how my case-study findings should be interpreted in the context of results from the metro-wide interviews with program authorities. Then, I detail why my findings are important and the concrete ways they advance existing knowledge in each subfield. In so doing, I forward a series of arguments about the ways in which my results support the previous insights of other work by applying existing theories to the cases, while suggesting revisions of earlier approaches. Lastly, I detail elements of relevant lines of inquiry that remain unanswered, additional questions that arose in executing the project, the broader political implications of my research, and how the aforementioned elements dictate directions for future research.

2. STATE-SPONSORED SOCIAL MINISTRY IN BROADER CONTEXT

This chapter reviews existing research for perspective on and insight into my research questions. Though the bulk of the authors cited herein are sociologists, I speak to a range of interdisciplinary concerns through engaging the perspectives of feminist philosophers, anthropologists, historians, political scientists, religious studies scholars, social work analysts, and public policy researchers. I emphasize the utility of interpretive approaches that direct attention to the level of on-the-ground, daily practices in service provision environments throughout. The first half of the chapter addresses literature from a number of sociological subfields: the welfare state, culture, family, gender, and religion. The second half of the literature review presents an overview of research on, or directly related to, the faith-based initiative.

Understanding State-Sponsored Faith-Based Programming: Mobilizing Scholarship on the Welfare State, Culture, Family, Gender, and Religion

The “feminization of poverty” and the “politics of need interpretation”

Pearce (1992) coined the term “feminization of poverty” to refer to the higher rates of poverty women experience due to the myriad social and economic consequences associated with the institutionalization of gender inequality. Scholarship in this line of inquiry argues that because women comprise the majority of individuals living in poverty, policy and research cannot afford to ignore gender in inquiry and practice. Authors writing in this tradition list a number of factors resulting in higher female poverty rates: the decline in marriage rates; the rise in divorce, separation, and out-of-wedlock births; the concentration of women in low-paying/service sector jobs; and higher

rates of domestic violence. One line of inquiry from this perspective contends that given the amount of women living below the poverty line, women's needs become a primary stake in battles over welfare spending (Pearce 1983; Ehrenreich & Piven 1984).

Nancy Fraser's (1989) argument begins with the above premises, noting that because women comprise the majority of recipients and employees of government services, "women and women's needs will be the principal stakes in the battles over social spending likely to dominate national politics" (144). She further argues that the question of women's needs has been framed as follows: Does the state have a responsibility to provide for a given group of people, and if so, to what extent? Framing the issue in such a manner, Fraser contends, encourages only a small range of answers, couched in the narrow terms of dollar amounts. Therefore, answers typically "take for granted the definition of needs in question as if that were self-evident and beyond dispute" (145). Fraser further explains the import of need interpretation in the context of the welfare state:

...the interpretation of people's needs is itself a political stake, indeed sometimes *the* political stake. Clearly, this way of framing issues poses obstacles for feminist politics, since at the heart of such politics lie questions about what various groups of women really need and whose interpretations of women's needs should really be authoritative. Only in terms of a discourse oriented to the *politics of need interpretation* can feminists meaningfully intervene in the coming welfare wars. But this requires a challenge to the dominant policy framework (145).

I argue that understanding changes in welfare state structures requires sensitivity to the interpretive processes by which needs are defined. Such processes often dictate that narrow, partial, and interest-based interpretations are rendered 'common sensical' and beyond, or above, critical questioning. Predominant understandings of need communicate 'problems' to be solved for which there are an implicit set of corresponding

solutions. These solutions are legitimized through the systematic de-emphasis of the interests they represent (cf. Douglas 1986). Therefore, the question of just *what* is qualitatively needed is not easily raised—especially if proposed alternative provisions do not resonate with the contours of the existing discursive framework. State actors, policy researchers, and ‘expert’ interpretations together inform the terms of the debate through the exercise of cultural power (cf. O’Connor 2001), which Edgell (2006) defines as the ability to advance some models and obstruct others “regardless of the motives of those proposing such models or arguments made about some models affirming a greater good that is somehow apart from interest” (192).

However, this does not imply that consensus is easily or readily achieved, as the sphere in which need interpretation occurs is a contested field that includes contributions from a number of actors. I draw on Fraser’s (1989) insights on need interpretation processes to establish that need definition at the level of policy discourse reverberates down to local contexts as community leaders draw on the structures of meaning embedded in policy in inventive ways. Such processes inform the language local authorities use to describe who they serve and the repertoires of action they select. In addition, leaders’ understandings of needs, problems, and solutions are further interpreted by front-line volunteers and other providers in social welfare institutions, which in turn, inform clients’ understandings of how organizations engage their self-defined needs.

Need interpretation, however, is not a unidirectional process, whereby the imperatives of elites are superimposed onto clients through a lockstep chain of command involving the intermediary actors described above. Therefore, I argue, need interpretation is a process

that operates at the micro-, meso-, and macro-levels, with complex interrelationships between each.

Gaining a grasp the processes of need interpretation, again, by necessity involves an interpretive approach. For welfare state scholars working within the interpretive paradigm, social policy at all levels of analysis is a site of contestation over the meanings of gender, race, class, and sexuality. One such approach is exemplified by the work of Fraser & Gordon (1994), in which they trace the genealogy of the keyword “dependency.” The increasing resonance of newer moral/psychological connotations for the word—and the opposition between the “dependent” and “independent” personality—mapped a series of other dichotomies central in modern culture onto the dependent/independent binary. Juxtapositions such as masculine/feminine, public/private, individual/community, economy/family, and competitive/self-sacrificing generated negative discursive and material consequences for those deemed “dependent,” who were most often women and welfare recipients.

Other scholars taking an interpretive approach include Haney & March (2003), who observe that a discursive disjuncture between the state’s and local communities’ understandings of “good fathering” positioned U.S. policymakers to repeat a history in which welfare efforts proved largely unsuccessful. Placing the onus on poor mothers to close the gap between their experiences and the mandates of policy rendered it difficult for them to sustain more collective, extended modes of mothering. Doing so “left a series of maternal possibilities untapped” and “bred misconceptions about poor women’s mothering by stigmatizing those who did not adhere to their narrow definition of

mothering” (478). Though the government and mothers’ interests likely intersected at a desire for paternal involvement and financial responsibility, the state instead adopted a misguided approach that devoted public funds to marriage education programs, and in so doing abandoned alternative courses of action that may have worked to support men providing care and socialization for children, be they relatives, friends, or neighbors. Interpretive research such as this, I argue, is necessary in order to develop sensitive, realistic, and effective policy, as highlighted in the above example.

Analysts have also addressed the question of women’s needs through studying the welfare state ‘from the ground up,’ which changes conceptualizations of the welfare state in a variety of ways. First, attention paid to the level of service provision and client experience makes specific social linkages explicit rather than assumed. Studies such as Edin and Lein’s *Making Ends Meet* (1997), Hays’ *Flat Broke with Children* (2003), Haney’s *Inventing the Needy* (2002), and Sullivan’s *Living Faith* (2012) use ethnographic methods to clarify the connections between the experiences of individual social actors and social structures. The filaments that run between policy and practice, individuals and institutions, structure and agency (affording greater theoretical purchase), and discourse and experience can all be illuminated by an examination of the ‘ground level.’ Therefore, my analysis includes an observational, ethnographic component.

Another benefit of studying the welfare state ‘from below’ lies in questioning taken-for-granted assumptions about the impact of state ideology on outcomes. Haney (2002) found that despite the Hungarian state’s adoption of a means-tested welfare approach, grounded in discourse that highlighted the benefits of directing resources to the “most

needy,” the quality of life for women deteriorated. Because Haney directed attention to both traditional welfare state levels of analysis (national expenditures and elite discursive structures) *and* more novel elements (social workers’ interpretations of need), she was able to provide a more holistic account of the impact of policy on the real lives of aid recipients and the gaps between policy and practice. Much of my analysis is modeled after the benefits of her incorporation of the perspectives of service providers.

Ultimately, studying the welfare state from ‘the ground up’ demands that we examine our taken-for-granted assumptions about how people are likely to experience social policy. In part, this requires we probe both state ideology and local interpretive sites instead of taking them at face value. In so doing, we can begin to examine normative assumptions and make explicit the linkages between policy and practice and individuals and institutions.

The “Two-Tiered” Welfare State: Race, Class, and Gender Implications of Social Welfare

Broader cultural ideals about the gendered, public versus private, division of labor inform U.S. welfare state structures and associated, implicit interpretations of need. Historically, the U.S. welfare state is a two-tiered, “dual system” (Smith 1984; Pateman 1988; Nelson 1990). Programs coded male are geared towards individual heads-of-household, are administered on a standardized national level, and are modeled after the male-breadwinner model of family life. Programs coded female are means-tested, more often include punitive and surveillance mechanisms, construct clients as dependent on public charity, and are designed for perceived family failures—most often, the absence of a

male breadwinner. Both faces of the gendered welfare state serve recipients in the context of their assumed and idealized familial roles.

Arguably, one of the primary ways race, class, gender, and family are institutionalized in the structures of the welfare state is through “maternalism”— a concept associated with the “tier” of the welfare state that is coded female. Essentially, maternalism refers to an ideology that "exalt[s] women's capacities to mother and extend[s] to society as a whole the values of care, nurturance and morality" (Koven & Michel 1993). Mink (1998) highlights two aspects of the maternalist agenda: support for the male-breadwinner family structure and resulting disapproval for wage-earning mothers; and their furtherance of a white, middle-class ideal of good mothering through supervision-contingent AFDC benefits and mandatory education.

Mink (1998; qtd. in Padamsee & Adams 2001) further claims that the maternalism should be read as white “middle-class women’s politics,” as associated policies either tacitly or overtly relied on dominating women of color and immigrants (16). Mother’s Pensions in the early 1900s were designed to promote female domesticity and render racial exclusion acceptable (Skocpol 1992; Fraser & Gordon 1994; Gordon 1994). Women were considered “morally unfit” for assistance if they engaged in a series of “inappropriate” behaviors, including living with a man who was not their husband, bearing children out of wedlock, performing gender ‘inappropriate’ paid work, and failing to maintain a home environment that met white, middle-class standards (Skocpol 1992). Many Black women were excluded from such programs through regional variation or because caseworkers deemed African Americans unfit (Roberts 1997).

Later programs also grounded in maternalist ideology—AFDC and ADC being the most notable exemplars—excluded Black women at a higher rate than white women (Borris, 1999). Codes invoking race, class, and gender further extended into the logic of welfare reform, as increasing numbers of unmarried women of color receiving public assistance—stereotypically represented as “Welfare Queens”—increasingly fueled calls to eliminate universal entitlement (Hill-Collins 2009; Zucchino 1999). Stryker & Wald (2009) argue that passage of the PRWORA depended on the invocation of racially problematic imagery, considerable increases in women’s labor force participation, and associated shifts away from gender norms dictating a male-breadwinner/female-caregiver model. I argue welfare reform signaled the end of maternalist welfare policies that defined women’s role as mothers first and workers second, which Stryker & Wald (2009) observe as presenting an ironic contradiction with the “family values” rhetoric promoted by many of the policy’s supporters (cf. Orloff 2006; Stryker & Wald 2009).

In addition, Stryker & Wald’s (2009) deployment of Somers & Block’s (2005) “perversity thesis” is especially useful in understanding the discursive and historical background that explains the legitimacy of ideas driving welfare reform, helps provide insight into the ways racialized categories of the “deserving” and “undeserving” poor are tied to enduring structures of inequality, and provides a foundation for understanding the affinity between conservative religious logics and the idea that the market should be the central organizing principle of public life (Somers & Block 2005). The perversity thesis deployed by supporters of the PRWORA operated to reassign blame for the poor’s plight from structural conditions to flaws in character and moral failings. Such flaws and

failings were attributed to the “dependency” created by welfare, which represented the poor as lacking sexual morals, a work ethic, and “personal responsibility.” Furthermore, the logic of “perversity rhetoric” is tied to broader neoliberal ideas about the need for the retreat of the state due to the threat to the moral order presented by ‘big government’s’ tendency to dictate a set of disincentives for individuals and institutions who would otherwise engage the stimulating and invigorating effects of the private marketplace.

Criticisms of the “perversity thesis” lodged by Hicks (2006) contend that Somers & Block failed to attribute significant causal power to the machinations of the Christian Right in developing and supporting the PRWORA. In response, Somers & Block (2006:511) forward: “...there is much to be said for an elective affinity between market fundamentalism and evangelical Christianity, as both doctrines draw on ‘individualistic, egoistic, and materialistic emphases.’” However, Somers & Block also caution against overstating the power of religious conservatives at the expense of understanding the power of ‘big business’ and finance in forwarding the agenda of market fundamentalism, and also express apprehension about speaking of the evangelical right as a unified monolith due to internal diversity within the group—two points with which I agree wholeheartedly.

Such cautions aside, as I detail in the previous chapter, Christian Right public figures and their influence were absolutely central in the development and enactment of the PROWRA and are not to be underestimated. Such influence is evidenced by the further codification of the Christian Right’s overarching agenda through the creation of the OFBCI, the issuing of associated Executive Orders, and presidentially mandated (and

Supreme Court sanctioned) civil rights law exemptions for religious organizations offering social services with the use of public funds, though certainly other actors, interests, and institutions were also involved in the post-Charitable Choice development of government-religious partnerships.

Overall, the practice of supporting church-based social services with state funds has enjoyed widespread bipartisan and public support, and funds have been funneled to a variety of religious institutions. However, the fact remains that political precedent for associated practices originated with religious neoliberal actors and discourses, and associated ideologies remain powerful in informing logics and repertoires of action at the local level.

Ultimately, the “perversity thesis” serves to frame representations of the flaws and failings associated with the poor in the U.S., which has implications for deservingness, group-based inequality, and perhaps most importantly for the analysis at hand, sexual morality and family structure. Arguably, perversity rhetoric is a useful overarching framework, and has deep historical roots. Such roots can be traced chronologically beginning with distinctions in post-Reformation Protestant theology between those with legitimate needs who invoked sympathy and those who received punitive treatment at the hands of the church, on through to the 18th to 19th century forces dividing the destitute into those deemed worthy of “outdoor relief” (women and dependent children) and those confined to the poorhouse (“able-bodied” men), to other 20th century American discourses about the “culture of poverty” and the “underclass” (Lewis 1966; Auletta

1982)—two additional moral rhetorics whose central tenets draw from the nexus of race, class, gender, and family.

Specifically, proponents of the “culture of poverty” argued that the poor are not only materially deprived, they also operate under a unique system of cultural values that work to ensure their marginalization. As the culture of poverty framework cites the socialization of children as one of the primary mechanisms through which such damaging cultural values are reproduced, the family takes center stage in this school of thought. Culture of poverty theorist Oscar Lewis (1966) depicts the poor as lacking class consciousness and having “neither the knowledge, the vision nor the ideology to see the similarities between their problems and those of others like themselves elsewhere in the world” (8).

As an extension of the culture of poverty thesis, literature citing “the underclass” similarly engages in a more subtle form of victim-blaming, and is often deployed in such a fashion that it serves as a codeword for African Americans living in poverty who exhibit behaviors considered deviant, criminal, “or just non-middle class ways” (Gans 1994). As well, “the underclass” implicitly (and sometimes explicitly) named the family as the source of forces reproducing marginalization through gendered references that differentiated between male “gangbangers” and female “welfare mothers” (Waquant 2008).

Ultimately, both “tiers” of the gendered welfare state are not only tied to group-based structural inequality, they also serve recipients in the context of their assumed familial

roles. Social provision therefore draws on cultural ideals about family and gender, as entitlement to services and resources are tied to cultural ideals about race, gender, and family (Mohr 1994; Skocpol 2003; Orloff 1996; Pedersen 1993; Gordon 1990). Subtexts regarding family are mapped onto binary constructions of deservingness and undeservingness—perhaps unsurprisingly because constructions of race and gender rely heavily on definitions of family, and are mutually constitutive [Katz 1989; White 1990-1991 (qtd. in Allahyari 1997); Passaro 1996]. Such insights are especially helpful in guiding the analysis at hand, as these norms form the basis for utterable and unutterable articulations of need—both individual and collective. Faith-based organizations’ capacity to develop language and practices that avoid reproducing such distinctions, and value diverse family formations, in part determines their qualitative potential to effectively and sensitively provide for recipients of services.

The “Ideal Family” and Cultural Schemas

Given the controversial nature of the question of social service provision, it is often a matter of contention and political debate among social movements, interest groups, lawmakers, and most importantly, actors at the local level—program authorities, additional staff members, volunteers, and service recipients themselves. The structures of meaning implicit in welfare services are constructed at the intersection of many different cultural scripts, and offer an opportunity for the investigation of the nature of the role culture and discourse play in shaping policy outcomes and practice.

Due to the great amount of variation in the ways in which the term “culture” is employed, my use of the term deserves brief explication. Clifford Geertz (1973) provides an early definition of culture as a

historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life (89).

However, such culture as a “web” definitions were discredited as criticisms rejected notions of a coherent cultural system hanging together in an ordered and secure manner. More practice-oriented conceptualizations of culture as a resource for strategic action are best exemplified by Swidler (2001), who argues that whether culture is defined as public symbols, a way of life, or individual knowledge, such definitions fails to help us understand how culture is put to use by social actors. Geertzian definitions, she argues, assume a unified system of meaning with no disjunctures or contradictions, yet “understanding how cultures change, or indeed, understanding what difference it makes for someone to participate in a particular culture, will require that sociologists address the problems created by the diverse uses of culture” (13). Therefore, for Swidler, it is important to look at how social actors employ culture, “asking what they do with the different ways of framing meaning they have available” (22). Hull (2006) provides a definition that closely approximates the way I employ the term. According to Hull, culture is

...the symbolic or expressive dimension of social life, the way people use symbols—language, rituals, imagery—to make and share meaning. ... I conceive of culture as a kind of social structure (or set of structures), a force that often guides people's behavior in certain directions but also furnishes people with tools and resources that make meaningful individual actions and choices possible (13).

Integrating the above representations, culture is, therefore, a system of meanings that exhibits both coherence and contradiction, and supplies individuals with resources for action and delimits their available options.

Analysts of the American welfare state have increasingly come to deploy the concept of culture in research conducted after ‘the cultural turn’ in the subfield (Naples 2006).

Naples further suggests that the efforts of scholars working in this tradition do much “to theorize religious ideology, public attitudes, and the power of discourse” to offer effective strategies for social change aimed at challenging entrenched structures of inequality (100). In particular, welfare scholars mobilize concepts from the sociology of culture to investigate the ways in which inequality is embedded in policy and enacted in local contexts. Stryker & Wald (2009) elaborate, “Scholars have shown that the PRWORA and earlier welfare programs have been shaped by racial and gendered hierarchies and associated *systems of meaning*” (emphasis mine; 520).

However, there is little in the way of consensus on the nature of the relationship between racial and gender stereotypes in American culture, the form these stereotypes take when embedded in social policy, and the mechanisms by which they are enacted in local contexts.

Sewell (1999) argues that two predominant visions of culture (culture as “system” and “practice”) are mistakenly seen by many theorists as oppositional. Instead, each presupposes the other. Symbols can only be deployed to accomplish a particular goal because they have more or less determinate and structured meanings, which are

determined by their relationships to other symbols. However, the system of symbols would not exist were it not for the repetitive practices that reproduce, and sometimes transform, the order of their meaning:

System and practice constitute an indissoluble duality or dialectic: the important theoretical question is thus not whether culture should be conceptualized as practice or as a system of symbols and meanings, but how to conceptualize the articulation of system and practice (47).

Sewell (1992) extends his ideas with his claim that cultural structures hold within them the resources that make agency and cultural change possible. Schemas, or “generalizable procedures applied in the enactment/reproduction of social life” (Giddens 1986; qtd. in Sewell 1992), enable actors to mobilize resources when enacted and hold particularly powerful potential when creatively generalized or transposed into new institutional environments. As Sewell’s understanding of cultural symbols suggests, institutional interrogations of culture extend beyond the meanings that may be embedded in cultural symbols themselves in order to examine the conditions or contexts under which culture is produced, disseminated, and interpreted (Wuthnow 1988). A fundamental assumption in this approach is that in order to produce culture, social resources must be expended—rendering the organization and availability of resources important questions.

Becker’s (1999) study of 23 congregations of various sizes and faiths in the suburbs of Chicago represents a compelling model of the “neoinstitutional” perspective, which builds on earlier insights from the literature on cultural schemas. Institutions (such as congregations) in the broader culture provide cultural frames that present a series of legitimate goals, tasks, and practices. “Local cultures” of religious life are constructed using congregational understandings of “who we are” and “how we do things,” in

conjunction with the institutionalized congregational models available in the local religious environment. Together, these styles constitute cultural models of organizational decision-making. When self-defining or seeking a logic to guide action, congregations consult available “congregational models”—“routinized solutions to this problem, bundles of things—programs, beliefs, ways of doing things—that go together” (181). Once a congregation has begun to follow a congregational model, members usually operate from one “bundle” of practices and understandings. In addition, institutionalized aspects of congregational models can be found in many aspects of congregational life, from worship, to authority structures, to membership expectations and interactions.

Insight from the literature on cultural schemas, and subsequent analyses such as Becker’s (1999) that extend them, have a number of implications for my study. First, Sewell’s delineation of the mechanisms of cultural change, and the ways in which structures of meaning from one arena of social life are transposed onto another allow me a window into the ways in which meanings produced at the level of elite discourse are absorbed and recomunicated in local contexts in the service of developing strategies for action. This framework further implies that structures of meaning developed in spheres of policymaking and state discourse are not adopted wholesale or reproduced precisely in accord with the intentions of their original ‘authors.’ Religious authorities operating in local communities may have different agendas and interpretations that are consistent or inconsistent, or entirely new and creative reiterations, from that of elites. Furthermore, Sewell’s perspective directs my eye to the ways those agendas and interpretations are enacted ‘on the ground,’ as institutional symbolic *and* material resources have

consequences for outcomes. Becker's (1999) insights on the "local cultures" of religious life provide a framework for understanding the self-identification of community-based and faith-based organizations—a subject I examine in greater detail in Chapter 4.

Furthermore, Becker's (1999) concept of "congregational models" offers a framework for interpreting the ways program authorities define the social problems their organizations set out to solve, and what appropriate strategies for doing so might look like. Taken together, Sewell's (1992) and Becker's (1999) contributions provide valuable insight into the ways understandings of the "Ideal Family" either reproduce or *transform* race, class, gender, and family stereotypes, as well as discourse and repertoires of action associated with remoralization and religious neoliberalism (cf. Edgell 2006; Edgell & Docka 2007).

The "Ideal Family" is a concept that illuminates how family structures take shape, and refers to a historically varying, context dependent form of familism—or set of normative prescriptions for family life (Edgell 2006). As a distinct cultural schema, the "Ideal Family" is established through a set of interrelated symbols, ideologies, and resources that comprise a blueprint, or roadmap, for "doing" family life (cf. Edgell & Docka 2007). Notions of the "Ideal Family" influence both the ways institutions communicate the types of families they value, and the ways individuals talk about and live their gendered family lives (Gillis 1997; Hull 2006; Edgell 2006). Generally, the 'average American' assembles their ideas about family life using the messages they are exposed to in the institutions they encounter in their daily lives, and worship communities are primary among them: "People encounter religious ideas about the good family in the sermons and parenting workshops and adult education forums in their local congregations" (Edgell

2006:4). Examining family ideals in religious institutions is especially important work, as worship communities represent one of the primary sources of familism in the U.S.

The contemporary shape of the “Ideal Family” in the US is best described through reference to the “SNAF,” or Standard North American Family (Smith 1993). SNAF serves as shorthand for a family model involving married heterosexuals whose primary orientation revolves around the rearing of children. This mode of family life privileges monogamy, procreation, and a gendered division of labor rooted in perceived essential differences between the sexes. Although in the past (and in the present, for some religious minorities) the SNAF involved a male-breadwinner/female-caretaker model, the normative basis of this aspect of family life is increasingly dissolving as economic realities render women’s labor force participation less optional and more mandatory. References to the SNAF are relevant for the work at hand because deviations from the SNAF entail implicit and explicit interpretations of need.

Religion, Gender, Family, and the Economy

In the last few decades, the American family has undergone a period of rapid and dramatic change. Divorce rates are increasing, single motherhood is on the rise, dual-earner families have now surpassed male-breadwinner arrangements, and same-sex partnerships enjoy greater levels of both visibility and legal rights. Many of these changes in family structure are informed by the public’s shifting moral vision of what constitutes “the good family.”¹ Moreover, many of these changes in family structure have been fueled by changes in the economy (Susser 1996a). As individuals and families

on the lower rungs of the socioeconomic ladder bear the brunt of the burden of rapid social change (Gans 1994), it follows that changes in family structure are most pronounced among the economically marginalized.

Literature abounds on the “flexibility” required of workers and bodies in the deindustrialized, transnational, neoliberal economy, which is characterized by the rise of the information/service economy, the retrenchment of the welfare state, decreases in job security for workers, and heightened disparities in wealth (Harvey 1990; Castells 1989; Martin 1996). Some of this literature touches on gender, and according to Susser (1996a), the best of these accounts consider how “gender is being rewritten differently according to class within this new society” (422; Castells 1996; Susser 1991; Susser 1996b). However, with the exception of writings on transnational families (see Parrenas 2005), less attention has been directed towards the impact of the ‘new’ economy on families living in poverty in the United States (see Susser 1993; Passaro 1996; and Pippert 2007 for notable exceptions). The effects of the reciprocal relationship between changes in the ‘new’ economy and shifts in the shape of the “Ideal Family” for the marginalized remains important and under-researched.

Susser (1996a) argues that most existing accounts of the ways government structures and racializes family relations among the poor look to the legacy of historical policies and practices such as segmented hiring practices, disparities in social policy, and the state’s facilitation of the influence of business ideology on labor unions. However, such inquiries regarding the family would be better served by a more thorough examination of the impact of additional institutions aside from markets and the state, as well as including

more detailed investigations of *present*, as well as past, policies and practices. Susser's (1996a) analysis moves us one step closer in this direction, citing the increasing criminalization of the poor, racialized patterns of mass incarceration, and changes in the state's expectations with regard to the gendered division of labor—all of which serve to escalate gender conflict among groups and individuals with lower incomes. Much of this conflict revolves around the control of family resources, household structure, and children (which can sometimes be an individual's only remaining means of accessing state assistance). I broaden the conversation by looking to the ways religious institutions engage with these processes in the context of social ministry.

As in the welfare state, the family has long been a focal point for leadership and participants in religious institutions (Roof & McKinney 1988; Christiano 2000; Sherkat & Ellison 1999; Edgell 2006). Scholars have long noted that religion and family are mutually reinforcing and cross-implicated. Moran notes: "...the life of the family and the life of the spirit have intersected at numerous points" in the context of Puritan family life in early American traditions (1992:12; qtd. in Christiano 2000). Christiano (2000) argues this interrelationship has extended well into the present day, noting that religiosity has important predictive effects on family structure and attitudes regarding family life (such as marriage, divorce, childbearing, and premarital sex). Furthermore, he insists, religion has played a central role "in entrenching familism as a dominant ideology of the twentieth century" (45).

Pankhurst & Houseknecht (2000) also begin their analysis with the observation that religion and family exist in reciprocal relation to one another: Religion provides symbolic

affirmation for family structures (via marriage, the socialization of children, etc.); family reproduces religious institutions by socializing the next generation of adherents; religious rituals mark important family events (funerals, baptisms, etc.); devotional practices (such as prayer) often take place in family settings; religion shapes family power dynamics through prescriptions for behavior in different family roles (wife, husband, child, etc.); and changes in family demographics affect changes in the religious sphere (7). In their commentary on the reciprocal relationship between social change and the twin institutions of religion and family, they reflect: "...religion and family, both public and private, are essential components of modern life. If anything, their future roles seem to be growing, rather than shrinking" (27). Notwithstanding the ongoing influence of religion, however, the authors also note:

...religion changes in response to the family because religion needs the family. ...Despite the efforts of religion to accommodate, though, with increasing economic dominance, the family grows ever further apart from formal religious associations. ...Although religious associations have made efforts to accommodate [economy-driven] changes in the family, the accommodations have not kept stride with family needs (32).

Clearly, then, the question of the relationship between religion and family—and religion's capacity to remodel its associated institutional structures in line with the transformation of the American family—is especially relevant given recent changes in the American family structure, which have occurred at an increasingly rapid clip. Such concerns provide an important framework for the analysis that follows in subsequent chapters.

As with the family, religious doctrine has very important implications for gender as well. Bem (1993) forwards that androcentrism is embedded in the very roots of Judeo-Christian theology, as the circumstances surrounding the development of the content and

subsequent circulation of the Old and New Testaments “involves the replacement of a goddess with a god and the defining of woman as the other” (43). She quotes Sanday (1981:215) in explaining the contours of this tradition “in the genesis of two of the guiding symbols of Western male dominance—the patriarchal, decidedly masculine God and the sexual, inferior female who tempts the male from the path of righteousness.” Certainly, many Western religious traditions do not subscribe wholesale to the moral implications of the story of the forbidden fruit. However, the role of Eve in Adam’s fall from Grace reverberates into present-day religious discourse regarding women’s roles and essentially wicked nature, and is even transposed into other social institutions.

Aside from androcentrism, many biblical teachings forward the two other central “lenses of gender” Bem (1993) describes that serve to reproduce sexism in modern culture: essentialism, which dictates that men and women have different, biologically and biblically dictated essential identities, and polarization, which refers to the processes by which the differences between men and women are superimposed onto “sex and virtually every other aspect of human experience” (2). Men and women are thereby channeled into “different and unequal life situations” and socialized such that they internalize and reproduce these distinctions (3).

The configuration of worship communities’ offerings for members is heavily informed by the structure of the families they idealize and in many cases, actively court (Edgell 2006). Many activities offered by religious institutions (examples are Sunday school, men’s groups, women’s bible study, etc.) serve participants in their assumed, idealized family roles. In particular, Edgell (2006) argues that religious models for family life are

organized around traditional familism, and are deeply entrenched in the majority of American religious communities—she offers the following outline in explanation. In large part, the persistence of such models is tied to the history of their institutionalization, and the nature of institutional change as slow and incremental—especially when organizations have made significant resource investments in particular repertoires of practice. The shape of family ministry has exhibited little change from programming developed and implemented during the construction ‘boom’ of new (and rapid expansion of existing) worship communities during the 1950s—the ideological heyday of the nuclear family, and a time when more and more individuals opted to organize their families lives accordingly. In addition to ideological impetus, the fiscal prosperity of the time provides another explanatory factor behind the increase in the number of families who chose to adopt an “Ozzie and Harriet” ideal (Coontz 1992; May 1999; Edgell 2006). The availability of greater amounts of resources for a greater segment of the (largely white) population meant that for more and more Americans, “Harriet” could stay home and tend to children and domestic duties, and “Ozzie” could invest himself in career pursuits with the knowledge that most other family responsibilities would be accounted for. As I delineate in later chapters, this style of institutionalized family ministry modeled around traditional familism, perhaps unsurprisingly, was also reflected in my case studies of congregational social ministry and outreach efforts.

The literature on religion and family suggests that the “Ozzie and Harriet” familism (a model for family approximating the SNAF) dominant among mainstream religious groups in the religious expansion of the 1950s has remained a central organizing device

for family ideals in local religious communities through to the present day (Pankhurst & Houseknecht 2000; Edgell 2006). As ‘traditional’ family models became increasingly inextricably linked with religious participation, normative structures emerged which dictated that ‘doing’ family the ‘right’ way was—and continues to be—linked to ‘good Christian’ identity in a number of the most prominent American religious traditions, particularly for conservative and mainline Protestantism (Gallagher 2003; Bendroth 2002). This is especially true of the two evangelical single mothers’ programs I profile. In this body of research, religious familism comes to influence gender rhetoric and practice in local religious communities—though much of this work is based on studies of white, middle-class religious communities (see Edgell & Docka 2007 for a notable exception). Moreover, even hybrid worship communities that pair traditional and innovative family programming models, and operate with a more diverse membership base, reinscribe the hegemony of the ‘Ideal Family’ (Edgell & Docka 2007). Again, findings from my case studies further bolster these conclusions.

My current research on social welfare programming in small religious organizations is an extension of the aforementioned research on the relationship between family ideology and gender in diverse religious communities. In our profile of three congregations selected for their expected distance from the 1950s “Ozzie and Harriet” ideal, my co-author and I found that while there was considerable innovation in family-oriented rhetoric and ministry, and a range of gender inclusive practices, there was also considerable symbolic affirmation of the value of more traditional gender roles and practices, particularly in the realm of the family (Edgell & Docka 2007).

Ultimately, in addition to considering the impact of religious ideologies and institutions, the broader economic relationships established by social policy must also be examined in any thorough investigation of the influence of religion on family structures. Stryker and Wald (2009) reflect, “In particular, racial and gendered divisions of labor shape systems of social provision and regulation by structuring who does what kinds of labor, and who can have access to which kinds of benefits and under what conditions” (520). Such divisions of labor and accompanying notions about entitlement, in turn, have important consequences for the ways individual Americans structure their family lives.

I situate my current work in the context of Susser’s (1996a) call to examine the impact of present (as well as past) policy and ideology on family structures, considering both the influence of state policy and the impact of religious ideology on gender and family structure. I do so by examining the faith-based initiative’s interpretations of family needs, produced and enacted in service-based organizations. My work seeks to consider gender, race, class, and changes in family structure, with special attention to matters of faith and religious ideology. Given significant changes in the relationship between the state and service-providing religious organizations, and the elaboration and influence of religious discourse on welfare policy debates, it is important to examine religious understandings of gender and family ideals, as well as the ways such understandings intersect with axes of social difference to inform notions of moral ‘worthiness’ for resources and aid. Therefore, models of gender and family must be considered as important axes of variation in faith-based organizations in order to fully grasp their potential capacity to deal effectively with poverty and inequality.

Faith-Based Initiatives in Broader Social and Political Context

The second half of the literature review provides an overview of empirical research on the faith-based initiative and related scholarship on social ministry processes and practices. The contributions reviewed herein represent the perspectives of scholars with a variety of different academic backgrounds, which includes sociologists, social work scholars, policy researchers, political scientists, and legal analysts. The following text is organized to address three broad themes of inquiry: First, how has the faith-based initiative impacted politics in general, the broader US welfare state, and congregations? Second, what kinds of religious groups have—or have been likely to—receive government funds; what kinds of worship communities offer social services; and what was the impact of the faith-based initiative on congregations and local communities? Third, under what conditions are faith-based initiatives likely to challenge or reinforce structures of group-based inequality?

Faith-based initiatives and the Compassion Capital Fund

Well over a decade after initiation of the faith-based policies, analysts still disagree on their collective impact. In this section of the chapter, I review the body of existing research that assesses the impact of the faith-based initiative on U.S. politics, the welfare state, and social provision. In this context, two institutional fields collide—religion and welfare—to inform the field of everyday practices associated with providing services. In order to fully grasp the circumstances under which ideological shifts occur, I first look to the ways associated resources have been structured and distributed and related

measurement problems. As well, I also review literature that investigates the texture of the services faith communities offer; the kinds of houses of worship that either receive state funds, or are likely to receive state funds; and the potential impact of receipt of such funds. Ultimately, as argued in Roundtable on Religion and Social Welfare Policy's report "Taking Stock: The Bush Faith-Based Initiative and What Lies Ahead" (Wright 2009), supporters of the faith-based initiative were largely successful in countering "the 'culture of resistance' that had existed in the federal government toward faith-based organizations' participation in social service contracts." However, the report also concludes: "the full extent of public funding for faith-based social services is largely unknown." A good deal of uncertainty remains, and this section of the literature review represents my efforts at clarification.

Assessing the Impact of the Faith-Based Initiative

A White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives report claims the number of federal grants to faith-based initiatives increased by 38% from 2003 to 2006, representing an 21% overall increase in funding (WHOFBCI 2006). As well, faith-based organizations received 10.9% of total federal funds awarded under the competitive grant system in the Departments of Health and Human Services (HHS), Housing and Urban Development (HUD), Justice (DOJ), Labor (DOL), and Education (ED) in 2005. Stritt (2008) argues, though, that the 10.9% figure dramatically underestimates the impact of faith-based social services. He therefore reviews estimates of the overall contribution of religious social programming (including volunteer labor, services offered, in-kind donations to support programming, etc.) to total national welfare efforts in order to speak

to the *full* impact of government dollars flowing to faith-based organizations—above and beyond that which is measured solely by dollars spent through government grant-making.

Combining raw data and estimates from a variety of sources, Stritt (2008) figures a rough \$50 billion per annum contribution from the “faith-based sector,” with \$24.25 billion coming from congregations. This “faith-based sector” concept refers to a tripartite typology of faith-based organizations: “congregations” (local communities organized for the primary purpose of religious worship), “freestanding FBOs” (organizations affiliated with, yet separately incorporated from, houses of worship), and “national network FBOs” [organizations that serve as the overarching social service arm of denominations and networks of such organizations (cf. McCarthy & Castelli 1998)]. To place his \$50 billion figure in broader context, Stritt cites a figure of \$138.2 billion (FY 2003, excluding income assistance and health care) for total government spending on social welfare programs in areas comparable to those offered by faith-based organizations.⁴ Therefore, he estimates, faith-based organizations’ contribution to social welfare programming amounts to 36% of comparable government spending.⁵

At the elite level, Kuo’s (2006) *Tempting Faith* describes his experience as second-in-command in the White House’s Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives (OFBCI) as profoundly disappointing. Kuo alleges promised resources were never delivered, allocated funds were gained from slashing existing social programs,³ and conferences for community leaders intended to disseminate information about applying for available grant funds became little more than political rallies for the Republican party—conveniently held immediately before major gubernatorial elections. In effect, he

claims, the OFBCI represented the administration's efforts to court both white evangelical and conservative, African American voters and community leaders, some of whom have since expressed a level of skepticism about the program and the motives of its proponents. Data gathered for Edgell & Docka (2007) confirmed the presence of such sentiments among a Black AME pastor whose congregation had, nevertheless, received a significant amount of grant money through the Compassion Capital program. Program authorities I interviewed for the study at hand also cited varying levels of skepticism about the use of the label "faith-based." Though they didn't all tie their reservations with using the label to describe their organization explicitly to the OFBCI, criticisms of other such programs associated with the initiative were at least implicit in conversations about "hypocrisy." Objections were most strong among the African American and religiously liberal leaders.

According to Stritt (2008), efforts to estimate federal monies flowing to faith-based organizations and the proportion of overall contribution to the US welfare system such services comprise are impeded in two ways: first, faith-based organizations do not have any universal system of accounting for the contributions they receive from individuals and philanthropic organizations—two very important sources of support that provide perspective on the 'value' of faith-based organizations. Second, establishing the amount of government funds flowing to faith-based organizations would require significant outlay to establish a national database to compile information from state and local governments on the distribution of disbursed funds between faith-based organizations and more secular bodies.

Indeed, much of the measurement problems associated with the question of government spending on faith-based organizations springs from the fact that aside from the Compassion Capital Fund, all other funding streams associated with the OFBCI were distributed through cabinet-level offices (such as Health and Human Services, Housing and Urban Development, the Department of Labor, etc.), and the cabinet offices then distributed funds through their state-level bodies. In addition, attempts to track dollars associated with the Compassion Capital Fund (CCF) have been frustrated by the fact that such funds were released to intermediaries, who then disbursed funds to both faith-based and community-based organizations, creating a monitoring gap.

In addition, national estimates of CCF spending do not generally disaggregate between funds going to self-identified “faith-based” and “community-based” organizations. As well, I found a wide range of variation within and between these two groups with regard to the texture of religious expression. Therefore, providing a mechanism for more macro-level analyses to parse the two apart would be a useful project indeed. Generating data that distinguishes between the two is necessary in order for analysts to begin to understand the similarities and differences between them—and, perhaps, to challenge the longstanding assumption that the “community-based” identifier implies a less central role for religion in the organization—another widespread misconception that much of the analysis in the following chapters dispels. Though overall CCF spending has been easier to track as such funds were intended *solely* for faith-based and community organizations, funds flowing through cabinet-level offices also did not often make distinctions between grants awarded to faith-based organizations and funding for all others. As such, these

distinctions were often not reflected in record-keeping (or if compiled, not released to the public),⁶ owing largely to the “antidiscrimination” principles built into executive orders.

Though prominent conservatives continue to argue that faith-based organizations are overlooked and underfunded due to “discrimination,” faith-based providers that partner with state entities remain an important part of the landscape of need provision in the US. As detailed in the introduction, President Obama extended Bush’s OFBCI by creating the Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships. Steinfelds (2009) argues that although Bush’s faith-based aspirations were hampered by objections to exempting state-funded religious bodies from civil rights law governing discrimination in hiring and firing, Obama has been able to deal with the matter by foisting it off into the hands of the Justice Department. Indeed, a January 2012 Supreme Court decision took the matter up, ruling unanimously that “ministerial discretion” trumps anti-discrimination employment law.⁷ An additional high court decision made in the months leading up to Obama’s inauguration challenged the constitutionality of the use of government dollars to fund OFBCI conferences, as the Freedom from Religion Foundation (FFRF) argued that such meetings did not only disseminate information about grant opportunities—they also engaged in subtle forms of religious indoctrination. Notably, the case was not decided on the basis of Establishment Clause violation claims, but instead, the court ruled in favor of the OFBCI under the rationale that taxpayers do not have legal standing to challenge executive branch expenditures. Although there has been little activity in the legislative branch regarding the state funding of social services, this is likely attributable to the authoritative, silencing influence of Bush’s executive orders. Clearly, the issue of faith-

based partnerships, and the specific laws that should govern those relations, remains a point of controversy and a site of negotiation.

Steinfels (2009) predicts the trajectory—and paraphrases the mission—of the OFBNP as follows:

...the Obama effort ...will use its machinery not just to help religious groups providing social services to qualify for government financing but also to get religious perspectives on policies for economic recovery, strengthening fatherhood and families, reducing abortions and improving interfaith relations.

Steinfels further argues Obama will be successful in meeting these goals, as the historic divide between proponents of faith-based solutions and opposing White House political strategists (that hampered the OFBCI's progress) no longer exists. Indeed, there is a significantly lower amount of contention (comparatively speaking) regarding partnerships between worship communities and government among political figures in general, which in part, serves to explain the 'lower' public profile of the OFBNP.

Historically, the OFBCI's leadership seemed to change with the seasons, owing in part to frustrations over political forestalling and underfunding (Kuo 2006). The OFBNP, on the other hand, has enjoyed the benefits of having the same director from its inception.

Joshua DuBois, a Pentecostal minister with longstanding ties to the President, heads up Obama's OFBNP. As well, faith-based organizations have played central roles in executing the functions of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, one of Obama's primary pieces of domestic policy. Although much of the background surrounding the OFBNP suggests ongoing influence for faith-based providers, the task of generating data on resources structures (spending and distribution) is plagued with many of the same complications as earlier efforts. What little data there is on the distribution of

funds under the OFBCI came after many years of analysts' efforts to parse through a complicated institutional structure involving multiple chains of distribution and oversight. Furthermore, the institutionalization and diffusion of "nondiscrimination" policies has meant that faith-based organizations compete alongside secular institutions for almost any kind of grant money, rendering efforts to distinguish between the two even more complex.

Ultimately, though spending and elite discourse are certainly important factors in gauging the impact of the faith-based initiative, I propose that a measured consideration of the consequences of government-religious partnerships in the lives of those affected requires a broader evaluative standard that considers the discursive as well as the structural aspects of the policy and its 'on the ground' implementation. Both material resources and the structures of meaning embedded in discourse have consequences for practices and rhetoric in local contexts. As the structures of meaning surrounding the faith-based initiative have generally been neglected in the existing literature, I address an important gap in understandings of the power and influence of faith-based initiatives in the US welfare state.

In the end, a more moderate perspective on the nation-wide impact of the faith-based initiative from the Rockefeller Institute of Government holds: "The changes are varied, incremental, and opportunistic, rather than universal, revolutionary, and fundamental" (Ragan & Wright 2005). Such a view most closely approximates my own, as the impact of the faith-based initiative is often either under- or overestimated. My intervention is such that I argue that the impact of the *ideology* associated with the new flavor of

government-religious partnerships has received scant attention, owing in part to a predisposition in the faith-based literature to interrogate material resources and concrete practices to the exclusion of discursive structures. Viewed through the lens of Fraser's (1989) writings on need interpretation, this pattern should perhaps be unsurprising. This text represents an attempt to remedy that oversight by investigating the relationship between meaning and praxis.

Worship Communities, Social Ministry, and Government Partnerships

At the level of service provision, Shirley's (2010) case study of two faith-based initiatives in very different organizational settings found that although congregations do play a role in addressing significant needs within American communities, overall evidence of meaningful and sustained impact in the communities studied was in short supply. Ferguson et al. (2002) found community and faith-based welfare reform projects experienced shortcomings in management, funding, and community involvement, all of which operated in tandem to limit overall effectiveness and capacity to sustain the provision of services over time. Given such observed disconnects between the texture of community need and the impact of religious communities' styles of engagement, it is especially worthwhile to devote attention to the characteristics of religious organizations partnering with government, and the ways the characteristics of those organizations are likely to impact the service provision environment.

Chaves' (2004) *Congregations in America* provides perhaps the most comprehensive picture of what kinds of services congregations provide, and how many congregations are providing them. Notably, he finds 57% of American congregations are engaged in some

form of formal social service delivery, and 21% of congregations in the nation are partnering with government entities to do so. Despite elite rhetoric that claims faith-based organizations offer long-term, caring, and therefore transformative relationships, Chaves finds many local religious communities engage in one-time, basic needs provision, especially emergency assistance services (such as food banks, clothing drives, etc.), with far greater frequency than more complex, comprehensive, or long-term forms of programming.⁹

Cnaan's *the Other Philadelphia Story* (2006) takes issue with Chaves' findings in the National Congregations Study with data from over 2,000 Philadelphia-area congregations. Significantly, he finds instead that 93% of his surveyed congregations engage in some form of social service delivery. Aside from considering the possibility that Philadelphia may be a particularly exceptional case, there are other reasons behind the discrepancies between the figures presented in both studies. Chaves (2004) contends that Cnaan assembled his sample with the intention of including only the most active congregations in the area. Furthermore, regionalism and level of urbanization may play a role, as well as differences between the two authors' definitions of what 'counts' as a community service (cf. Edgell 2008). Additional data suggests the picture Chaves paints is likely closest to reality. Clerkin & Groenbjerg (2007) find slightly more than half of U.S. congregations offer some type of human service—though in comparison to secular and larger faith-based outfits, they provide a narrower range of services. Differences in measurement aside, existing research makes abundantly clear the considerable import of congregations in local landscapes of service provision.

Another important question revolves around *which kinds* of congregations are interested and involved in government-sponsored service provision. Chaves (2004) finds there are four primary predictive factors in determining which churches are most interested in applying for government funding for their service delivery efforts: 1) elements of the organizational environment of the congregation, 2) the congregation's racial and social class composition (minority and lower-income communities show greater inclinations), 3) higher amounts of constituents living in the surrounding neighborhood, and 4) the theological and political orientation of membership (liberal-leaning institutions are more interested in government partnerships). Of these factors, the racial makeup of the congregation is perhaps the most interesting and consequential in gauging potential interest in seeking state funds. Two-thirds of African American congregations expressed a willingness to seek financial resources from government, compared with 28% of predominantly white congregations. When controlling for other important congregational differences such as size and denomination, African American congregations are five times more likely than other congregations to express interest in seeking public support for social service activities. I discuss the matter of African American participation in the faith-based initiative in greater detail below.

Twin studies conducted by Ebaugh, Chafetz, and Pipes (2005a; 2005b) offer further insight into the characteristics of "faith-based social service coalitions" that are likely to influence their openness to receipt of government funds, as well as the characteristics of organizations actively involved in partnerships with the state. Overall, they find that larger, more professionalized, less religiously expressive, and more 'activism-oriented'

organizations are more likely to apply for and receive greater levels of state funds.

Similar associations bore out among those coalitions who had not yet applied for funds, but expressed an interest in doing so.

Ebaugh et. al (2005b) also explore the empirical reality behind the OFBCI's central organizing premise that represents conservative and evangelical religious bodies as having a greater capacity to operate as better service providers. Ironically, they find that high levels of religious expression and providers' belief in a relationship between religious content and positive program outcomes together resulted in lower levels of interest in, seeking out, and obtaining government funding. Similarly, Chaves (1999) found that mainline and liberal congregations were more open to the idea of government partnership. Aside from Ebaugh et. al's (2005b) findings that open religious expression and tying religious practice to outcome is negatively related to receipt of state funds, there is no other nation-wide study that examines the relationship between theological orientation (liberalism/conservatism) and *actual* receipt of government grants.

Despite Ebaugh et. al's (2005b) and Chaves' (1999) findings, a significant relationship between the OFBCI and theologically conservative organizations remains, and should not yet be discounted. First, Chaves (1999) collected his data during the period of time between Charitable Choice enactment and the development of the OFBCI. Whereas few people aside from lawmakers, academics, and other elites were aware of the Charitable Choice provisions, in the years following the initial implementation of associated provisions, the OFBCI maintained a very high public profile due to political controversy and presidential promotion. As well, the White House hosted dozens upon dozens of

informational conferences regarding the faith-based initiative, and explicitly targeted evangelical networks in disseminating information. Furthermore, the content of messages sent down from the OFBCI to intermediary funding organizations caused many to also target evangelical organizations—a reality echoed in my interviews with leaders at four intermediary organizations across two Midwestern states. I also suggest that Ebaugh et. al's (2005a) findings must be interpreted in a broader context. First, they include all sources of state funding, and not solely those associated with the OFBCI. Historically, large, bureaucratized, and secularized faith-based organizations have received the lion's share of government funding. Their finding of a moderate statistical relationship between high levels of religious expression and trepidation towards receipt of state funds likely reflects the impact of the aforementioned factors, as well as the fact that until immediately before the time of their data collection, open expressions of religious values in state funded social services was prohibited in existing policy.¹¹ Sea changes such as these are often subject to a lag-effect, whereby institutional structures do not immediately 'catch up' to legislative provisions.

Chaves & Wineburg (2010) address more general temporal questions in their finding that more U.S. congregations indicated interest in social services and government funding in 2006-2007 than in 1998. However, increased interest did not translate into greater congregational involvement in social services, government funding, or collaborations over the same time period. An explanation for the gap, the authors argue, lies in the faith-based initiative's failure to change congregations' behavior or expand their role in the social welfare system because of policymakers' misconception of the unique role of

congregations in local community systems. False assumptions about congregations' capacity to expand their social service role and the extent to which small worship communities constitute a legitimate alternative to existing organizational networks of social support were additional factors identified by Chaves & Wineburg (2010) that contributed to the limited, 'measurable' impact of the initiative.

Becker (1999) takes up the related matter of how different types of churches engage community and civic responsibility in *Congregations in Conflict* (1999). Her four-celled typology of local religious cultures includes those she labels "leader," "house of worship," "community," and "family" congregations. Each model describes a distinct way of viewing the relationship between the congregation and the outside world, as well as prescribing how members should relate to one another and religious authorities. Not only is Becker's typology useful for understanding the ways in which congregations are likely to handle conflict in general, her framework also affords some potential insight into the ways in which different types of congregations are likely take up the challenge of servicing the poor, how they are likely to interpret that charge, and how they are likely to field the challenges the provision of social services presents. Becker's models also have implications for interpreting the way a given congregation is likely to orient itself in relation to the state and government-religious partnerships, which as she predicts, is an element "that may become highly relevant if the federal government continues moving toward the use of private, voluntary groups to channel various forms of aid and charity" (183).

Ammerman's (2005) *Pillars of Faith* comprehensively examines the relationships between congregations and what Ammerman terms their "partner organizations" (which include groups ranging from material suppliers, service/community agencies, ministerial associations, and mission programs). Ammerman maps these relationships in an attempt to make definitive claims (as opposed to conjecture that otherwise dominates the existing literature) about how religious institutions relate to the public sphere. The study concludes that mainline Protestant congregations are the most connected religious organizations, whereas sectarian groups often self-consciously limit their connections to secular and other faith-based institutions. However, it is no quite so easy as reducing these differences to theological distinctions. Instead, a *combination* of resource availability, membership demographics, and theological orientation together influence the links congregations make to other community organizations. A strong contribution includes Ammerman's typology of congregations, which distinguishes between more "centralized" conservative Protestant churches from those that are more liberal and "networked."¹² Indeed, Ammerman's point about religious organizations' styles of public engagement as irreducible to their theological orientation bears out in my case studies. Each of the two evangelical programs for single mothers I profiled had very different ways of relating to the broader community through the level and type of distinction they made between "good Christians" and "nonbelievers."

Unruh & Sider (2005) takes this line of inquiry one step further in arguing that although there are many surface similarities between church-based programs and secular ones in terms of goods or services rendered, there are important differences in their motivations,

definitions of success, and understandings of their mission. The authors make the observations that faith-based programs exhibit a number of differences in the way they relate evangelizing imperatives to their mission work, and groups varied in their capacity to negotiate potential contradictions between their social objectives and doctrinal imperatives to ‘spread the good word.’ Perhaps most significantly, the authors recognize that the religious characteristics of an organization do not necessarily dictate the programs it operates, decoupling belief from service. Again, these insights bore out in my data in that of the two evangelical case studies described above, one was highly motivated to share biblical teachings and the value system they believed should spring from subscription to religious texts, whereas the other was able to relegate these imperatives to the background, despite strong ties to the evangelical tradition.

One of the main contributions of Unruh & Sider’s (2005) text is their development of an immensely useful six-celled typology of existing programs: Faith-permeated, faith-centered, faith-affiliated, faith background, faith-secular partnerships, and secular organizations are listed in a continuum that ranges from the highly religious to the fully secular. Unruh & Sider’s typology was particularly useful in aiding me in interrogating distinctions between organizations that appear, upon initial surface observation, to be ‘more’ and ‘less’ religiously expressive. However, as I detail in the section describing my main findings in Chapter 1, I found that such boundaries are porous, in that they shift over time and in both directions. While Unruh & Sider recognize that such a continuum oversimplifies often complex, ‘on the ground’ realities due to “inherent [limitations],”

they nevertheless represent religious content in programming in a fashion that presupposes the accuracy of a continuum in describing such realities.

Another important contribution of Unruh & Sider's (2005) text is a classification system for the religious characteristics of social service programs, which they group into four main categories: Symbolism in the program environment, the explicitly religious content of programming, strategies for incorporating explicitly religious elements into other aspects of programming, and the expected connection between religious elements and desired program outcomes (117). Despite the utility of this classification system, Unruh & Sider's study does not address the question of change over time, nor do they explore the ways organizations represent their religious identity in different ways, in different places, for different audiences. I argue these oversights lead to a false conceptualization of the multiple characteristics of religious organizational identity as each existing along a continuum (which they then combine to represent organizations as 'more' or 'less' religious).

Unruh & Sider (2005) do, however, recognize these elements of religious identity and expression are multiple and may operate independently of one another. Other studies of religious organizations' expressions of faith and related symbolism cited by Unruh & Sider also recognize that religious organizations have a variety of (perhaps independently operating) religious characteristics (cf. Monsma 1996, 2002; Jeavons 1998; Smith & Sosin 2001; Goggin & Orth 2002). Again, however, Unruh & Sider employ their understanding of such religious characteristics in the service of creating a model that presupposes a continuum *within* each category of religious characteristics—a model

which fails to capture the ways in which any particular organization may be ‘very religious,’ yet exhibit no differences from an ideal-type “secular” organization *within the same category of religious identity*, due to variations that occur at different points in time, in different locations, and for different audiences.

Tellingly, Unruh & Sider relate that “An organization need not be faith-based to provide an arena for people to live out their faith” (2005:107). Lastly, they explain, their typology “focuses on the tangible and overt rather than the subjective and implicit aspects of religion” (107). The poor fit of Unruh & Sider’s model for my own purposes is partially explicable by the fact that the “subjective and implicit” aspects of religious organizations comprise the central basis of my inquiry, though as I argue elsewhere, the “tangible and overt” aspects of religious identity and expression are directly tied to the interpretive elements of faith-based organizations, which together shape material outcomes. Attention to both elements of inquiry is therefore essential.

Due to recent legislative, judicial, and public affirmations of non-profit organizations’ entitlement to the expression of their religious character, existing non-profit social service organizations may also be increasingly likely to be environments where religious symbols, ideologies, and worldviews permeate the local environment. One can easily envision potential service-seeking clients approaching religious organizations increasingly homogenous and open in their expression of organizational religious identity and ideologies as viable options.

Studies such as these direct our attention to the question of what kinds of religious organizations are most likely to partner with government, and the ways the characteristics of those organizations are likely to impact the service provision environment. I address these concerns by surveying the contours of one local field of service provision, as well as investigating the potential impact of theology on organizational rhetoric and associated client outcomes. I further detail the ways questions surrounding organizational theology informed the contours of my inquiry in the immediately following chapter on methods.

The Faith-Based Initiative and Structural Inequalities

The racial implications of the faith-based initiative are profound and far-reaching. Faith-based initiatives were the most frequently promoted civil rights effort of the Bush Administration, and were framed by the president and supporting legislators in the language of “tolerance and respect” and “equal opportunity for all without discrimination or prejudice.” Therefore, faith-based initiatives were represented in a fashion that drew heavily upon a particularly resonant set of cultural values for Americans: civil rights. The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights’ (2004) report on the Bush Administration’s civil rights record states: “That this is the same language that historically has been associated with improving opportunities for traditionally underserved minority groups is significant” (158). However, the political use of such symbolism carries with it a disappointing irony.

When surveying the national religious landscape early in the conversation on religious social services, Chaves & Higgins (1992) found that Black congregations were more involved in secular activities in general, and were significantly more involved in serving underprivileged segments of their immediate communities and in civil rights advocacy.

Chaves (1999) further discovered a high level of interest in state partnerships among African-American religious leaders. A study released in 2006 reports problematic findings: “Only 2.6% of the 750 African American churches that received government queries for grants actually received funding. Some 47% of them had congregations located in the Northeast and 26% in the South” (Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies; qtd. in Harris 2007). Reasons behind the notable lack of involvement of the Black religious community include a lack of awareness about programs and how to apply for funds, skepticism about accepting federal money, and a lack of matching funds and resources (Harris 2007). White (2008) found 66% of Black pastors had no knowledge of the Charitable Choice Act of 1996, and 77.7% were not knowledgeable about the funding streams created by Charitable Choice.

Consistent with other similar research, Kvasny & Lee (2009) found that small and mid-sized Black religious organizations were rich repositories of information about local need and often had long histories of providing help and spiritual strength. However, those same organizations best positioned to serve in the roles envisioned by the OFBCI often lacked the resources and infrastructure necessary for securing funds and implementing programming. Such findings are consistent with earlier conjecture that OFBCI funds would be funneled only to organizations considered sufficiently established to manage (and quantitatively measure the efficacy of) those funds in a manner deemed appropriate by the federal government—leaving behind racial, cultural, and religious minority organizations, and further entrenching existing organizational patterns of privilege and deprivation. Many of the program leaders I spoke with for this study—and especially

those in small startups—mentioned the burdens of reporting and measurement as especially prohibitive, potentially deterring them from similar future partnerships. Five representatives expressing such sentiments from the twenty-seven total programs I surveyed were African-American.

The question of the extent to which faith-based organizations have the capacity to reach across barriers of social difference is another important point of inquiry. Lichterman (2005) investigated which types of congregations are most likely to make meaningful connections beyond their immediate faith community, or build “bridging” capital. To do so, he followed several associations of Protestant church-based networks organized to find solutions to the social problems that impending welfare reform would create. In explaining what goes wrong in these groups’ best efforts to network with the community and recipients of services, Lichterman insists that it is not structural factors (such as concrete resources or denominational affiliation) that determine the success or failure of groups. Lichterman’s concept of “group customs” refers broadly to practices of membership, as well as the cognitive maps that group members use to draw boundaries between themselves and the rest of the social world, the bonds of mutual obligation tying the group together, and the norms governing appropriate speech within the group. Many of these customs constitute the taken-for-granted elements of everyday life. In Lichterman’s view, civic connections between otherwise unconnected groups and individuals depend on the quality and duration of social relationships, and more specifically, on the extent to which group members are capable of “social reflexivity”—a process of collective inquiry about a group’s concrete relations with the wider world,

which by necessity involves active reexamination of taken-for-granted customs and a sometimes painstaking effort to change those customs. “Group customs” provides a useful explanatory device for interpreting my own data, in that organizations most concerned with creating distinctions between “good Christians” and the rest of the world were seemingly least successful in their otherwise genuine efforts to reach across class and racial difference—both in drawing in potential clients, and in networking with other worship communities.

Bartkowski & Regis (2003) also problematize conventional understandings of faith-based social services as assumed and automatic generators of “social capital.” They argue that the “Janus-faced” nature of social capital is such that it can function both to reach across and to reinforce America’s social divisions. The American religious landscape, they argue, is marked by social asymmetries in the form of historical legacies, cleavages between denominations and faith traditions, and racial stratification. Religious congregations, according to Bartkowski & Regis, cultivate social capital by collectively engaging in boundary work, which is simultaneously integrative and exclusionary:

...religious boundary work and the differential stocks of social capital it yields may create uneven opportunities for faith communities in this era of government contracting. Our study suggests that the haphazard expansion of Charitable Choice could reinforce structured forms of inequality among faith communities while undermining religious pluralism and racial justice. ...other inequalities among religious communities might be exacerbated by Charitable Choice (172-73).

Therefore, the danger of relying on religious communities for social service work is that the hierarchies and inequities they mirror from the larger society may be reproduced as they administer social services.

Similarly, Bane, Coffin, & Thiemann (2000) assert that the promise of religious organizations in strengthening community should not be considered in the absence of the possibility that such organizations may fail to be sufficiently attentive to structures of gender and race that divide our society. “Religious congregations may provide services to the poor, or even protest on their behalf, but do so *for* them and not *with* them, thus reinforcing exclusion” (13). Indeed, the exclusion of the voices of clients in my case studies sometimes resulted in reifying the perceived differences between volunteers and those with a background in “generational poverty.” It is important to note, however, that clients’ experiences were not marginalized out of a desire to exclude, but instead sprang from a lack of visible and viable models for greater inclusion. In the absence of available ‘cultural maps,’ actors were constrained in their capacity to bridge important aspects of social differences.

Wood’s (2002) study of faith-inspired activism has another useful take on the debate. Religious beliefs and theological values, he explains, are important in determining the outcomes of faith-based organizations. Faith traditions that do not equip adherents to process ambiguity can serve as a potential barrier to coalition building and compromise, as can traditions of strong pastoral authority inhibit the ability of members to challenge the status quo.

Edgell (2008) convincingly argues that despite the centrality of caretaking efforts in American (especially Christian) religious institutions, caretaking is not necessarily undertaken as part of an effort to change enduring structures of inequality, and is instead an active expression of faith-inspired commitments. This reality suggests limitations on

the potential for change within organizations that are motivated more by a desire to express their religious convictions, and less by a desire to effect structural change.

Wood (2002) further notes that biblical literalism leaves some institutions ill-equipped to deal with issues that are not easily framed in biblical terms. If an issue cannot be addressed within the confines of an organization's biblical interpretations, such concerns are often viewed as falling outside the realm of appropriate and intelligible discourse. In the end, Wood's research provides compelling additional factors to take into account when considering the capacity of specific organizations to administer truly liberating social programming. As my study uses theological orientation as a primary axis of comparison, I actively engage with many of the issues Wood cites.

Overall, although there were and are significant limitations in the execution of policies and practices associated with the faith-based initiative, programming established by the OFBCI and continued through the OFBNP have been far from inconsequential. As detailed in the previous chapter, faith-based organizations' practice of partnering with government is an increasingly normative practice, and enjoys broad-based, bipartisan support¹² from members of the general public¹³, political elites, and community leaders. Specifically, changes on the horizon of American social service have amounted to the creation of a discursive landscape where government-religious partnerships have grown increasingly normative.

However, some enduring, troubling questions remain. Slightly over a decade after the formal implementation of faith-based partnerships through the OFBCI (and arguably

longer, if one considers Charitable Choice), the jury is still out in the debate on whether and how faith-based initiatives are a liberating or restrictive practice. The question of underrepresentation in faith-based initiatives, be it based on race, religion, sexual orientation, or some other criteria of difference, must be taken seriously in ongoing analysis. Enduring group-based inequality structures such as age, race, gender, class, and sexual orientation must all be considered to a greater degree if we are to effectively model what types of inequities will be ameliorated and what types may be exacerbated under the new welfare regime. It is unlikely that any one analysis will have the capacity to make universalizing statements about whether faith-based initiatives either ameliorate or exacerbate inequalities, nor should that be the goal of inquiry. Instead, the conditions under which inequalities are challenged, reproduced, or *transformed* should guide the ongoing conversation. My analysis represents one effort to do so.

Ultimately, it has become clear that partnerships between government and small, openly faith-expressive houses of worship are an increasingly important part of the national landscape, and despite ongoing contention, they are here to stay. Therefore, given the ongoing potential of such arrangements to affect the lived experience of marginalized individuals and groups—in very concrete ways—the ways in which religion plays a role in informing ‘everyday’ institutional environments of service provision warrants the careful attention of social scientists.

3. QUESTIONS AND METHODS: DEVELOPING DESIGN, SITE PREVIEWS, AND SOCIAL LOCATION

Research Questions

This dissertation is motivated by three primary questions: 1) How do institutionalized models of family and gender in faith-based organizations inform service providers' interpretation of clients' needs? 2) Do the models of family circulating in faith-based organizations have consequences for the ways these organizations become gendered social spaces? 3) In environments where models for the "Ideal Family" exist in tension with other forms of family life, will organizational rhetorics about family and gender reflect this diversity? All three questions were addressed in the context of social service programs funded by pools of resources established by the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives.

My primary questions necessitated attention to a number of associated elements of the field. First, with regard to need interpretation, I explored the language, cultural schemas, and associated practices religious leaders and 'front-line' workers deployed in faith-based and community social service programs in their definitions of poverty as a social problem. I interviewed authorities and staff members in faith-based and community organizations, asking about their views on poverty, marginalization, and changes in the family, and I solicited their ideas about constructive solutions to the perceived problems posed by each phenomenon. I directed special attention to the ways need interpretation varied on the basis of gender, race, and family background (nuclear, single-parent, extended, etc.) by focusing on differences and similarities in the ways clients from

different social locations were spoken of and treated by leadership, staff, and volunteers in settings of 'everyday' service provision. I was also attentive to how the social location of clients influenced provider-to-provider discussions of client needs, and whether that varied on the basis of the clients' family living situation. Also important were the ways clients and providers created meaning through interaction and either succeeded or failed in creating relationships across traditional barriers and status distinctions (such as gender, socioeconomic status, race, etc.). Further, I drew my attention to the role such relationships played in helping or hindering clients' access to political and material resources.

To address my second question about the dialectic relationship between family models and the social construction of gender, I listened and watched carefully for instances where family ideals were enacted or spoken in gendered terms by both providers and recipients. Generally, this involved looking for talk of familial roles: mother, father, husband, wife, son, daughter, etc. Sometimes, however, normative role associations were broader, but nevertheless carried overtones of gender and family. Examples of such more general roles include citizen, community member, worker, client, dependent, provider, etc. By reflecting on the implicit and explicit associations subjects made regarding the gendered responsibilities associated with each role, I was able to sketch the relationship between family and gender in each of my sites.

For my third question, I trained my eye to recognize when the family-related cultural frames used by providers seemed to match with the lives of clients, and when the two seemed to diverge. I asked participants about when they felt their family life and

associated decisions were supported, and when they felt their realities were unacknowledged, incorrectly assumed, or judged with moral standards that perhaps differed from their own. In addition, I looked to the ways those who organize and execute programming defined successful completion of their curricula and/or proper utilization of their services, especially with regard to the types of family lives providers tried to cultivate for their clients. Definitions of client success, or positively evaluated behavior, were signaled by providers' use of keywords such as "stability," "self-sufficiency," "empowerment," or descriptions of clients who were deemed to be "ready for a change."

Research Design

To address the above questions, I conducted interviews, participant-observation, focus groups, and primary document analysis. Data was collected from years 2007 to 2012 in two separate, yet interrelated, phases. The first phase of data collection involved interviews with organizational authorities in Compassion Capital funded non-profits from three cells identified as either: "community-based," theologically liberal, or theologically conservative. For the second phase of data collection, I completed interviews with organizational leaders, staff, and volunteers, observed both the operation of daily service provision and special events, and conducted focus groups with the recipients of services in four area non-profits where I expected to find significant levels of talk or practice related to family life.

There were many benefits to completing the dissertation in two separate, yet interrelated modules. Interviewing program directors and volunteers from faith-based and community programs across the metro area allowed me to speak in broader terms about what types of organizations and practices fall under the umbrella of “faith-based”—an understanding and definition not often interrogated in existing literature on the subject as the label includes a range of practices and organizational forms. In addition, doing so allowed me to identify organizations for case study which would be representative of the broad range of family and gender rhetoric within the phase one sample. Furthermore, entry into phase two fieldsites proved easier, as I had established a level of rapport with my interview subjects from phase one.

While I began with a guiding script for all interviews, in practice, they were open-ended and semi-structured. Conducting my interviews in this fashion allowed my subjects to guide me to the appropriate terms and categories that would describe their experience, as opposed to my assuming appropriate structures of meaning and proceeding accordingly. In other words, the use of semi-directed interviews was particularly advantageous for the proposed research because it allowed my research subjects *themselves* to describe their standards of evaluation and guide me toward the appropriate analytical categories, instead of my applying language and insisting my participants describe their experience in predefined terms.

Interviews began with my requesting that participants fill out a “background information” form with questions on their professional background, their duties and responsibilities within the organization, the organization’s budget and funding sources, and their client

base profile (gender, race, family situation/structure, income level, labor force status, residence, etc.). From there, I proceeded with the tape-recorded interview. Themes I covered in program director/volunteer interviews included: program history; participants' opinions of what they did/did not "like" about their job; organizational mission; use of Compassion Capital Funds; program change over time/future plans; 'successful' program outcomes; family/individual client needs; defining the family and (solutions to) poverty; the role of faith in family and welfare programming; views on privatization, devolution, and the remoralization of the welfare state; and organizational religious expression/character (see appendices for interview guides and focus group questions). Interviews generally lasted anywhere from 1 ½ hours to 3 hours.

My ethnographic component allowed me to compare the rhetorical strategies my participants deployed (what they said they were doing) with the practices they enacted in daily settings (what they did). In addition, it helped me move beyond pre-packaged talk considered polite and appropriate when considering matters as politically sensitive as welfare, family, race, and gender. Many of my interviewees spoke in standard terms with "predictable scripts and silences" (Pollock 2004:11). It was often difficult to get the people I was working alongside to speak candidly about these matters, and I sometimes left interviews feeling that I had gathered information inconsistent with the content of what I'd observed in days prior. Therefore, it was important for me to compare the content of interviews with "the informal logic of actual life" deployed in provider-to-recipient and provider-to-provider interactions (Geertz 1973:17).

In each case study setting, I began in some sort of volunteer capacity. Doing so allowed me to contribute something (however meager) to organizations with serious time and resource deficits, as well as allowing me access (however limited) to a small part of the service providers' experience, or worldview, through partially replicating their institutional location. Certainly my livelihood did not hang in the balance, as it does for many of those who work in and approach social welfare organizations. However, I feel justified in making claims about the perspectives of both providers and recipients after having spent some time on both sides of the fence, either as researcher, or in my personal experience as a welfare service recipient.

Ethnography brings into stark relief the connections between structures of power and the 'everyday life' of research participants. Utilizing participant-observation methods in actual settings of service provision helped me determine how subjects were positioned within the discursive field of their respective institutions. Ethnographic methods often prove advantageous because they allow the researcher access to the discursive field of everyday life, where the linkages between social structures and subjective experiences are made explicit. For example, as ethnographer Leslie Salzinger (2003) points out,

The use of the embodied, emotional, thoughtful self as a research 'instrument' is well suited to the enterprise of making connections between the purportedly public and private, [and] between economics and gender... (3).

Focus groups and informal conversation allowed me to solicit opinions from recipients of services. In focus group settings, clients were interviewed in clusters to gather information on the potential limitations or liberations of particular practices. I chose the focus group format to minimize my participants' potential discomfort with being

interviewed on a one-on-one basis with a perceived representative of the institution they were being asked to critique, to gather as many opinions as possible with the greatest possible expediency, and to allow subjects to expound on one another's responses to engage in a process of collective meaning-making. In some instances, themes and tones I observed in "waiting room" conversations were replicated in focus group settings.

Lastly, primary document analysis allowed me to compare the different "public faces" presented by the organizations I followed, as they were constructed at different points in time and for different audiences. I gathered materials such as website descriptions, informational pamphlets (for donors, potential volunteers, and prospective clients), annual reports, annual budgets, strategic plans, minutes from Board of Directors meetings, curricular materials (worksheets, intake forms, transportation logs, etc.), grant applications, and anything else made available. Reviewing and coding these materials allowed me insight into how the organizations I followed changed over time, as many of the documents were produced over a wide range of years.

Data Collection

In the first phase of data collection, I began by conducting 7 interviews with leadership at 4 different "intermediary" organizations drawn from two bordering Midwestern states—non-profits charged with the responsibility of disseminating information about the Compassion Capital Fund (the primary fiscal vehicle of Bush's White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives), awarding funds on a competitive basis to small faith-based and community initiatives, and providing technical support and training in

capacity-building to selected grantees. The intermediaries I selected for interview were housed in 1) a large, traditionally African-American and conservative house of worship; 2) a specialized office operating as a subsidiary of a mid-sized public university; 3) an interfaith council of religious leaders from a variety of denominations united for the purpose of advocacy and programming; and 4) an organization—partially funded/supported by the state—designed to grow the capacity of non-profits in rural areas. Intermediaries were drawn from throughout two neighboring Midwestern states, and were selected to represent the wide range of possibilities with regard to variation in intermediary type and organizational style. Interviews with intermediaries were conducted in order to gain a better understanding of the local-level administration of the Compassion Capital Fund, achieve an understanding of the concerns unique to a small handful of fund-granting institutions, and gain an initial familiarity with the language used to describe representatives' understanding of their mission, imperatives, barriers, and successes. Such language, I assumed, would shape priorities and understandings at the local, grantee non-profit level.

Continuing in phase one, I next conducted 32 interviews at 27 separate organizations, sampled from the list of subawardees receiving Compassion Capital grants between the years 2004 to 2010. Organizations in phase one were selected to equitably represent organizations from three categories: “community-based,” theologically conservative, and theologically liberal. The moniker “community-based” refers to a self-identification organizations were asked to select by their corresponding intermediary for reporting purposes—either they identified themselves as “faith-based” or “community-based.”

Though the juxtaposition of such language implies more secular content for community-based organizations, I found this was not the case, as many exhibited a level of religious expression and association I considered to be beyond what I witnessed at many self-described faith-based organizations.

Though initially I had designed the study to compare small “secular” social service organizations with small “faith-based” organizations, it soon became clear that organizations included under both labels were far too diverse (as measured by size, target demographic, mission, history, resources, manner of religious expression, relationship with houses of worship, etc.) to allow for universalizing statements about them. Instead of a broad comparison of “secular” and “faith-based” organizations, I decided to only select faith-based and community organizations funded by the Compassion Capital Fund—the primary fiscal vehicle of the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives, administered by the Department of Health and Human Services.

After narrowing my focus to solely CCF recipients, I then decided to make comparisons across one axis: theological tradition. Theological tradition is one significant axis along which I expected variation in need interpretation, family, and gender, as the degree of liberalism or conservatism in particular houses of worship often dictates their orientation to matters of family, gender, the particularities of their ethic of care for the marginalized, and general sentiments about the role of government in public and private life (Hart 1994; Edgell 2006; Edgell & Docka 2007; Pankhurst & Houseknecht 2000; Christiano 2000; Gallagher & Smith 1999). Assignment to either the liberal or conservative category was made on the basis of the organizations’ denominational affiliation [as per criteria

established in Roof & McKinney (1987)]. However, for the sake of preserving the anonymity of organizations, their specific denominational affiliation is left undisclosed in the chapters that follow, and they are referred to simply as “liberal” or “conservative.” As mentioned above, included alongside theologically liberal and theologically conservative organizations are small CCF-funded non-profits that chose instead to self-identify as “community-based,” thus rejecting the “faith-based” moniker. I therefore had three categories of comparison.

All interviews were conducted either with Program Directors, Executive Directors, Founders, CEOs, Volunteer Coordinators, or Board Members. In addition, documentation regarding the program was collected and analyzed for content. Informed consent for interviews was obtained in the form of a signature on a form detailing the risks and benefits of participation in the study. Informed consent for participation in the observational component of the study was obtained through asking that program directors please discuss my presence with their clients/volunteers before inviting me to any sessions/events, allowing potential participants to ask questions and express any concerns beforehand.

The seven liberal faith-based non-profits selected for interview in phase one included a youth mentorship program, an advocacy program for low-income families, an arts program for youth and disabled individuals, an after-school and tutoring program for youth, an employment resource center, and a homelessness advocacy and resource center.

The eight conservative faith-based organizations selected for interview included an Islamic cultural center, a resource center for Christian educators, a health clinic, a drop-in youth center, a life skills/tutoring program for youth, two single motherhood programs, and a congregation engaged in a wide variety of outreach and family ministry activities.

Lastly, twelve “community-based” Program Directors and other authorities were selected for interview from the following organizations: a mentorship program for “at-risk” teenage girls of color, an after-school/summer program for youth, a tutoring program for African-American youth, a youth employment program, three advocacy organizations for African immigrants (two of which are specifically designed to meet the needs of women), a fatherhood/pregnancy prevention education program, a college preparatory program for African-American youth, a multicultural/ESL early childhood education program, and a neighborhood-based family advocacy program.

In the second phase of data collection, I selected four organizations to follow as case studies. Organizations were selected to represent each of the three categories in my typology: one liberal faith-based group, two conservative faith-based groups, and one community-based group were chosen. Organizations selected for in-depth profiling were chosen to be illuminative of the range of family rhetoric in faith-based and community organizations at large, and exemplary of the “priority” areas identified by CCF administration. Programs for “needy,” “vulnerable,” and “at-risk” families were explicitly selected, as efforts of this type all generally have implicit and explicit understandings of ideal family formation and accompanying gender roles and needs. To best facilitate access to frames of interest, programs where family discourse (such as

strengthening and/or protecting the family) was especially prevalent (such as homelessness programs where efforts were made to keep families in-tact, mentorship programs for children with absent parents, parenting education programs, etc.) were targeted for selection. In addition, programs that were relatively long-term in their curriculum and explicitly tried to foster relationships between clients and volunteers/service providers were targeted.

In phase two of data collection, four organizations were profiled as case studies: *Graceful Girls*, a “community-based” mentoring organization for African-American female youth; *Integrity Intervention*, a theologically liberal “faith-based” homelessness advocacy group; and lastly, two theologically conservative “faith-based” organizations designed to offer support to single mothers: *Mastering Motherhood* and *Parenting Without Partners*. Members of the leadership were interviewed, volunteer and staff interviews were conducted (when applicable), program documentation was collected and reviewed, daily activities were observed (via my participation as a volunteer), and focus groups were conducted with the recipients of services. I was present for the daily activities associated with service provision, ‘behind the scenes’ conversations among providers at the end of the day’s activities, special programming designed to address the specific needs of clients (such as employment, legal advice, summer camp, a prayer circle, etc.), board and other leadership meetings, fundraising events, volunteer trainings, and group visits to partner organizations.

For each interview, I did not transcribe verbatim, and instead chose to take copious notes during the interview process, which were then expanded to include both descriptive and

analytic content within a short time (1-3 days) afterwards. Segments of the interview that contained verbatim quotes suspected to be especially relevant were signposted, and these especially relevant segments of the interview were later transcribed. Interviews for both phases of data collection were conducted at locations such as churches, community centers, respondents' homes, coffeehouses, and restaurants.

At *Graceful Girls* I interviewed 7 members of the leadership team and conducted four focus groups with a total of nine participating young women. At *Integrity Intervention*, I also interviewed seven members of the leadership team and conducted two focus groups with a total of nine participating clients.

At *Mastering Motherhood*, I interviewed five members of the leadership team. Though more interviews would have been ideal, there was a distinct shortage of volunteering mentors at the time of data collection, and the leaders of the organization expressed trepidation about my gathering data beyond the small handful of interviews I was allowed (the Executive Director informed me, upon my request for additional contacts, "you should have enough information by now"). I was also denied access to participant interviews at *Mastering Motherhood*. My requests were denied on the grounds that long-time participating mothers either had just left or were currently exiting the program, and new mothers had not yet been present for long enough to offer a measured view of the organization. My observations indicated to me that although there would have been sufficient candidates for a small handful of interviews, anxieties expressed by the leadership about having their organization portrayed in a public forum in a negative light were more likely to blame. I was continually reminded by program authorities that no

portion of my findings should be published in a public forum without review from the Executive Director. Requests to Xerox and bring home any materials (volunteer training manuals, strategic plans, etc.) not readily available to the public were denied, under the logic that they were proprietary materials, and replication of the program model would result in legal liability for the organization.

At *Parenting Without Partners*, I interviewed 2 of the 3 members of the leadership team (the one I did not formally interview was solely responsible for childcare, and not present for the content of the meetings and had no knowledge of the program's curriculum). In addition, I conducted 2 focus groups that included 7 total participants. Luckily, however, many of the participating mothers I interviewed both formally and informally at *Parenting Without Partners* either were or had been *Mastering Motherhood* participants, due to their policy of cross-referral. I thereby gained additional perspective on *Mastering Motherhood*, as well as through informal conversations before, during, and after programming.

There are a number of reasons I chose to profile two organizations for the “theologically conservative” cell in phase 2 of my research. First, as previously mentioned, the organizations had a policy of cross-referral. Second, their historical relationship had an added layer of depth in that *Mastering Motherhood* was hired to serve as a “professional mentor” and to advise *Parenting Without Partners*' Director on matters of capacity building with the use of Compassion Capital funds. Some of the areas in which *Mastering Motherhood* provided *Parenting Without Partners* with guidance and modeling included board recruitment/function, insurance/liability issues, “operating

processes,” the standardization of mentor training, and the development of intake and other important institutional paperwork. Though the two organizations had some differences in structure and purpose, they also had considerable similarity in their target populations, models of service delivery, governance structures, and theological orientations, commitments, and associations. Overall, *Mastering Motherhood* and *Parenting Without Partners* were very intentional about the division of labor between the two organizations and in their alignment of their respective strategic goals. Lastly, as detailed above, both individual organizations presented unique limitations I hoped could be overcome through selecting two organizations very similar in general focus (single motherhood programming). While I could interview a decent handful of leaders and mentors at *Mastering Motherhood* and no participants, at *Parenting Without Partners* I could only interview two members of the leadership team and plenty of participants. Together, my access limitations at each served to counter-balance one another. As well, the small size of my interview sample pools should also be understood in the context of the relative size of the organizations, as both were very small (see the program profiles included at the end of this chapter, and at the beginning of each case study chapter, for additional information about their size and capacity).

While conducting the ethnographic component of the study, fieldnotes were taken in a small, handheld notebook as the day’s events unfolded in each fieldsite. As the format of most interactions was either classroom instruction or group meeting, scribbling in a notebook was not necessarily a socially inappropriate activity. As with my interview

notes, handwritten fieldnotes were later expanded to include additional descriptive and analytic detail from memory.

Throughout the fieldwork process, I wrote “notes on notes” to explore analytic themes and categories as they emerged (Fields 2005; Kleinman 1993; Lofland & Lofland 1995). When data collection had been completed, I looked back on my interview and field notes, re-listened to key segments of interviews, and examined my notes-on-notes to further expand initial themes, concepts, and categories. From there, I developed a coding scheme I applied to all program documentation, interview notes and partial transcripts, fieldnotes, and notes-on-notes. The patterns I explored therein comprise the main content of the dissertation.

Theoretical Underpinnings & Social Location

In crafting my interview guides, interpreting my ethnographic data, and coding, I approached the information I’d gathered with a partially-committed “grounded theory” approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Whereas I did approach the field with a central set of concerns (need interpretation, family, and gender) and an understanding of existing literature on those concerns, I made a concerted effort to avoid applying my own categories of analysis. Instead, I tried to extract codes and categories from the language and understandings of my research participants. Though I had suspicions upon entering the field, I tried to remain open to all possibilities. As I approached each daily interaction or interview exchange, I tried to discern my participants’ main concerns and the practical/rhetorical strategies they used to resolve those concerns. The grounded theory

approach proved most useful to me, however, in the analysis/coding phase of research, as codes were extracted from the text, rather than constructed through and applied on the basis of outside criteria. Once significant codes were extracted from the content of the data, they were then compared against the body of the data once more, establishing a dialectic relationship between raw data and codes. Research therefore proceeded in both an inductive and deductive manner.

In addition to grounded theory, Smith's (1987, 2002) method of institutional ethnography provided another framework for understanding my observations of interactions (including those between my research participants and myself). In essence, the institutional ethnographic framework provides a roadmap for empirical research, and is especially well-suited to illuminating the connections between 'everyday life,' the practices of professionals, and the discourse deployed by policymakers and other elite actors. Though ultimately always grounded in practice, social interactions in this perspective are read as texts—all actors have different motives, discerning theme is especially important for the 'reader' of such 'texts,' and the 'plot' is driven by larger organizing devices (generally conceptualized as institutional power). Therefore, this particular approach is similar to Gusfield's (1981) later elaboration/deployment of Goffman's "dramaturgical analysis" (1959), yet different in its special focus on gendered power relations and texts *as they are situated* in the practices of daily life. Originally, Smith developed the method in order to help articulate an approach designed to create sociological analysis *by* women as opposed to *about* women—moving the feminine perspective from the endpoint of inquiry to the forefront of conceptualization. The method is mainly ethnographic in its approach,

though especially attuned, again, to the discursive, or textual, elements of social life, all the while remaining grounded in *how* those texts are deployed by research participants in the realm of practice (Eastwood & Devault 2001). The approach also includes a level of focused attention to the political-economy of social interactions. Relations of power are generally mapped in spatial terms, with power radiating out from discursive centers, many of which are marked by silence and absence as opposed to utterance and presence (Smith 1993).

The final theoretical frame that held major influence over my data collection is feminist standpoint theory, another body of theoretical and methodological musings closely associated with the work of Dorothy Smith. Essentially, the perspective begins with valuing women's experiences as a starting point for knowledge. Because women are situated at the locus of power relations in any given institutional context, they are best positioned to view and grasp the dynamics at play. Further, subordinated groups are best positioned to lodge critiques and present alternatives to conventional and expert-informed wisdom. Though critics argue standpoint theory necessarily creates an essentialized feminine identity, more contemporary formulations of standpoint theory hold that standpoints should be conceptualized in relational terms, taking into account other forms of domination such as racism, classism, sexism, and ablism [or as in Hill-Collins' (2009) words, the "matrix of domination"], and the understanding that every individual subject is always in a unique position with regard to the aforementioned centers of power (Sandoval 2000), affording them uniquely corresponding insight into structures of power.

Standpoint theory was useful for the development of my methodology and the interpretation of my data in two ways. First, it allowed me insight into the reasons behind differing conceptualizations of institutional interactions between research participants, particularly on the basis of their differing social locations. For example, white women did not experience the same organization in the same fashion as men of color, nor were their needs “read” by service providers in the same fashion. The theory therefore called me to direct my attention to the impact of participants’ social location in my interpretations of their rhetoric and practice.

Second, my status as an “outsider-within” shaped both my own interpretations of data and my interactions with my research subjects in a number of ways that required careful consideration (Lenz 2004; Pierce 1996). I had to consistently mine my practices and interactions to consider when I was approaching the field as a privileged, white academic, and when I was approaching the field as a product of (in the words of many service providers) “generational poverty,” not yet comfortable in my ill-fitting middle-class skin. I had to consider when my respondents read me as ‘social worker,’ complicit with and representing the organizations that always required some level of deference and moral reform to dispense resources, and when my crooked teeth, tattoos, linguistic mannerisms, and stated worldview told a perhaps conflicting story. I had to further consider when volunteers and program authorities read me as either a helpful source of additional volunteer labor, a potentially useful outside perspective on the efficacy of services, or an ‘outsider’ who might potentially craft detrimental or negative critiques of practices.

Overall, while my position as “outsider-within” afforded me an epistemic advantage of ‘double vision,’ it also required that I develop and hone a number of important sensitivities. First, I had to remain conscientious of the ways my subjects read me and summarily responded. It was important for me to continually engage in careful consideration of the ways my personal experiences with poverty and homelessness might have led me to make quick, or unwarranted assumptions about my understandings of the words of the clients I spoke with. On occasion, my class background may have also led me to be especially critical of the moral assumptions, or normative orientations, of providers in their dealings with marginalized clients. Given my identity as a white woman, I had to caution myself against overestimating the interpretive value, or recognizing the limits, of shared experience with clients of color given the distance created by my white privilege. I also had to consider the ways in which my privilege as a white professional granted me access to providers’ perspectives I might not otherwise have been privy to. My self-presentation as a professional—in combination with my whiteness—also sometimes caused clients to read me as a social worker, which undoubtedly impacted the tone of their interactions with me. Lastly, I had to caution myself against suppressing aspects of my identity as woman, feminist, and as fundamentally shaped by my liminal class status in any efforts I may have engaged in to ‘pass’ as a scientist. In sum, my social location influenced both the process of data collection and my subsequent interpretation of my findings, and I made a number of efforts to consider the impact of these influences upon my work.

Field Site Overviews: An Orientation to the Programs

Graceful Girls

Graceful Girls is a youth mentorship organization designed to “increase the self-esteem, self-worth, and self-regulation of young urban women, ages 13-19, through education and mentorship.” Specifically, the organization’s Strategic Plan states a desire to address the following “societal symptoms:” “...1) families in crisis, 2) crime involving more girls, 3) more girls using drugs, 4) self-abuse & drug abuse, 5) rampant promiscuity and 6) truancy/high dropout rates.”

The Program Director, Jasmine, is an African-American single mother of two sons in her late thirties. Though originally trained as a hairdresser, she now works as a “Youth Career Coach” and administrator at the high school that donates space for *Graceful Girls*’ activities. Jasmine began offering *Graceful Girls*’ programming five years ago. The group began with Jasmine’s vision to work with the public schools, foster care, and juvenile court systems “to help guide Black girls in the right direction by... making them beautiful after bringing up the young ladies’ self-worth.” In collaboration with her friend and colleague, a high school principal, the two together decided on an after-school, extra-curricular model, developed in partnership with the Urban League. Eventually, the program would transition to 3-hour-long Saturday morning format. At the time of data collection, youth participation involved a year-long commitment from the girls. Young women were drawn from both surrounding neighborhoods and the high school that hosts the program. Participating girls would find out about *Graceful Girls* through posted advertisements at area schools, recruitment presentations given by the leadership team, and word-of-mouth recommendations from associated friends or family members.

Graceful Girls' programming was funded through a combination of a variety of sources. Funds from private foundations, individual donations, in-kind contributions, small government grants, and fund-raising events provided support for operating expenses. The Urban League provided limited resources and networking opportunities, the hosting school provided the venue and recruitment opportunities for participants, and intermittent small-sum grants from local philanthropic organizations provided sporadic fiscal resources. Operating expenses for the 2011-2012 school year were under \$50,000, though plans for future growth would include two additional after-school programs, raising operating expenses to a total of \$150,000. *Graceful Girls* received a \$4,000 grant late in the lifespan of the Compassion Capital Fund, which was mainly used to develop a consulting relationship with an area financial literacy advocacy organization. *Graceful Girls* has no paid staff, and operates entirely on the basis of volunteer labor. Expenses are rarely met, and resources are piecemeal and intermittent, leaving the leadership to execute activities as funds permit and supplement with their personal incomes.

Currently, *Graceful Girls* is based out of one of the most economically depressed and racially segregated neighborhoods in the area. The organization is almost exclusively African American. At the time of data collection, about 16 girls were participating on a regular basis. The group meets weekly inside a small charter school, housed in a mid-sized Catholic parish. Large Victorian homes carved into rental units and downsized industrial operations sit in the shadow of the church. An adjacent commercial strip includes check-cashing and loan outfits, fast food establishments, dollar stores, and small

apparel/footwear shops. Remnants of vacated small businesses are still visible in faded signage and curling paper inside picture windows.

Initially, *Graceful Girls* began by working to bring a series of “strong black women” speakers into the public schools to share the stories of their lives and career paths. After the first two years, the organization’s model was refined to include both a series of speakers and individual “consultants” assigned to groups of 3-4 girls. Presently, the consultants act as both mentors and life coaches, and are expected to reach out to each young woman in their team on a weekly basis. There are now anywhere from 15-30 girls enrolled in any given year—16 participated on a regular basis at the time of data collection.

I began with *Graceful Girls* by volunteering my time as an “academic coach.” Duties involved with this volunteer post involved helping participating youth study for the ACT, searching for/identifying appropriate scholarships, drafting scholarship applications, searching for/selecting colleges/technical schools/universities for application, completing college applications, financial aid advising, career coaching/strategic planning, finding career mentor matches, degree program planning (at all levels of education), identifying/applying to/succeeding in resume-building extracurricular activities, and securing/providing general academic tutoring. My experience has been characterized by close personal relationships with both the adults and young women in the organization.

Although *Graceful Girls* explicitly identifies as “community-based” as opposed to “faith-based,” spirituality is very important. Religious language, symbolism, and practices are

pervasive in both the formal curriculum and informal, weekly conversations. On a typical Saturday morning, the day's activities begin with an impassioned prayer, led by either a member of the leadership team or one of the young women—it was not uncommon for one of the girls to enthusiastically begin the session with prayer. The next portion of the meeting was reserved for “check-ins,” where all participating youth would share significant parts of their week (goings-on at school, family events, personal struggles, etc.). From there, the group would have either one or two speakers who would cover topics such as sexual hygiene, peer pressure and drug use, career development, self-esteem, personal emotional growth, relationships with parents and peers, etc. Each meeting closed with the young women sharing their “takeaways,” or elements of the day's curriculum that stood out for them as particularly noteworthy or applicable to their personal life.

Integrity Intervention

Integrity Intervention is an outreach ministry which serves as a one-stop referral and emergency services center designed for both homeless and “very impoverished” individuals. While *Integrity Intervention* does not have 501 3.C status, it is included underneath the church's 501 certification. According to the Director, Nadine, the requirements to certify are burdensome and onerous, despite any potential benefits in decision-making autonomy or governance that would come with separate incorporation. Nadine is a white, elderly professional; holds undergraduate and graduate degrees in psychology and child development; and previously worked as an individual and family therapist, primarily with “people from generational poverty.”

The program is housed within *Community United*, a historically liberal congregation committed to racial justice and welcoming LGBT members. *Community United* is a large, mostly white, middle-class and liberal congregation—both in the political and the theological sense. The few Black members of the congregation I spoke with informed me that the advertised “diversity” of the community referred more to a diversity of opinions than a variety of race, class, or other social group membership. Nevertheless, there is a small amount of racial minorities that attend Sunday services. Consistent with the racial composition of the host congregation, the overwhelming majority of volunteers I observed at *Integrity Intervention* were white and middle class. Exceptions included two recently immigrated volunteer advocates of Caribbean descent, and one African American retiree who served as the volunteer receptionist one day a week.

Community United sits directly down the block from a large, ornate Catholic church. An Episcopal church also sits on a nearby road, which is dominated by rental units converted into condominiums. Taken together, these three congregations all offer some type of programming for the homeless and impoverished. One can frequently witness a sizable number of homeless individuals milling around in the immediate vicinity, and especially in the warmer summer months. The neighborhood surrounding *Community United* is characterized by a liminality between the high rises of downtown and a residential/commercial neighborhood. Also nearby is a large public park alternately known for the privacy the thick greenery offers for public sleeping/camping spots, and for some, the assumed risks to safety presented by those who seek refuge there. On top of a nearby hill, located directly above an intersection between the freeway and a main

thoroughfare, sit makeshift camps. Tents, blankets, tarps, sleeping bags, carpet remnants, and other found items are used to block bodies from the elements.

Integrity Intervention was awarded a \$14,000 Compassion Capital grant mid-way through the life of the CCF, which was mainly used to develop a database to track client information and the disbursement of resources. Their 2011 Annual Report details four main causes of “the explosion of poverty and homelessness in our community:” 1) the “economic downturn;” 2) a limited number of affordable rental units; 2) decreases in state funding for “emergency housing needs;” and 4) widespread “barriers to employment such as mental illness, chemical dependency, chronic health conditions, and felonies.” In the same year, *Integrity Intervention* reported “905 new clients; 3,631 repeat clients; and 4,536 total client visits;” the assistance of 85 volunteers offering over 6,000 hours’ of their time, and a total budget in the \$125-150,000 range.

The two full-time, paid staff members for the organization include the Program Director, Nadine, and the Assistant Director, Sally (formerly, the Volunteer Coordinator).

Additional help includes unpaid, trained volunteer advocates who work with each client individually, on a long-term basis (generally, several months to years—roughly one year is seen as ideal). *Integrity Intervention* heavily utilizes volunteer labor, which requires a high degree of “cultural sensitivity” and a significant amount of training on the part of such volunteers. Volunteer advocates trained for anywhere from a few weeks to a couple of months, learning how to effectively execute the duties associated with their position. Advocates were expected to interview clients about their goals in “life transformation,” make referrals to other public and private agencies and non-profits, service any expressed

needs with *Integrity Intervention's* own resources, and address associated issues in follow-up meetings with clients. Nadine frequently emphasized that clients were expected to engage in “relationship building” with their volunteer advocate, which entailed setting goals, demonstrating effort in working towards achieving their personal objectives, and consistently meeting with the same advocate. Clients were expected to continue to work with the same advocate for the purposes of “remaining accountable,” “building trust,” and becoming a “full participant.” Initial client intake interviews with volunteer “advocates” generally lasted about 45 minutes, and follow-ups generally took slightly less time.

Integrity Intervention began in 2002 as one piece of a larger initiative conceptualized by *Community United's* pastor, executed in collaboration with a small handful of other area religious leaders from a number of neighboring worship communities. This city-wide interfaith effort was designed to address the sizable and increasingly visible amount of homeless persons in the city's center and in immediately surrounding neighborhoods. Over time, the group evolved into a more formally coordinated network of partnering churches. Materials distributed to describe the networks' efforts often included the following inspirational quote: “It only takes 10 people to start a movement.” The groups' mission statement provides a window into their collective goals and orientation:

[Our network] is an interfaith collaboration of... downtown [metropolitan] churches, synagogues and mosques working together to end homelessness and poverty. [We focus] on shifting from an immediate needs approach to long term solutions through a combination of education, advocacy and action. Through learning and volunteer opportunities for congregants, community partnerships, and development of effective strategies and programs, [we are] committed to impacting the community around us to decrease homelessness.

Each of the member worship communities performs a unique role in the network's more "long term" strategy—in line with their overall vision for change—which is designed to extend beyond a more traditional social ministry approach to serving the homeless.

Despite the overtly religious orientation of a very small minority of volunteers, religious rhetoric was in short supply in the daily environment at *Integrity Intervention*, demonstrating a significant similarity with the service-oriented liberal congregation (also receiving White House OFBCI funds distributed through Health and Human Services) profiled in Edgell & Docka (2007). *Integrity Intervention* thus sits in stark contrast with the three other case studies (one "community-based" and two theologically conservative) profiled.

At *Integrity Intervention*, the main doors are locked, and a surveillance camera records the immediate surrounding area. Images are broadcast on a small monitor visible to both the church secretary and the program receptionist. Such visual screening practices allow staff to prevent the entrance of clients who have exhibited past behavior considered problematic (obvious intoxication, combatitiveness, fighting with peers, etc.). The operation is organized around a wide main hallway in an annex building, adjacent to the main sanctuary. In the hallway there are a couple of wide benches that serve as a waiting area for clients, across from a television with an introductory video that plays in a running loop. On a typical weekday morning, the main reception room is bustling with activity. People run here and there, papers in hand, hurriedly asking each other questions or heading in or out at a frenetic pace. Volunteers and staff alike pride themselves on creating a "welcoming environment" for clients at *Integrity Intervention*—all visitors are

greeted individually and offered refreshments upon arrival. Retired pastors circulate within the waiting areas, making conversation with those who demonstrate interest. On the main countertop sit sandwiches, condiments, orange juice, cookies, and coffee for visitors who would first sign in with the secretary, then either remain on the overstuffed couches or head out to the waiting area with the wooden benches. Some clients engaged in polite conversation with staff and with other clients, some would stare silently at the walls or at their feet, while others napped quietly.

The video running in a continuous loop in the lobby begins by briefly describing the target and mission of the program. Clients work with volunteer advocates to develop life goals for “moving toward self-sufficiency and stability” in twelve key areas: “housing, criminal record, income/financial, employment, health, medical, education, family/parenting, relationships, organizational skills, legal issues, and substance abuse.” The video shows images of smiling advocates meeting with cheerful, attentive, and grateful clients, and switches to a series of different quotes from clients explaining the difference *Integrity Intervention* made in their lives. The video further explains that sometimes, when you are homeless, you can feel like “you are at the bottom of the barrel,” so the program tries to help people restore self-respect, accountability, responsibility, etc. The video repeatedly emphasized that the ongoing, one-on-one relationship between advocate and client was the key to helping rebuild “self-confidence,” encourage “stability and self-sufficiency,” and provide “hope and encouragement.” The rhetoric of self-help, self-sufficiency, and personal empowerment

was pervasive in the organization's promotional materials, formal client curriculum, and the everyday talk of those who represent it.

A true understanding of *Integrity Intervention's* impact must be contextualized within a consideration of the enormous value of the volunteer labor they utilize and the in-kind contributions they receive. At the time of data collection, the organization had served a total of 12,000+ individuals, and on any given business day approximately 15-25 clients were seen by about 10 rotating volunteer advocates. Aside from those clients who were seen by advocates, many more approached the program from day to day for sandwiches and beverages, to find a comfortable and warm place to sit and rest, or to attend larger employment support groups or "personal growth" sessions. In an average week, about 10 to 40 advocates performed one-on-one intake meetings or follow-up interviews with clients, in addition to many more volunteers who did data entry, filed client information, worked the front desk, provided legal or employment advice, dropped off or sorted donations, or offered health screenings.

In addition to making referrals to other places where clients could get resources such as food, shelter, clothing, counseling, and transportation, *Integrity Intervention* was able to directly offer a modest amount of direct resources through a combination of funds and in-kind donations. Resources distributed directly to clients at *Integrity Intervention* were made possible through private foundation grants, individual donations (many of which came from *Community United* congregation members), small government grants, and ticket sales for fund-raising events. *Integrity Intervention's* most important direct resource was bus tokens, distributed to help clients attend doctor's appointments, support

group meetings with other organizations, job interviews and training, work, and classes at nearby colleges. Also included in the list of available help was legal advice, access to a registered nurse for health concerns, emergency food assistance, hats/gloves, school supplies, and toiletries. Mainly, the organization measured its impact on the community through quantifying the amount of resources distributed and the number of individuals served. Other offerings for clients included group meetings for individuals to “network” as they continued in their search for employment, and sessions organized around “personal and spiritual growth.” The latter of the two, however, was offered more sporadically, and according to Nadine, had been less successful in execution and impact.

After my initial interview with Nadine and a tour of the facilities, I began my work with *Integrity Intervention* as a volunteer member of the office support staff. Generally, this involved greeting clients and engaging in informal conversation with them while they waited for their advocates, reviewing and filing client case files to ensure all appropriate paperwork was included and complete, answering the phone, “buzzing in” clients through the locked front doors, addressing client questions, sorting resources and donations in the kitchen/storage room, and assisting advocates in locating resources and information for their clients. I also served as a volunteer assistant in the weekly employment search support group, recording notes, offering information on employment resources, and after a point, helping guide the sessions. When not busy with the duties associated with my volunteer posts, upon securing client and advocate consent, I was able to observe as many client/advocate intake interviews and follow-up sessions as I wished. Given the many roles I assumed at *Integrity Intervention*, I was often present for many ‘backroom’

conversations among advocates and between advocates and leadership. All participants were aware of my dual volunteer and observing researcher status.

Mastering Motherhood

Mastering Motherhood describes their mission in promotional materials as “a non-profit, mentoring program designed to equip single mothers with the skills, education and support to build and maintain healthy, stable homes for their children.” Resources provided are described as follows: “One to one mentoring; Goal setting and achievement; Educational meetings twice a month; Healthy Family Activities; and Resource Connection.” A pamphlet designed to encourage prospective participants to connect with the program explains: “You can expect to be greeted by a friendly, compassionate voice who cares about where you've been and where you want to go. You may have a ‘no strings attached’ introductory meeting to decide if the program is right for you!”

Mastering Motherhood serves clients in two primary ways—through a mentoring relationship and a classroom education component. Single mothers are paired with a volunteer mentor who regularly and actively participates in a worship community. Preferably, mentors are drawn from the membership of *Devotion Church*, where the program is housed. Mentors provide practical resources such as emotional support, advice, and physical help with the tasks of child-rearing—examples include watching mothers’ children while they run errands, picking their children up from school, or simply stopping by to lend a hand with housework. Bi-weekly classroom meetings focus on budgeting/financial health, “life skills,” building healthy relationships, and parenting

education. In addition, mothers are given access to an emergency food shelf the organization maintains, and referrals are made to local social service programs that provide resources consistent with participant needs. Mothers arrive at *Mastering Motherhood* through the leaderships' professional contacts with county child protection and social workers, counselors and social workers in the public school system, and homeless shelter staff. At the time of data collection, there were eight mothers participating, and nearly as many on the waiting list awaiting mentor assignment.

My role at *Mastering Motherhood* was less of a volunteer, and more of an observer. However, at the leadership's request, I did offer information about community resources and additional programming as consistent with the expressed needs of participants during classroom sessions. On occasion, I volunteered my time with various tasks such as set up and take down for meetings and preparing the mailed monthly newsletter, designed for friends and supporters of the program. Doing so allowed me a level of access to conversations among the leadership and between mentors and leadership regarding matters associated with service provision.

Members of *Mastering Motherhood's* programming leadership included the Executive Director, Julie, and the Program Director, Lana. Both women are white, middle class, married mothers. Julie is in her mid-forties, and came to work with the program after serving for many years as a juvenile court officer. While she holds both bachelor's and master's degrees in sociology, she prefers to tell people she is trained in "human services," as she feels many assume a degree in sociology entails a preoccupation with theoretical matters to the exclusion of more practical, "hands-on" concerns. Lana is in

her early thirties and was originally trained to work as an accountant. After the birth of her first son, she decided to take a part-time job as the Volunteer Coordinator at her family's church—a large evangelical congregation in an outer-ring suburb. After working in this position for a few years, however, she found herself very frustrated with the “territorial” nature of the church's outreach efforts, as a number of her attempts to build coalitions and engage in collaborative work with other nearby worship communities were thwarted by authorities in the congregation. At that point, she began looking for another job in community ministry, found an opening with *Mastering Motherhood*, applied for the position, and was hired.

According to the Executive Director, the program has “a long history.” About 20 years ago, a married couple from *Devotion* with 10 adopted children and extensive experience with the foster care system decided they wanted to aid in preventing child abuse and neglect. The solution, this couple decided, was to establish a network of Christian foster homes to ensure that the children involved would be “in loving homes grounded in the word of the Lord” and “never have to face that same vulnerability again.” Over time, however, this model was difficult to sustain because of a shift in focus on the part of foster care officials to try to keep children with their families of origin, and remove them from the home less frequently. This led the church to rethink how they could make meaningful interventions in the lives of children, eventually deciding upon providing sliding-fee daycare. Daycare workers ended up noticing that life was far more “unstable” and “unpredictable” for children from single parent families—these children had more intermittent attendance, they were “sick” more often, they had unreliable transportation,

and they had greater levels of “emotional trouble.” While the hope was that the “full-ticket” participants would help fund services for the families that could not afford the entire bill, this model eventually became financially unviable. When these efforts collapsed, the more informal mentoring relationships that had developed in the day care center were formalized with the first iteration of the *Mastering Motherhood* curriculum.

Mothers are encouraged to participate in the *Mastering Motherhood* program on a long-term basis—in some instances, for up to three years. However, the ideal length of participation is 6 months to a year—though the program maintains a degree of flexibility in this regard. Participating mothers at *Mastering Motherhood* were considerably more racially and socioeconomically diverse than the participants at the other program for single mothers I profiled, *Parenting Without Partners*. Of the eight mothers participating when I began my fieldwork, two were African American, one was multiracial, and one was a South American immigrant. While I could not explicitly ask participants about their social class status (as the Executive Director would not allow me to interview clients), five of the participating mothers made statements in sessions that indicated they were clearly living beneath or uncomfortably close to the poverty line. Mentors at *Mastering Motherhood* were all white, middle class, and living in nuclear family arrangements.

Mentors were recruited mainly through their ties with *Devotion*. At the time of my arrival, all participating mentors were active *Devotion* members. However, about two weeks prior to my exiting the site, a small handful of mentors from other area worship communities had joined, begun training, and were awaiting their mentee assignments.

Though such efforts at including mentors from other worship communities had been attempted in the past, these initiatives had failed as volunteers opted not to continue their relationship with the organization. Leadership speculates this is likely due to the fact that although every effort was made to make outside volunteers feel integrated, because they did not have the added piece of membership in the same worship community (which would have entailed attending Sunday services and other church activities together), they may have felt “like they were missing a piece of the community experience.” Mentor mothers from other communities had been added after multiple months of waiting for new volunteers from *Devotion* that never materialized.

Devotion, Mastering Motherhood's suburban host congregation, is surrounded by strip malls, sprawling single-family tract housing, high-end condominium complexes, corporate parks, enormous new car lots, and a nearby nature preserve. The building itself is short, squat, painted an unassuming brown, and a testament to the modernist architectural marriage of form and function. *Devotion* articulates a specific commitment to building fellowship across “gender, race, age, culture, and class” and “ministering to those in need, and seeking justice for the oppressed.”

While *Mastering Motherhood* received a “modest” amount of support from *Devotion*, Julie was quick to emphasize that the organization is separately incorporated, and maintains an independent 501.3C status. Autonomy from the church, she explained, was important in representing the organization to potential sources of financial support in order to avoid inaccurate assumptions about the church assuming financial responsibility for program operations. *Mastering Motherhood's* most important sources of funding

were individual donations—which could sometimes be “very generous”—and grants from private foundations.

Mastering Motherhood had also been granted relatively generous levels of Compassion Capital funding, as they received two Compassion Capital grants in total: \$12,000 midway through the CCF’s implementation, and \$6,000 four years later. These funds were used primarily for board development, strategic planning, and assistance with filing for their 501.3C status. During the first CCF grant year, operating expenses totaled to around \$100,000. Expenses for the second year of CCF disbursement decreased by approximately \$15,000. According to Julie, “the economy, increasing number of nonprofits, and the restrictions on faith-based programs all contributed to this decline.”

The organization expressed its identity as a religious organization in three different ways. First, near the end of the meeting, mothers are given the opportunity to write out “prayer requests” and place them in a small wooden box. These requests are later distributed among *Devotion* congregants who have expressed a desire to “help single mothers.” Second, leaders and mentors describe the organization as motivated by “Christian values.” Though usually this involved general references to scriptural mandates about care and compassion, the organization’s Christian values were also made manifest in one of their requirements for participants—they must be single mothers “living alone.” This requirement was motivated by both a desire to serve only mothers with no fiscal household ties to a man and expressed concerns for child well-being. Lastly, *Mastering Motherhood* expressed its Christian identity in the informational materials they distributed about their program. The program uses two informational brochures—one for

other referring organizations, potential funding sources, and volunteers, and one for potential participants. The language in the latter of the two is markedly simpler, born of a desire to make the program more accessible. While the information included in the former of the two brochures is more detailed, there is another important difference I noted: it included an explicit description of the program as “faith-based.” Leadership at *Mastering Motherhood* explained they had decided to omit this language from the participant brochure out of concern that it might be a “turn off,” as mothers might assume they needed to be Christian or convert, or that the program “would be all about religion.” However, when mothers call to inquire about the program, they are then informed that their assigned mentor will be a “good Christian woman,” and are asked if that will be a problem. Leaders report “no one’s had a problem with it yet.”

According to one participating mother: “My mentor family has shown me that relationships can work, and also shown my kids a loving family. My son always tells everyone that he has an extra family and how lucky he is.” Participant perspectives such as these served to highlight the role of mentor mothers as serving as something of a surrogate extended-family member. Program leadership observed that many program participants experienced feelings of alienation or disapproval from extended family members upon their decision to participate in the program and “actively work towards self-improvement.” Mothers were therefore encouraged to draw on their relationships with their mentors for emotional support.

Financial assistance from mentors to mothers, however, was forbidden, as it was seen as “discouraging independence” and establishing an undesirable precedent that other

mentors might not, and should not, be willing or obligated to follow. As well, the mothers' participation in state-based public assistance programs was frowned upon, as it contributed to what the leadership referred to as "cycles of dependence." One of the frequently touted successes of the program involved the story of one particular participating mother who chose to purchase her own condominium using only her own resources, as opposed to accepting state-based assistance in the form of grant money for first-time homeowners. At the year's largest fundraising event (a concert featuring local Christian musicians), the mother's story was presented to the audience. Following the Executive Director's statement, the mother herself addressed the audience to tell her story and express her gratitude for the support she'd received throughout her years spent in the program. The theme of the presentation highlighted the moral guidance offered to participants at *Mastering Motherhood*, which had enabled this particular mother to avoid requiring "a government handout" in her efforts to "stand on her own two feet and provide an example for her daughters to follow." Aside from the assumed negative consequences of accepting government support for participants' ability to achieve "self-sufficiency," state-based assistance was often represented by leadership, and referenced by mentors, as something to which participating mothers were only entitled for short periods of time, and under extreme circumstances.

Parenting Without Partners

Parenting Without Partners is a bible-based parenting education program, and meets weekly at *Promise Church*. The program is operated by a group of three women: the founder/director, Lisa; her volunteer co-leader, Mary; and a woman who volunteers her

time for childcare during meeting hours. In addition to classroom-based education, *Promise* also offers “single moms family camp,” which takes place at the “retreat” property owned by church every year. Mothers are drawn to the program through postings and newsletters at *Promise* and other area conservative churches, from ads in neighborhood periodicals and local religious radio stations, and through invitation from the director. Overt religious symbolism, biblical reference, and growing in one’s faith are central pieces of the curriculum. Ten to fifteen women participate in any given week.

The format of *Parenting Without Partners*’ meetings includes initial discussion involving the entire group, a video-based lesson on a topic specifically designed to meet the needs of single parents, and smaller facilitated discussion groups intended to offer the opportunity to apply the knowledge gleaned from viewing the content of the DVD. Mothers pay a \$10 fee which includes access to all 13 sessions, online supplements, and a personal workbook with “hopework” sections designed to offer an opportunity for reflection throughout the coming week on the curriculum and scripture cited during the Sunday night session. After the initial meeting, women arrive for subsequent meetings with their “hopework” completed and ready to discuss. The flexibility and accessibility of an on-again-off-again program schedule, accommodation for intermittent participation, and the provision of age-appropriate and engaged children’s activities/childcare were seen by participants as unique aspects of the program, representing the leadership’s deliberate efforts to cater to the sometimes prohibitive demands of life as a single parent.

Promotional materials for the program explained that *Parenting Without Partners* was designed to “build relationships with single moms” with the following strategies:

In groups, classes and one-on-one [meetings], we create an atmosphere where single moms feel loved, accepted, and welcomed. We invite them to openly discuss their challenges, questions, doubts, fears, and faith. We help them see God in their situations. Our goal is to walk with single moms and help them learn to know God more intimately and fully depend on Him.

Religious symbolism, open expression of religious belief, and references to scripture permeated the daily environment at *Parenting Without Partners*. The religious identity of the program was most frequently expressed through references to the desirability of carrying out God's intentions for one's life; the utility of drawing on scripture as an "instruction manual" for use in meeting the challenges associated with single parenting; and the love, protection, and guidance offered through an intimate relationship with God.

Both Lisa, *Parenting Without Partners*' Director, and Mary, the volunteer co-leader, were white, middle class women in their fifties. Although both women are mothers, Mary is married, while Lisa raised her children as a single parent following her divorce. Lisa holds a graduate degree in ministerial training, and is active in local Christian homeschooling groups. She has been a member at *Promise Church* since the beginning of the program, though she did not originally assume a leadership role in the church's ministry to single mothers. Lisa became involved in *Promise's* single mothers' ministries through her work with *Promising Life Family Services*, a pro-life organization that was the result of the efforts of individuals from a number of worship communities including *Promise Church*. Out of these efforts grew the first organization at *Promise* designed specifically to serve single mothers, which Lisa assumed control of after the first few years of programming. She is now a paid member of *Promise Church's* ministerial staff. Mary became involved with *Parenting Without Partners* through her efforts with an organization designed to work with the children of incarcerated parents. She explained to

me that while working with children in the program, it became clear to her that in order to help children in any significant or meaningful way, “you have to start with their mothers.” When she found out about *Parenting Without Partners* via her membership at *Promise Church*, she contacted Linda to see how she could get involved. Mary’s professional training is in special education.

Promise Church, the hosting congregation for the program, is located in an inner-ring suburb, immediately outside the city limits. As development is so dense, the suburban nature of the area is indistinguishable from blocks nearby that sit within the urban city limits. The church sits in a residential area, nestled in between mid-sized single family homes, with two large, radiantly green city parks down the street in opposite directions. I often saw families pushing strollers and walking dogs up and down the sidewalks on early evenings in the warming spring weather.

Promise Church is decidedly conservative in its orientation to both interpreting scripture and controversial social issues. Official congregational policy disallows ordination rights to openly gay and lesbian clergy, maintains a “fidelity and chastity standard” requiring church officers to either remain faithful to the definition of marriage as between one man and one woman or practice chastity if single, prohibits abortion except under “extreme circumstances,” and is insistent about literal interpretations of scripture in all aspects of life. Views on marriage and family consistent with these policies were echoed in interviews with leadership and program participants, regardless of their church membership status.

Parenting Without Partners' programming is funded almost exclusively by *Promise Church*. Exceptions include a small amount of grant money supplied by small, private religious foundations, and the program's one-time receipt of a \$7,000 Compassion Capital grant late in the life of the CCF. For the year during which *Parenting Without Partners* received their CCF funds, their total budget was under \$50,000. Four years later, their budget increased to the mid-\$30,000 range—though this was mainly associated with one-time infrastructure development expenses.

Parenting Without Partners used CCF funds mainly to hire a consultant to help them develop a strategic plan and a governance structure, and the intermediary organization disbursing the funds allowed them to hire leadership from *Mastering Motherhood* to perform this function. The development of such a relationship between the two organizations was, in Lisa's words, "a natural next step," as leadership from *Mastering Motherhood* had been informally mentoring *Parenting Without Partners* for some time, and both organizations maintained a policy of cross-referral. In general, mothers were referred to *Parenting Without Partners* when they expressed needs associated with spiritual development and faith formation, and conversely, were referred to *Mastering Motherhood* for needs associated with more material concerns. Participants and families from both programs often attended the yearly "single moms family camp" together.

While I offered assistance in any capacity the leadership might have deemed helpful, I participated in activities associated with daily programming far less at *Parenting Without Partners* than I did at any of my three other field sites. Therefore, while my insights were sometimes solicited in group conversations during classroom sessions, my role at

Parenting Without Partners was almost solely that of an observer. Exceptions to this rule included the assistance I gave with childcare and cleanup at the yearly “single moms family camp.”

Table 3.1: Field Site Overviews¹

Organization Name	Organization Type	Mission & Target	Program Director	Client Base	Length of Participation	Physical Location	Role of Religion	Budget	CCF Grant
<i>Graceful Girls</i>	Community-based	Youth mentoring	Jasmine: Youth Career Coach and educational administrator	Low-income young women of color	Multiple years: may participate from junior high through senior high	'Inner-city' charter school targeting youth of color	"Faith-centered"	Under \$50K	\$4K
<i>Integrity Intervention</i>	Faith-based: Theologically liberal	Advocacy, direct service, and referrals for the homeless and "very impoverished" individuals	Nadine: Retired individual and family therapist	Older, single, "childless" men of color over-represented	Several months to multiple years (flexible, though one year is ideal)	<i>Community United Church</i>	"Faith-affiliated"	\$125-\$150K	\$14K
<i>Mastering Motherhood</i>	Faith-based: Theologically conservative	Mentoring for single mothers and parenting education	Julie: Former juvenile court officer	Somewhat racially diverse, predominantly low-income single mothers	Six months to one year (flexible)	<i>Devotion Church</i>	"Faith-centered" to "faith-affiliated"	\$100K; \$85K	\$12K; \$6K
<i>Parenting Without Partners</i>	Faith-based: Theologically conservative	Bible-based parenting education and faith formation	Lisa: Paid member of church ministerial staff	Mostly white, middle to lower-middle class single mothers	Five-six months	<i>Promise Church</i>	"Faith-permeated"	Under \$50K	\$7K

4. THE PROGRAM DIRECTOR INTERVIEWS: RELIGIOSITY, DEVOLUTION, REMORALIZATION, AND THE GENDER/FAMILY NEXUS

In my interviews with program directors (and other top organizational authorities) across a Midwestern, metropolitan area, I began with a series of questions regarding religion, the welfare state, need interpretation, and gender and family ideals. Specifically, I asked: In what ways does the “faith” in “faith-based” make itself manifest? How do faith-based organizations express their religious commitments? In the context of welfare state devolution, how do leaders conceptualize the ideal division of labor between church and state in social service provision? Do directors feel effective solutions to poverty require more “moral” approaches, or are broadening structural opportunities and social reform seen as better strategies for aiding the marginalized? Lastly, I endeavored to determine how leaders in faith-based and community organizations describe and outline their vision of family and marital life. As emphasized earlier in the dissertation, family and marriage ideals have important consequences for the social construction of gender, and can either reinscribe or challenge entrenched gender inequality. Gender, family, and socioeconomic inequality are inextricably bound social phenomena.

One of the guiding themes of this chapter is an effort to depart from inquiry that asks *whether* faith matters, which is a prominent implicit, if not explicit, question in a good amount of the literature on faith-based programming. Instead, I directed my focus to the question of *how* faith matters. In other words, instead of asking *whether* faith-based organizations are more effective in or capable of providing for the poor, I shifted my gaze away from the predominant paradigm in existing research to instead explore *how* the

interpretive structures faith-based organizations operate under influence settings of service provision.

Generally speaking, the field of faith-based service provision is far too varied to make broad generalizations regarding the efficacy of religious elements in programming. Such organizations vary in size, theological orientation, program mission, target population, and relationship with government—to name only a few factors—which makes it difficult to formulate any kind of broad, universal statements about faith-based organizations. In addition, many small non-profits, and even larger organizations that do not necessarily identify as “faith-based” or otherwise religiously affiliated, have notable amounts of religious content and connections, rendering the divide between “religious” and “secular” in service provision artificial.

The Faith Factor: Religious Content and Expression in Faith-Based and Community Initiatives

I first endeavored to determine how faith was expressed in faith-based and community initiatives. To do so, I asked questions about: funding sources; how the spiritual needs of clients are met; the religious convictions of leadership, staff, and volunteers; the role of religious values in decision-making; the religious content of programming; self-identification as “faith-based;” affiliation/partnership with houses of worship; changes in religious identity over time; and any other ways religious values might be important to the organization. Leaders’ responses to these questions suggested that there were five main ways religion became salient in faith-based organizations (see Table 4.1).

First, leaders mentioned the extent to which religious principles are communicated to clients and/or participants in the context of daily service provision. Whereas none of the religiously liberal organizations cited such practices, a significantly larger amount (88%) of theologically conservative organizations did so. Thirty-three percent of community-based organizations mentioned communicating religious principles to clients—many of which were involved in providing services to youth. Examples cited included interpreting scripture, reassuring clients of “God’s love,” and, in the words of one conservative pastor whose congregation housed a drop-in center for youth, reminding children “to be patient with themselves when they try to make big life changes, because God is patient with them, and always will be.”

Second, leaders explained that either religious authorities played a significant role in decision-making (for example, through sitting on the Board of Directors or serving as a member of the paid staff for the organization) or religious values were cited when making important decisions regarding the group’s direction and future. Notably, 100% of both religiously liberal and religiously conservative organizational leaders interviewed fell into this category. Thirty-three percent of community-based organizations also cited religious values and the authority of religious leaders as important parts of their decision-making process.

The third way in which religious values were important to organizations was in the sources they used to recruit volunteers, and the extent to which leaders felt both they and their volunteers were personally motivated by religious convictions to do their work. Whereas 43% of religiously liberal organizations explained to me that they were “faith-

motivated” in the above-described fashion, 100% of conservative organizations cited such a connection to their values and the recruitment of volunteers largely from houses of worship. Again, 33% of community-based organizations fell into this category. To reiterate, organizations were coded into this category if their leaders drew significant amounts of their volunteer base from other churches, or if they felt biblical or spiritual values provided a basis for their motivation to do ‘good works.’

The majority (57%--see Table 4.1) of religiously liberal organizations explained that although they likely drew volunteers motivated out of religious conviction, many of those volunteers did not voice feeling compelled to contribute out of faith. As well, some leaders stated knowledge of people who volunteered despite a lack of religious commitment. As the director of a “faith-based” employment service, run out of the basement of a Lutheran church, explained to me:

Many of the people we’ve employed, or people who come in wanting to help... you know, they’re not necessarily Lutherans. I wasn’t even sure whether they were Christian or not, but really, I didn’t care, and I don’t think anyone else on the board did, either. These aren’t the types of things that are important. What’s *important* is that you care about what happens to families when the primary wage-earner loses their job, and can’t pay the rent or put food in the fridge. People come in wanting to do something about that, because they see it happening to so many friends and neighbors, and they know it just wreaks havoc on a community. So they don’t talk about religion. They talk about community, instead. ...The whole language of “faith-based,” if you parade it around like that, is more dividing than uniting. It creates insiders and outsiders, and we want to do that as little as possible. But you have to balance that with the fact that we work out of the church, the church makes our work possible, and lots of people from the church want to help. It’s a tough question.

The fourth factor, as in the above statement, lay in the way religious character made itself manifest through organizations’ reliance on the financial resources of houses of worship for program operation. Groups were coded into this category if leaders estimated that at least 50% of their operating expenses came from monetary congregational donations.

Whereas 100% of theologically liberal organizations were reliant on congregations for over half their budget, only 75% of theologically conservative organizations cited such a dependence on houses of worship. Again, community-based organizations were somewhat of a 'mixed bag,' with 33% relying on churches for their operating expenses. It is important to note that although 33% of community-based organizations expressed their faith, or were tied to religious institutions, for the previous four variables, it is not the same organizations that appear in each category, as all four variables operate somewhat independently of each other.

Lastly, faith-based organizations expressed their religious commitments by either displaying religious symbols in settings of service provision, or relatedly, through choosing to locate their service provision within a house of worship.¹ Whereas 100% of theologically conservative organizations fell into this category, a slightly lower 86% of theologically liberal organizations were coded as such. However, the more compelling figure lies with the community-based organizations—42% of them either displayed religious symbols or delivered services within a church. This finding is especially significant given that a good portion of the existing literature assumes that organizations self-identifying as community-based will necessarily exhibit very little in the way of religious expression.

A number of observations are clear from the above data. Whereas many other existing typologies of faith-based groups assume faith exists on a continuum ranging from more religious ("faith-infused") to less religious ("faith-motivated"), qualitative data from my in-depth, semi-directed interviews indicates that religious expression and commitment

should be conceptualized less as a spectrum and more as a varied and diverse field, with a number of different forms of religious expression, many of which operate independently of one another. There are many ways faith matters to the range of actors involved (program clients, leaders, volunteers, funders, host congregations, etc.) which defy an overly simplified continuum that extends from ‘more religious’ to ‘less religious.’

Most existing studies of faith-based and community organizations take their self-identification as “faith-based” or community-based at face value. However, by including questions about change over time, my interviews with leaders revealed that some organizations that had previously identified as faith-based now instead identified as community-based. “Faith-based” is a label many of my respondents explained they have come to shun for a number of reasons. Reasons for disassociation from the label included negative political connotations with the Bush administration; associated difficulties in securing funds from public and/or secular entities; and anticipated client assumptions about content, expectation to convert, or aversion to religious character.

Timothy is a white, middle-aged, seemingly middle class man who serves as the Program Director of a community-based, “inner city” employment initiative for neighborhood youth. Though he has only been with the organization for one year, he’s well aware of their contentious history regarding their religious identification. He explained to me:

We have our roots as a “faith-based” organization, beginning with [an area Catholic parish]. However, about 3 years ago, we made a decision to drop the “faith-based” identifier. This was *not* an easy decision, and it meant that we alienated some of our board members from [a wealthy, suburban Catholic parish]. But, it opened up a whole new field of funding possibilities for us. And, it meant that we no longer put bible verses up on the walls, because that’s just not where some of the kids are coming from. We also stopped including discussions of faith in the classroom education piece of what we do. It was a really, really tough call, though. Everyone said

we were going to make a leap if we did this. The resources from the church were a sure thing, but they weren't enough, and everyone wanted to appeal to a broader audience. So we made the change, and after a few hiccups got worked out, I'm glad they did.

Timothy's recollection of events (albeit from secondary sources) is notable because it demonstrates the organization's flexibility in their religious identity. They decided to drop the "faith-based" moniker both for financial reasons and so as to not deter a portion of their potential participant base. However, the story of the program is still displayed prominently on the website, in promotional pamphlets, and throughout their main location—which includes specific mention of their founding by a nun. In addition, religious communities still make sizable donations, and the primary groups purchasing the goods youth employees at the organization produce are churches.

In her international research on NGOs, Bush (2005; 2007) offers some insight in organizations' religious identification where organizations were likely to downplay their status as "religious" through two strategies—"discursive secularization" (or, the use of secularly-oriented language and frames) and "procedural rationalism" (or, appealing to secular/scientific/rational authority in practices and decision-making procedures). These dual strategies were deployed by otherwise "religious" organization in instances where they needed to assert claims with legitimacy, create alliances with other NGOs, and minimize dispute where the intersection of religious and secular human rights norms carried the potential to generate conflict. Despite the use of the two above-listed strategies, Bush suggests much of this secularization is indeed "discursive," and has had little impact on, or is decoupled from, religious content in actual practices. Religion remained a primary motivating force for human rights activism among the NGOs she

studied. My own data provides limited support for this claim, as my one community-based organization (*Graceful Girls*) was more fervent in their expression of religious identity than either my religiously liberal case (*Integrity Intervention*) or one of my theologically conservative cases (*Mastering Motherhood*).

Significantly, all 11 community-based organizations interviewed were either located in houses of worship, received significant financial support from religious institutions, populated their leadership bodies with authorities from the local faith community, drew large amounts of volunteer labor and other in-kind resources from explicitly religious bodies, or included some type of religious content or symbolism in their curriculum and programming. In part, I argue the literature's oversight of this dynamic springs both from a lack of research that takes change over time into account as an important variable, and from taking programmatic self-identification as "faith-based" at face-value, without questioning organizations' strategic reasons for providing different public faces in different contexts.

For all organizations, looking at change over time reveals the shifting boundaries between "faith-based" and "secular." At the very least, time is one element that complicates the divide between the religious and the secular in the field of non-profits, or at most, demonstrates the falsehood of this 'divide.' In addition, organizations often present themselves as having varying degrees of religious content for different involved parties. Potential funders, the target client base, volunteer recruitment sources, and internal self-representation of organizational identity often entail widely varying levels of

religious expression for religiously liberal, conservative, and community-based organizations.

For example, at *Mastering Motherhood*, the authorities chose to present a very different public face to different audiences. In materials intended for potential clients, there was no mention of religious values or content in programming. However, the newsletter prepared for the mailing list, which was mainly comprised of individual donors, provided examples of how the prayers of single mothers regarding their material needs had been answered, thereby demonstrating “God’s graciousness.” The organization presents itself online as “faith-based,” but only on a webpage accessible by a link within a link within a link, and even then, in font so small it is nearly illegible. Similarly, in the “community-based” case study, *Graceful Girls’* Program Director would cite secular authorities, such as data produced by family social scientists and childhood development researchers. However, in informal conversations with participants, in the weekly curriculum, and when representing the organization to parents and the immediately surrounding community, religious language was far more prominent.

Though my data does not follow organizations over time, it does explicitly ask program authorities about changes over time in religious practices and identification. This element is largely missing from the existing literature, mainly because of the “newness” of small faith-based programs’ practice of partnering with the state, quantitative leanings in the literature (following up with clients in survey research is expensive, and initial respondents can be hard to locate), partnerships between such small institutions, and legislation (Charitable Choice, Executive Orders under President Bush) that has allowed

for more explicit expression of religious values and symbols in all service organizations, be they community or faith-based organizations. Any analysis of small non-profits such as those considered here would do well to examine both the organization's self-identification, materials that present their "public face" in different forums and for different audiences, changes in organizational religious identity over time, and the operation of daily affairs through participant observation.

Devolution: Engaging the State to Provide

Devolution is a concept with two constituent elements: First, it references processes of decentralization in the welfare state, whereby social provision is more locally controlled, and second, it points to processes of privatization, whereby social responsibilities 'devolve' to the private sector. Unruh & Sider (2005) cite Cnaan, Wineburg, and Boddie's (1999) referral to such processes as the onset of a "newer deal," or reversal of New Deal-era approaches to social policy such as those climaxing with the Johnson Administration's War on Poverty.

Furthermore, devolution is a process often viewed as associated with neoliberal ideology, as such policies emerged during the Reagan years with calls to return to "local community-minded social strategies" (Unruh & Sider 2005:10). Welfare reform legislation enacted in 1996 (specifically, the PRWORA) 'devolved' responsibility for social welfare provision onto the states through the block grant system. In addition, the term has negative connotations for some, by which devolution is seen as one step in processes whereby the federal government 'shirks' responsibility for providing for the vulnerable. For others—religious neoliberals primary among them—devolution is seen

as the only legitimate response to the problems associated with an inefficient, ‘uncaring’ government bureaucracy, which supplanted the more effective efforts of religious institutions in providing for the ‘needy’ from the Great Depression forward (Olasky 1996, 2002). Proponents of devolution argue that decisions are best made at the local level, and view the public and private sector as competing with one another for a finite amount of resources, to serve a finite amount of clients. To quote Unruh & Sider (2005) again, “devolution is more than public policy; it is a sociopolitical narrative—a way of constructing America’s social history” (10). As well, devolution represents a central “part of the discourse on the changing relationships among various actors in the social welfare arena” (10).

Charitable Choice, and the efforts of Bush’s White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives, created a public, discursive space in which the relationship between church and state could be, and was, renegotiated. In addition, it provided the resources (however meager) for the resultant ideas to be put into practice. Therefore, it’s important to look at organizational attitudes and practices with regard to devolution, and especially in the context of leaders’ conceptualizations of what *ideal* relations between the welfare state and faith-based organizations should look like. My interview data clustered around three “ideal type” categories, which were informed and bolstered by Hackworth’s (2012) findings. However, whereas Hackworth sees attitudes towards devolution in a somewhat binary fashion, I found an intermediary position between support and opposition, which I delineate below. Mainly, this stems from a difference in scope and focus. Whereas Hackworth’s directs his attention to communications at the

elite level (national religious leaders, policymakers, and ‘think-tankers’), I instead directed my lens to the realm of ‘on-the-ground’ leaders’ views and everyday practices. My respondents’ opinions on welfare state devolution to the private (mainly religious) sector clustered around three main orientations. I refer to the first category I placed my interview subjects in as “replacement.” Generally speaking, leaders with “replacement” attitudes towards devolution espoused the idea that faith-based organizations can provide services in a more efficient/effective fashion than state entities, and the landscape of need provision should move increasingly towards faith-based organizations *replacing* government institutions. These respondents believed faith-based organizations are more flexible in their response, have a more intimate knowledge of the landscape of need in local contexts, possess a greater capacity to build trust with clients, and are less bureaucratic and uncaring than state welfare institutions, so they are especially well-positioned to provide for the needy. Under this framework, the government should be engaged in the process of ‘stepping down’ from their responsibility as need provider in order to grant religious organizations their rightful place at the table. In this fashion, growth in one sector (private) is seen as coming at the expense of the other (public), and, according to my respondents, rightfully so, as the state has failed in lifting people out of poverty. In summary, “replacement” interviewees believed that large, impersonal government bureaucracies have proven themselves ineffective in preventing or ameliorating poverty and “dependency,” and should therefore be “fired from the job.”

Randall is the director of a children’s after school/summer day camp program, and also serves as a youth pastor at a local Assembly of God congregation. He looks to be in his

mid-thirties, white, and solidly middle class. His youth initiative includes after-school programming and summer day camp for “latchkey” kids. Randall explains that he founded the organization in order to give children from an area mobile home community “a stable, loving environment where they can get positive interactions with adults.” Soon, the organization would branch out to serve a small handful of neighborhoods in economically depressed, suburban locations, targeting the children of low-income families. When asked about the ideal relationship between churches and government, Randall explained:

There are some things that huge government machines can't do for people. Lots of times, that person sitting behind the desk, shuffling papers is there to get a paycheck and get through the week, and not necessarily to make any kind of difference that's going to last. That's where I think churches come in. We can provide compassion and understanding, and come at things from a nonjudgmental place, because we use Christ as an example in all we do. ...Churches used to be the place where all of this happened! When people were in trouble, the first place they went was the church. In fact, people still sometimes come to the church first, or at least come to the church when government fails them. ...but all of that changed when government started poking around where it doesn't belong [laughs]. I really think we need to just go back to where it all started—with the church.

The above passage demonstrates that Randall's views serve as an “ideal type” orientation within the “replacement” category. Randall references government as a large, uncaring bureaucracy, which therefore cannot truly affect the lives of people in a positive and long-term way. He also feels churches are better positioned to take on this role because of the unique values that spring from a commitment to Christ-like care. Lastly, he feels government needs to step down, so the church can (re)assume the function of caring for the marginalized.

I refer to the second, intermediary category of interview subjects as “partnership.” Under this framework, faith-based organizations and government best serve clients when they engage in partnership, with FBOs responsible for the provision of *immaterial* needs (the

caring, compassionate, relationship-based side), and government engaging in the responsibility of providing for *material* needs (financial resources, training, and other capacity-building assistance). This paradigm dictates that the roles of both government and faith-based organizations should be engaged in a process of revision and renegotiation—not necessarily because of changes in legislation regarding the participation of faith-based organizations in providing public services with public funds, but instead because the landscape of social need in the U.S. is rapidly changing and requires the flexible responses that only partnerships between public and private entities can bring. Therefore, in contrast to “replacers”’ desires that the government back away, those who advocate for “partnership” feel that neither government nor faith-based institutions should be ‘stepping down’ from their responsibilities in any regard.

Abdul is a middle-aged man who migrated from Ethiopia as an adult nearly 20 years ago. He serves as the director of a church-based health clinic in a conservative, Orthodox Christian denomination. Given his training as a nurse, his development of the “nurse program” seemed a logical next step for him. Abdul related to me his feeling that welfare reform resulted in an outpouring of need. The end result was:

...government ended up with way more than it could handle. So in some ways, it had to call on churches to rise to the occasion to deal with the massive changes that were in play. You see, people were getting what they needed to *survive*, but they didn't have what they needed to *thrive*, and live healthy, happy, good lives. So welfare had to be changed, but it meant that everyone had to kind of make things up as we went along. ...but churches can't do it all. I definitely think there are some things the church brings to the table, and some things the government brings to the table, and things will always go better when we work together. Definitely, churches don't have the money to do the kind of work the government would like to see them do, so that's where they need to step in and start providing resources for us to do our work.

Abdul's response begins by citing the upheaval welfare reform created. However, instead of criticizing these changes, he saw them as necessary, *and* as providing an opportunity for the church to rise to the occasion and respond to the growing needs of their communities. In contrast to the "replacers," however, Abdul did not want to see the state back away entirely. He still saw government entities as responsible for providing material resources.

I refer to the final category respondents as "resistance." This paradigm dictates that FBOs should be engaged in actively challenging government's increasing tendency to back away from their historical role (as in the years between the New Deal and welfare reform) in providing universal entitlement to a minimum standard of living. These leaders advocate for a return to a Keynesian welfare state, and their responsibility as mobilizing their religiously-legitimized prophetic voice to criticize the practices of the state. They generally profess a moral and spiritual obligation to hold public institutions fully accountable to religious values of stewardship and care. According to these leaders, the state has backed away from its appropriate level of responsibility for addressing public needs, and religiously-inspired activism is necessary to hold the state accountable. Generally, organizations in this framework see the fact that needs provision has been foisted upon them by the state as inappropriate, and are deeply resentful. Some recognize the irony in their participation in a program that funnels funding towards establishing the relationships and shifting the responsibilities they oppose. However, most see partaking in such funding as part of a necessary evil in fueling their capacity to provide for ever-growing needs and to remain viable as an organization with the capacity to lodge an

effective critique. Therefore, while they resented the underlying ideological framework behind devolution, they also viewed it as an opportunity to secure necessary funds for providing for the ever-growing needs of the community. They participated, but they did so begrudgingly. Despite their objections, devolution offered an opportunity for congregations to ‘fill the gap’ created by welfare reform—a duty they were obligated to perform as “compassionate” people of faith.

Esther, a graying, jovial, and talkative white woman in her early sixties, is one of the board members for an advocacy organization for Latino immigrants. She described the situation as follows:

We’re in the middle of a recession, so everybody’s hurting, and I guess [President Bush] just figured that it would be cheaper to have churches deal with all the problems he created with the economy. He really screwed things up, *big time*. As people of faith, we *have* to respond, but this is a catch-22 because instead of getting the government itself to get people what they need and come up with solutions, we end up getting money from a program where politicians are basically walking away from the problem... We cannot just sit by and watch people suffer, because it’s our job to care for the least among us. However, this means we have to participate in a system where the government is totally dropping the ball, and we’re picking it up. The whole situation is just a mess. I sometimes get to feeling like, “what do we even pay taxes for?” Religious leaders have a long history of holding politicians accountable, and it seems like we need even more of that right now. We need to make sure we’re helping people *and* trying to make a change. Doing the faith-based initiative gives us the chance to do that, so in some ways, it’s a good thing. ...but we have to remember what’s really at stake here.

Esther’s response includes a number of notable elements. First, she feels government abdicated responsibility for one of its most important functions: caring for those in need. This leaves people of faith and conscience faced with a difficult task. They must provide for the ‘needy,’ as consistent with their religious convictions, while simultaneously decrying the system that makes such arrangements possible. In order to be able to do so, however, “resistance” could not become so extreme that funds were refused. In fact,

Compassion Capital funds provided congregations with a valuable opportunity to fulfill their calling to stewardship.

As for frequencies, none of the theologically liberal organizations used language consistent with either the “replacement” or the “partnership” paradigm—instead, all used the language of “resistance” to some degree. Theologically conservative organizations displayed a nearly opposite tendency—they were equally split between “replacement” and “partnership,” with none falling into the “resistance” camp. As with the other subject matter discussed in this chapter, community-based organizations (CBOs) were divided in their responses. However, one trend can be observed—only 1 CBO interviewee deployed the replacement frame, with the remainder split nearly evenly between partnership and resistance. Individuals working in community organizations are generally left-leaning, and the logic of devolution (even the more moderate “partnership”-style) has generally been associated with conservative ideology. These realities render the findings for community-based organizations all the more striking.

Remoralization

The next subject I tackle is referred to in the literature as “remoralization,” or the conviction that welfare services should come with moral expectations attached.

According to proponents of remoralization, social service provision carried out in the private sector (and especially in small religious contexts) is preferable to provision by large government bodies. Under this line of thinking, private entities with ties to local communities tend more often to be responsive to local needs, more personally involved with the unique texture of each individual client’s problems, and most importantly,

imbued with a desirable set of moral values that are otherwise absent in state bureaucracies.

The philosophy of remoralization is often tied to calls for devolution. In their delineation of the relationship between the two concepts, Unruh & Sider (2005) cite religious neoliberal leader Chuck Colson's words: "If assistance is to make a long-term difference, it has to come with moral strings attached. It involves making people learn how to behave responsibly" (11). Colson and other supporters insist that while secular provision might meet immediate needs, it will ultimately fail in addressing problems at their root cause. Furthermore, advocates of remoralization tie the failure of 'godless' welfare to the "demoralization" policies associated with the New Deal (Olasky 2000; qtd. in Unruh & Sider 2005:11) which see the causes of poverty originating in social structures. Unruh & Sider (2005) delineate that those who advocate for remoralization view the Great Depression as ushering in undesirable approaches to poverty relief whereby "moral concerns and tests to sort out the 'deserving poor' were abandoned in favor of a social-scientific approach to welfare and a doctrine of benefit entitlement" (11).

Some program directors expressed the view that the poor need supervision or moral guidance because their condition is the result of moral failings, degeneracy, pathology, or poor choices. Organization heads expressing such views were coded as "poverty as individual."

Julie is the director of a single mother mentoring program housed in an evangelical Protestant congregation (her organization is profiled in depth in Chapter 7). When asked about the root causes of poverty, she relates:

I think if you've grown up in poverty, and that's all you know is that poverty mentality, you have trouble seeing through to the full consequences of your actions. So, maybe you make some bad decisions, and those bad decisions start to add up and dig a really deep hole that it can be hard to climb out of sometimes. People sometimes just need to be shown that there's another way... They need to know that they're better than that. They also need to see that good choices have positive outcomes.

Another notable part of Julie's response is her engagement with the theme of "choice," which emerged again and again in other "moral/individual" responses.

On the other hand, those leaders who felt the poor most need structural opportunity to exit their condition generally argued that attempts at moral reform are not only inappropriate, they are also morally repugnant, invasive, and/or ineffective. Such cases were coded "poverty as structural." Leaders in this category generally felt that "moralizing" solutions to poverty often fail to address structural problems in our society (such as high unemployment, lack of access to education, increasing disparities in wealth, etc.) that create class inequality. Under this framework, leaders believe that policies and programs built around individuals, and not structures, are doomed to failure.

Amelia is white woman in her 50s with a reserved demeanor. She is a former board member from a drop-in center/emergency food shelf for low-income families. The program operates out of a mainline/liberal Lutheran congregation. When discussing the matter of moral or religious values in outreach ministry for the poor, she explained to me:

If people are hungry, or if they can't pay their rent, you can't just throw the Bible at them. Scripture has its time and place, and if you are struggling to make ends meet, that has to be your first concern. If we're going to help people get through situations like that, we need to understand

the barriers they face. There's not a lot of jobs out there—at least not ones that pay anything that will support a family. There's not a lot of affordable housing out there. Everything's expensive, and no one can go to the doctor if they get sick. How is anybody supposed to get ahead... you know, how are they even supposed to keep their heads above water?

Amelia's response highlights the sentiment that material needs must be met before spiritual needs are attended to—an outlook not uncommon in interviews with both theologically liberal and community-based organization leaders. In addition, this is a theme I return to later in the dissertation, in my comparison of two programs designed to serve single mothers.

Though certainly some respondents mentioned both individual choices and social structures as perpetuating inequality, I sought to identify where respondents placed the bulk of the onus and coded accordingly. Theologically conservative and theologically liberal organizations are nearly mirror images of one another with regard to the frequency with which they cited poverty as caused by individual moral failings. Twenty-nine percent of liberal leaders' cited individualizing, moral explanations for poverty, and the remaining 71% cited social structures as cause (sometimes implicitly, sometimes explicitly), necessitating amoral response. Seventy-five percent of conservative authorities felt the root of poverty lay in individual choice, and should therefore be remedied with moralizing solutions, whereas 25% felt the problem lies with social structures. Community-based organizational leaders were divided right down the middle, with 50% coded "poverty as individual," and 50% coded "poverty as structural."

Relationships between codes reveal another significant pattern: a striking relationship between devolution and remoralization. In liberal organizations, 71% of respondents

were likely to have both a negative view of devolution (coded as “resistance”) and a “poverty as structural” approach to the causes of economic marginalization (none exhibited both a positive view of devolution and an “individual/moral” approach to poverty). In conservative organizations, 75% both viewed devolution in a positive light (coded as “replacement” or “partnership”) and poverty as an individual-level phenomenon necessitating moral instruction. Community-based organizations, again, were relatively evenly split, with 42% having both positive views on devolution and moral, individualizing approaches to poverty, and 42% critical of devolution and favoring structural/amoral solutions to poverty (note: these numbers do not add to 100% because they measure the extent to which views on both variables *coincided*).

As I demonstrate later with data from my case studies, the extent to which organizations viewed their mission as oriented more towards social work and advocacy (addressing material needs) versus placing a premium on engaging in evangelism/ministry (providing for immaterial needs) goes a long way towards explaining the conservative/liberal divide in orientations towards devolution and remoralization.

Data from my liberal case study also sheds light on the significant finding that nearly 1/3 of all studied liberal organizations frame poverty in individualizing terms. I argue that this stems, in part, from the pervasiveness of politically conservative ideology regarding poverty in the post-welfare reform era (and take up the matter further in Chapter 6), but also from ‘moralizing’ approaches to poverty pervasive within religious welfare institutions in general. Furthermore, a good deal of resources were and still are tied to such rhetorics, which may have prompted otherwise progressive organizations to adopt

traditionally conservative approaches and frames. In any case, rhetorics that cite structural change are difficult to sustain in environments of limited resources (another matter I explore more fully in Chapter 5), as has been the case since the global fiscal crisis began in 2007-2008.

Family, Marriage, and Gender

There is a good amount of insight to be gleaned from coupling questions about the causes of and potential solutions to poverty with questions about family structures and marital ideals. Views on family structure tap into broader beliefs about the extent to which those in alternate family structures (such as single-parent households) have made morally questionable or pathological “choices.” Alternative explanations that explore the link between family structure and poverty argue that seeing flexible family structures as ‘deviant’ is the result of restrictive or traditional middle-class norms and/or even broader structural forces that produce variation in family formation. Those who generally subscribe to the latter of the two views sometimes couple their critique of existing family norms with the belief that people should have access to a broader “menu” of options for family life, that women should have access to resources that will enable them to establish family lives outside of patriarchal structures, and that our social institutions should respect *and* support those choices. Furthermore, some cite historical structures of inequality that forestall and deny access to the nuclear family form for the poor (for instance, many poor women report that marriage and motherhood are highly valued, despite the barriers they face in accessing both simultaneously, as in Edin & Kefalas 2005). On the other hand, those who associate poverty with alternate family forms often

implicitly posit a causative relationship between the two, viewing social decline as resulting from individuals' departure from the traditional, nuclear, heterosexual, male-breadwinning family (see McLanahan and Percheski 2008, for a review of a good amount of research conducted under this evaluative assumption).

In order to capture organizational leaders' views on family and marital life, I asked a series of questions associated with the "ideal family," the "ideal marriage," and child well-being (see Appendix A). Responses were coded as "traditional family/gender" if respondents views approximated those dictated by the "SNAF" (Standard North American Family; Smith 1993), citing a male breadwinner/female caregiver model (though many in this category viewed female labor force participation as taken for granted), the primary function of marriage as procreative/childrearing, and invoking heteronormativity. Respondents were coded "stretched traditional" if they exhibited departure from these norms by emphasizing a positive or affirming attitude for *one* of the following: the legitimacy of same-sex partnership/marriage, single parenthood (or other alternatives to nuclear structures), openness to women assuming the *primary* 'provider' role, the functions of marriage defined as organized to promote personal emotional fulfillment *above and beyond* procreative/childrearing functions, or the interchangeability of male and female gender roles. Lastly, if leaders cited a significant departure from the family and gender norms by citing a revision of *more than one* of the "traditional family/gender" requirements, they were coded "innovative."

None of the theologically liberal leaders cited models for family life that could be considered "traditional." Seventy-one percent of authorities from such organizations

used “stretched traditional” frames to describe their ideal vision of family life, and 29% were truly “innovative” in their approach to family. Conversely, 75% of the leadership in theologically conservative organizations spoke in terms that evoked the “traditional” family (though they did so only after considerable probing—most of their initial talk of family and male/female partnerships generically cited “love,” “understanding,” and “communication”), whereas 25% used a “stretched traditional” model to describe their family ideals. None of the theologically conservative leaders could be described as “innovative.” Again, community-based organizations exhibited considerable variation, with 33% coded “traditional,” 42% coded “stretched traditional,” and 25% coded “innovative.”

Byron is a male, middle-aged, Black Reverend who runs a number of family ministry, emergency assistance, and missions programs in a largely African American Baptist church. Due to the meager resources of the church, Byron is the only member of the paid staff that works on outreach initiatives. Indeed, he accepts part-time pay for a full-time job, and admits to struggling to make ends meet—though he feels this affords him a closer connection with those he serves. Byron was awarded a Compassion Capital grant in order to aid the organization’s efforts in capacity building, mainly though developing the necessary infrastructure to compete for grants and streamline their volunteer coordination. Data from his interview provides an especially good example of a response coded as “traditional.” He responded as follows when asked about marriage and family:

I think the most important thing for a family is for them to *stay together*. Young men need to see their fathers doing positive things, and keeping the family together no matter what, and girls need to be able to see strength and grace from their mothers. If they can’t do that, how are they gonna be good parents? So it’s a whole generational problem, and it keeps repeating itself. Welfare isn’t

going to teach people that, and I think a lot of the problem started when they started taking God out of things—like when they stopped prayer in schools. I mean, we *are* a Christian nation! ...In the big picture, I think what's most important for husbands is to serve as protector and provider. A man is held accountable before God for keeping his family safe, putting a roof over their heads and food on the table, and making sure everyone is okay. Now, that's a huge burden, a huge responsibility, but that's what it means to be a man. And women help out with this, but at the end of the day, it's the man that has to answer to God for the whole family. So your kids also have to obey you, because it pleases God. It shows God you did right by your family. Which basically means that the man should have the final say in family decision-making when things come up. This doesn't mean that your wife doesn't give you plenty of input—my wife sure enough has her say-so in things—but it does mean that you are ultimately responsible for the house and everybody in it. And that has to count for some kind of authority.

Notable elements in the above passage include male headship; a gendered division of labor (man as breadwinner, woman as 'helpmate'); a description of marriage in heteronormative, procreative terms; and the premium placed on gender-specific role models for children for the purpose of creating *their own* family one day. Byron's commitment to invoking scriptural imperatives in his understanding of marriage and family also points to a belief in the Bible as the ultimate authority for matters of marriage and family—a hallmark of theologically conservative ideology. Finally, he mentions devolution, remoralization, and family all in the same breath, arguing that family problems stem from a lack of public religious expression/creeping secularization. Byron thereby argues for a reintroduction of the church into public and family life.

Tessa, a woman in her late 20s, had recently resigned from her position as Program Director at a tutoring program for youth at the time of our interview to focus on caring for her young children. The program she worked for is housed in a mid-sized mainline/liberal church, and is located in the middle of the city. Essentially, the program would recruit middle and high school students from the surrounding area to volunteer as tutors for neighborhood children. When asked about family life, she insisted:

Kids do need two parents, but they could be a mother and a mother, or a father and a father—I could care less! [laughs] However, I think it's important for children to have role models from *both* genders in their lives in order to learn and grow. It just seems like women are better at some things, and men are better at other things. Generally, it makes more sense for women to stay home or cut back on work to take care of the kids, because daycare is so insanely expensive. Kids are more bonded to their mother at a young age, too. ...Mothers just seem to be better at giving children the emotional things they need. ...That's why coming from a single-mom home is so tough, I think... Mothers have to go out and work all day and then deal with the house and give their children what they need. It's hard when there's only one set of hands, and kids can really end up in a bad place because of it. Lots of children would be better off if they had both a mother and a father. ...I think there's a lot of people that think a family can make it if there isn't a father in the home, necessarily, but that ends up making it so that kids can't get what they need from their mothers.

Tessa's comments provide an "ideal type" version of the "stretched traditional" family/marriage model. Basically, she exhibits openness to same-sex parenting, but like Byron, feels children need both men and women to take significant roles in children's lives because of the different strengths they bring. Such language is consistent with the logic of gender polarization. According to Tessa, women are better at emotional "bonding" with children. In order to do so, an extra wage earner is required, and she implies a preference for a male breadwinner given women's greater emotional literacy.

Esther, the former board member for the Latino advocacy group also quoted above, gave responses to family/marriage questions that led me to code her case as "innovative." In her words:

A good family is one that has unconditional love, communication, trust, and spends time together. They also spend time in the community, trying to make it a better place to live. ...Really, a family can look like whatever you want it to look like. Many of the people we serve here come from cultures where grandmas and grandpas, and uncles and aunts, even cousins, all sometimes live under the same roof. Really, things sometimes end up working out better that way in the end because there's always someone to turn to... Deportations also break families up, so sometimes people just have to make things up as they go along. Women can sometimes make more money, but some men have a problem with this. But the women have to do the things men are expected to do when their husbands are gone! If we paid people a living wage, it really would be so much less of a problem for families. People wouldn't have to struggle so much...So basically, once you

have two people committed to each other, and caring for each other, you've either got a family or the beginnings of a family.

Esther's vision of the family is far more inclusive than the majority of my other interview respondents'. She voices the legitimacy (indeed, even preferability, under some circumstances) of extended family arrangements. Instead of citing a traditionally gendered division of labor, she recognizes that sometimes structural forces turn these notions upside down. However, many of the problems families face, according to Esther, arise not from their family structure, but instead, the way society (specifically, the labor market) is organized.

Conclusion

In the last decade, changes in welfare state policy have increased the role of small religious institutions with overtly religious characters. Such changes necessitate attention to a series of questions regarding the "faith" in "faith-based," leaders' conceptualization of the relationship they would like to cultivate with state entities, their opinions on the intersection between devolution/remoralization, and how these beliefs relate to ideals regarding the gender/family nexus. In the case studies that follow, I provide a window into how all of the above elements of interest operate and intersect in the context of 'everyday' service provision.

My findings shed significant, if preliminary, light on the concerns listed above. First, though some research assumes a boundary, or continuum, between "religious" and "secular" organizations in the field of small social service oriented non-profits, conceptualizations such as these superimpose a false divide on a field marked by

complexity and change over time. Instead, the religious content and character of organizations should be conceptualized as shifting, porous, and multidimensional. This is especially demonstrated by the fact that of the organizations I followed, many of the community-based organizations exceeded theologically liberal organizations in expressions of religious elements in some facets of their identity—especially with regard to the communication of religious principles in settings of service provision. I argue this is partially attributable to the legacy of individualism regarding one’s religious commitments in liberal theological traditions, whereby faith is conceptualized as a private matter, appropriate only in contexts of worship. As I argue later in the dissertation, religious conviction provides a lexicon for articulating family-associated concerns. Therefore, the liberal legacy of keeping matters of faith confined solely to worship-based settings works to inhibit broader public engagement with matters of faith and family beyond the pulpit.

Also worthy of analytic attention is the finding that many community-based organizations exhibit elements of religious character in their governance structures, motivating beliefs/mission, and in their programming environment. In general, I believe this speaks to the long history of religious institutions’ involvement in serving the needs of local communities, and previous legal requirements that they do so by establishing secular subsidiary organizations. Despite the Bush Administration’s best efforts to invite religious social service organizations to the table at which government funds are served, many community-based organizations with religious ties remain skeptical about the consequences of explicitly identifying as faith-based—especially since a number of

private sector sources of funding continue to either favor secular organizations, or perhaps completely exclude religious organizations. Respondents' views on the negative connotations associated with the term "faith-based" should also be considered as well, as program authorities cited concerns that such language is potentially divisive and may deter prospective clients, volunteers, and other interested parties. Lastly, as I argue elsewhere, community-based organizations may include religious language and values as such symbols are especially resonant for many Americans, given comparatively high levels of religious commitment in the U.S.

To recapitulate, theologically conservative organizations were nearly unanimous in their support for devolution, despite some concerns about government intervention that might limit church autonomy in decision-making or create burdensome reporting requirements that organizations lack the capacity to handle. Despite such trepidation, all respondents mentioned a positive view of church-state partnerships in social service provision. This observation should be interpreted in the context of the fact that all professionals surveyed had applied for and won grants from the Compassion Capital Fund. Also, such positive views persisted multiple years after CCF participation—in some cases, over a half a decade after disbursement. Therefore, leaders had sufficient time to reflect on their experiences and view them in a positive light, suggesting continued participation under the right conditions (namely, existing funds, a politically favorable environment, and no additional legal restrictions).

In addition, despite a level of resentment expressed by liberal leaders about doing the government's "dirty work," growing numbers of liberals also expressed support for

devolution. However, conservative and liberal groups connected their affinity for devolution to the ethic of remoralization (and/or the implicit or explicit causes of poverty) in different ways. Whereas conservatives viewed devolution as opening the window to desirable processes that would remoralize welfare state provision, liberals mainly expressed aversion to such moral, or individual, approaches to poverty relief.

However, it is again notable that some liberal organization leaders expressed support for both devolution and remoralization, framing their responses in terms of the desire to meet the funding imperatives of government and private foundations. Leaders repeatedly emphasized to me that the pool of available grant monies had been steadily drying up in the years since the global economic crash, and large funding entities were looking to see the greatest result for the smallest contribution. For many organizations, this meant framing their mission in the terms of “personal transformation,” “life changes,” and “self-sufficiency,” which ultimately serves to place the burden of change on the individual as opposed to structures of inequality (this is a theme I explore in greater detail in my analysis of the case study programs). This trend also creates a funding environment where small organizations with shoestring capacities feel forced to develop measurements and collect and analyze data on “outcomes”—a task for which very few have the time, resources, and expertise. This is the subject of further discussion in Chapter 5, in which I profile a theologically liberal homelessness advocacy, referral, and emergency relief organization. Again, it is important to note that positive attitudes towards devolution and preferences for moralizing solutions to poverty did not always

coincide, nor did resistance to devolution and seeing structural change as the best remedy for poverty.

As for marriage and family, conservative leaders were most likely to hold “traditional” views, whereas liberal authorities were most likely to view the family with an adaptive, or somewhat “stretched” model for family life. Again, directors of community-based organizations were quite mixed, but exhibited the highest degree of “innovative” thinking about family and gender. Among conservative organization heads, positive attitudes about devolution, an affinity for moral approaches to poverty, and traditionalism in the realm of the family all coincided to a great extent. The inverse was true of liberal program leaders, where a good number of respondents wove together a criticism of welfare state decentralization, structural understandings of poverty, and more flexible family ideals.

Avenues for further research include replicating the original model of the study in additional geographic areas and collecting a greater number of cases to determine the extent to which the findings are generalizable. Doing so would allow further purchase in understanding deviations from the general trends noted. It would also allow analysts to further tease out the cognitive maps service providers access when assembling their worldviews which inevitably guide their programming. As well, there is room for a useful comparison between those organizations who received faith-based initiative funding, and those service-oriented religious institutions that choose not to apply, in order to examine the extent to which their views on devolution, remoralization, and gender/family differ. It is my hope that this initial investigation will spur further inquiry

at the intersection of faith, poverty, and family in a time when such interconnections are especially relevant for understanding the current policy landscape in the U.S.

Table 4.1: Religious Identity, Views on Devolution and Poverty, and Family/Gender Ideals by Organization Type

	Liberal (N=7)	Conservative (N=8)	Community-based (N=12)
RELIGIOUS CHARACTER			
Faith in Programming	0%	88%	33%
Faith in Governance	100%	100%	33%
Faith in Motive	43%	100%	33%
Faith and Finances	100%	75%	33%
Faith in Symbolism	86%	100%	42%
DEVOLUTION			
Replacements in Devolution	0%	50%	8%
Partners in Devolution	0%	50%	42%
Resisters of Devolution	100%	0%	50%
POVERTY			
Poverty as Individual	29%	75%	50%
Poverty as Structural	71%	25%	50%
GENDER/FAMILY IDEALS			
Traditional Family	0%	75%	33%
Stretched Traditional Family	71%	25%	42%
Innovative Family	29%	0%	25%

5. “A HAND UP, NOT A HAND OUT:” FAMILY, FAITH, AND “RELATIONSHIP BUILDING” AT *INTEGRITY INTERVENTION*

Integrity Intervention is an outreach ministry serving the homeless and “very impoverished.” The program is based out of a large, theologically liberal and politically progressive congregation, *Community United*. The program has a paid staff of two, which includes the Director, Nadine, and the Assistant Director, Sally. *Integrity Intervention* is now in its tenth year of offering services.

Programming consists mainly of “relationship building” whereby clients meet with a volunteer advocate on a regular basis (usually bi-weekly or monthly) to set a number of personal goals and develop strategies for achieving them. In so doing, advocates dispense personal advice, referrals to other area non-profits and state programs, and resources the organization itself collects and redistributes. Resources *Integrity Intervention* provides directly to clients include tokens for public transportation, professional legal advice, food, clothing, school supplies, and toiletries. Other elements of programming include staff facilitated meetings for clients to “network” in ongoing employment searches, and small group sessions organized around “personal and spiritual growth.” The latter of the two, called the “Fulfilled Life” group, has been more sporadic and less successful.

Integrity Intervention tracks its impact on the community mainly through the number of individuals served and the amount of different resources distributed. In total, the organization has served 12,000+ individuals to date. Fifteen to twenty-five clients are seen on any given business day by about 10 rotating volunteers. Volunteers are drawn

from *Community United*, other nearby, liberal and mainline worship communities, and through networks with other area secular and faith-based non-profits that serve the impoverished. While most volunteers are churchgoing people, a small minority are unaffiliated with a specific worship community. Over the course of any given week, *Integrity Intervention's* programming requires the assistance of about 10 to 40 volunteers who engage in direct contact with clients, as well as numerous other individuals who serve in other capacities, giving their time and resources to support ongoing programming and ensure a continuing flow of resources.

In this chapter, I develop four central claims. The first is related to *Integrity Intervention's* orientation towards religious expression in programming. Leadership and volunteers regarded faith primarily as a personal and private matter. Their normative orientation to faith as private was demonstrated in particular through reference to other organizations—more specifically, through invocations of a more theologically and/or politically conservative, faith-permeated, openly religiously expressive ‘other.’ Requiring that clients engage in religious activities, making moral judgments on the basis of what were defined as misinterpreted biblical precepts, and openly expressing personal religious convictions to clients were practices represented by leaders and volunteers at *Integrity Intervention* as morally repugnant and to be avoided.

Second, providers at *Integrity Intervention* also associated this conservative “other” with open articulation of ideologies for family life—another practice they saw as fundamentally problematic. Therefore, in addition to personal religious beliefs, family

was deemed another fundamentally taboo subject for conversation, which respondents believed should also be relegated to the realm of the personal and private.

Third, and relatedly, *Integrity Intervention*'s practice of removing 'family-talk' from the forum of public dialogue limited providers' access to alternative cultural schemas for gender and family life, which had important consequences for the informal, unofficial standards by which providers dispensed resources and program consequences. Therefore, gender- and family-associated practices together informed a number of significant resource distribution and other program outcomes. Differential outcomes in access and the application of program consequences tended to privilege female clients and clients with custodial children, whereas men were subject to more stringent evaluations of their behavior and perceived demeanor.

Lastly, I demonstrate how broader discourses regarding the causes of poverty had important consequences for providers' processes of need interpretation. In turn, these understandings influenced associated gender and family ideals, codes invoking the relationship between race and poverty, and again, subsequent resource dispensation. Distinctions between the "deserving" and "undeserving" poor² were primarily made through talk about the culture of "generational poverty"—a term originating in Ruby Payne's (2003) *Bridges out of Poverty* curriculum, which cites "cultural differences" between the poor and the middle class as the primary engine behind unsuccessful social programming efforts for the poor. Originally, the curriculum was developed to help educational professionals bridge class-based differences in their instruction and students' learning styles, but has since grown into a larger enterprise with materials designed for

many different kinds of communicative efforts—including social work and other human services. I explore *Integrity Intervention*'s use of Payne's curriculum for mentor trainings (and in everyday conversation) elsewhere in the chapter.

Religious Identity and Expression at Integrity Intervention: Self-Definition through 'Othering'

At *Integrity Intervention*, explicit articulations of faith and religious content in daily programming were not central components of service provision. This stands in stark contrast to the other case studies considered in the dissertation, including the “community-based” organization, *Graceful Girls*. The level of religious expression and symbolism at *Integrity Intervention* was also relatively low as compared with the other faith-based organizations in the metro-wide dataset (analyzed in Chapter 3), as well as a number of the community-based organizations (see Table 3.1 in Chapter 3).

Members of *Integrity Intervention*'s leadership and volunteer base generally felt their work was consistent with propositions usually associated with the tradition of liberal Christianity and associated beliefs. In the context of questions about organizational identity, some respondents described their understandings of the Bible as a historically situated narrative authored by human beings. While divinely inspired, holy texts were not meant to be read as a source of universal truth, nor interpreted in a literal fashion.

Nadine explained:

I mean, [the Bible] was written over 3,000 years ago! People believed a lot of crazy things back then, and I think you need to keep that in mind when you read it. Yeah, it's the word of God, but it's not like he sat down and wrote it himself.

Furthermore, many respondents used rhetoric consistent with social gospel understandings of the responsibility of Christians to bring about social justice. *Integrity*

Intervention's providers' identity as liberal, service-oriented Christians also informed collective understandings of the proper role of faith in service and helped shape the ways staff and volunteers engaged in representing their organization and its mission for internal and external audiences.

There were a few noteworthy instances where *Integrity Intervention* expressed its religious character. First, a brief prayer was conducted with leadership and volunteers before the day's work began. Generally, prayer never lasted longer than one minute, occasionally extending to two. Prayer was always led by the director, Nadine, which functioned to model the appropriately defined role of faith for the remainder of the staff and volunteer base. Significantly, daily prayer occurred behind closed doors in the office, where clients were not allowed to enter until daily "shop-talk" and the morning prayer had concluded. The message was clear: prayer was intended for volunteers, who were assumed to be either people of faith or open to explicit professions of faith commitment. Clients were excluded, as assumptions about their religious commitments could not, and should not, be made.

Another context in which faith was explicitly addressed included a question on the intake questionnaire for clients about "religious affiliation," which asked whether or not clients were active participants in a worship community. As Nadine explained, this question was designed to determine the extent to which clients were "plugged into positive networks of support." My observations of client/volunteer advocate interactions confirmed the purpose of this question as designed to address concerns about the self-defined needs of the client for socialization and fellowship, and not as a mechanism for

proselytization. When clients would indicate that yes, they were indeed members of faith communities or attending worship, advocates would then ask for the name of the institution, make note, and move to the next order of business. If clients related that they were not “plugged in” at a church, advocates would then inquire whether the client had a desire to do so. If not, the matter would then be abandoned and the information gathering process would continue. If clients indeed expressed a desire to find a worship community, advocates would then solicit information about the client’s preferences in this regard, and make recommendations accordingly. If clients expressed beliefs and desires in line with the offerings of *Community United*, advocates would then extend an invitation to join Sunday services. On occasion, clients were invited to attend faith-based services for recovering addicts hosted by *Community United*, but again, such invitations were only extended if clients mentioned personal religious beliefs consistent with that of the congregation.

Upon concluding interviews with clients, a minority of advocates would offer to pray for or with their clients, but would always first ask permission to do so. Most advocates opted not to do so, however, and therefore, client/advocate prayer was a rare occurrence. Reverend Jerry, a retired Methodist minister, was one of two advocates I witnessed engaging in this practice. On the very first occasion I saw him do so, Reverend Jerry asked the young woman he had been advising if she would like to pray together, at the conclusion of their session. After securing her consent, the three of us clasped hands. Jerry asked that God protect her and guide her, the young woman prayed for her two sons and thanked God for sending her “these wonderful, understanding, loving people to help

me.” After the client’s departure, Jerry realized that while he had asked the client for her permission to pray, he had not asked me. He proceeded to apologize with genuine regret that he had prayed in my presence before determining my comfort level or personal religious beliefs. Such interactions worked to establish the ultimately circumscribed and *private* space reserved for expressions of faith at *Integrity Intervention*, and further solidified my impressions that religious expression was only appropriate with clients’ consent.

The organization’s “Fulfilled Life” group was another exception to *Integrity Intervention*’s general relegation of matters of faith to the background. The details surrounding the collapse of the last iteration of the group are telling. The program was described as follows in a pamphlet designed for a general audience: “A select group of 10 clients meets weekly for six months with co-leaders to learn new life skills that lead to productive, self-sufficient lives.” Co-leaders included the director, Nadine, and *Integrity Intervention*’s only ex-client volunteer advocate, Joseph. In Nadine’s words, however, the only two attempts at implementing the group thus far had “pretty much been a flop.” According to Nadine, the associated time commitment and expectations for personal growth were too great for clients preoccupied with the exacting demands of daily life in poverty. Attendance first became sporadic, and clients eventually stopped returning for the meetings. I would later discover another reason for the leadership’s abandonment and subsequent dissolution of the group: Joseph and Nadine often disagreed about the extent to which faith formation should play a role in clients’ “life transformation.” Whereas Nadine saw the group’s primary function as teaching “life skills,” Joseph instead

envisioned a forum for clients to explore their “faith walk.” In the end, this resulted in the group lacking in focus and direction, as Nadine and Joseph often struggled to present a coherent message to clients about the objectives for participation. Ultimately, Joseph was the only volunteer advocate I encountered that argued for a greater role for spirituality in service provision, and mentioned as much in his interview. Exchanges that occurred between Joseph, Nadine, and other volunteers regarding the role of faith in interactions with clients served to highlight the organization’s overall orientation towards faith as a fundamentally private matter.

The final exception to the rule of compartmentalizing religion in interactions with clients included a table in the front lobby with free bibles for clients to take for personal use. Not long after I began my work with the organization, the supply of bibles had been depleted and was never replenished, despite Joseph’s repeated requests to keep them stocked and available. With the exception of Joseph’s advocacy, talk regarding the role of religion in providing services was relegated to responses to targeted questions in my interviews with providers, via my explicit questioning.

Providers sometimes cited their responsibility as people of faith to provide for the vulnerable, and engage in stewardship for the broader community. Elizabeth, a white, retirement-aged, former secretary for a car dealership, told me in her interview:

We have a commitment to be the hands and feet of Jesus, and that means treating people as Jesus treated them. You know, with love, and compassion, and understanding. That also means we have a responsibility to seek out the least among us and care for them. I might complain sometimes, waah-waah, poor me, I had a bad day, but life has been pretty good to me. That means I need to share and give back. There’s some scripture, and I can’t remember where in the Bible it is... Well, there’s some scripture that tells us we will be judged by how we treat the least among us, and I think that’s totally true. I don’t always follow the Bible, word for word. I don’t cover my head, or not eat shrimp or whatever else, or sacrifice animals on certain days [laughs], but you

know, the stuff about love and compassion, I can really get behind that! I try to treat everyone, no matter what they look like, brown, yellow, purple, whatever, essentially the same. And I try not to judge people based on their circumstances. ...I don't think that comes from being a religious person, or necessarily being a Christian. Honestly, I think what's more important is the fact that I care about what happens to my community, and to the people in my community. You can't drive through this neighborhood, or go walking around downtown, without seeing homeless people. I mean, they're *everywhere*! How can you look at that and not want to do something about it? How can you just walk past them, like they're not there? Giving them the change in your pocket isn't going to do anything about it, either. It's like throwing them the crumbs. So no, it's not really about my faith. It's about being a human being with a heart.

Elizabeth invoked her religious beliefs to explain her motives for the work she does at *Integrity Intervention*, but she was careful to point out that her drive to serve did not spring solely from her identity as a Christian, a desire to follow Christ's example, or biblical commitments. For Elizabeth, the work she does for the marginalized is part of her broader commitment to the well-being of the community, and was inspired by a sense of social responsibility that springs from her relative privilege. Such themes were echoed by many of the other volunteer advocates I spoke with—both in interviews, and in informal conversation. Many of my respondents modeled their behavior after the example they felt Jesus set for them, which compelled them to act in the best interest of the community by serving the less fortunate. Indeed, many of the morning's opening prayers involved Nadine's requests for the Lord to guide her and the volunteers in following Christ's loving example. However, as with Elizabeth, religious belief was only part of the story for other providers at *Integrity Intervention*.

When asked whether people of faith have the capacity to make more profound connections with those they serve, and if faith-based organizations are more effective in providing services, the overwhelming majority of interviewed providers at *Integrity Intervention* saw their work as no different, or no better, than that of secularly-oriented

agencies and individuals. Nadine's viewpoint was especially useful, as many of my other respondents expressed similar views:

Having faith behind you doesn't necessarily mean it's going to make you better at helping people. It won't automatically make you more empathetic, or make you less judgmental. It's a funny thing, because there's plenty of places where the exact opposite happens. ... There are places that say they're using the Bible to guide them, when really, what they're doing doesn't look anything like what Jesus taught. Just putting religion into things doesn't guarantee you anything, but that's not how they talked about this whole thing [the faith-based initiative] when it started. ... I really think there's a difference between religion and spirituality. Religion is about the institution—it's about the church. The church is fine and good, and you need a community of believers sometimes to connect together and feel restored, or to keep your traditions going. But you can have all of that and not have the *spirit* in it. There are plenty of people who don't go to church, or people who don't believe in God... Buddhists, or atheists, or whatever, but they are really spiritual people. They spend time thinking about why we're here and what it means to be human—this *little* speck in the universe [laughs]. It's like, they do things for the greater good, and they care about helping people. ... So no, I don't think being "faith-based" makes you better at what you do, or means you're going to do a better job. There's no guarantees with that. ... This is hard work, and we need all the help we can get.

Nadine's message was clear: faith-based organizations do not necessarily have a 'value added' component, despite policy-making supporters' arguments to the contrary. More important than faith commitments, or "religion," is what Nadine refers to as "spirit." For Nadine, having "spirit" or being "spiritual" is about making a contribution to the 'greater good' and being self-reflexive about one's humanity. Nadine was insistent that religious commitments do not necessarily make providers more effective at what they do, and in some cases, "religion" may even cause more problems than it solves. Again, Nadine's disposition was not unique, and was endorsed by a number of other volunteers at *Integrity Intervention*.

When asked about the dissolution of the "Fulfilled Life" group, Nadine had disparaging words for what she referred to as the "how's-your-walk-with-God" volunteer approach. She related her position to me in an informal one-on-one conversation, in a room empty with the exception of the two of us. Nadine strongly felt that explicit expressions of

religiosity on the part of volunteers, and the practice of posing direct questions to clients about their faith and spiritual health, can at best, make clients uncomfortable, and at worst, seriously compromise the “trust-building process that is so very vital to the type of work we’re trying to do here.” In the initial interview I conducted with her, she elaborated on the matter of expressions of faith between advocates and clients:

Nadine: It’s important to consider whether or not you’re starting from the premise that human beings are fundamentally flawed, and therefore predisposed to sinning and doing all sorts of bad things. The other side of the coin is starting with the belief that everyone is fundamentally lovable, and created in God’s image, and therefore deserving of compassion.

DDF: Do you think there are other organizations out there that work with the poor, or with the homeless, that feel that way? I mean, other places that see people as flawed, or as sinners?

Nadine: Are you kidding me?!? Absolutely! [groans audibly] There are so many places where clients are asked to like, confess their so-called sins before they can get help with whatever they’re dealing with. And that’s something... you know, we really try to get away from that. We really do things differently here. We come at it from a place of love. Really, that’s what Jesus was all about. He didn’t make people grovel before he helped them, he just did it. And he didn’t use it to force people into believing things. He helped people no matter who they were or where they were at, whatever mistakes they made... didn’t matter. And that is the Christian thing to do. I don’t care who you are. If you’re doing it any other way, you’re coming at it from the wrong place. ...It’s an awful way to treat people. It’s an awful thing to ask them to do. When you’re out on the streets, barely making it, there’s already a ton of shame that goes into it. Lots of people can’t even bring themselves to ask for help, so they just keep on struggling alone. ...It’s all about creating a loving, supportive relationship—lots of our clients haven’t ever had that, so they’re suspicious at first, or they don’t know how to respond. It is all about creating that close relationship. ...we just keep at it, until you start to build that level of trust. We’re here to walk with them, to show them there’s a different way to be and a different way to do things. But we’re not doing it for a golden ticket to the pearly gates, or to use it as an excuse to throw the Bible at them. It’s just not the time for that, for most of the clients we have coming through the door. You cannot focus on religion if you’re not eating, and if you don’t have a place to sleep. ...So many places you go, you look around, and that’s what it is. Some of those people say one thing and do another, you know, because they talk about Christ-like love, and not being judgmental, but then that’s all they do.

DDF: So can you give me an example of a place like that?

Nadine: Ummm... [laughs, looks out the window]. Why don’t you come along on some of the field trips we do to other organizations in the community and see for yourself? Yeah... I think that would be better! You really need to just see it for yourself.

Nadine’s above statement is significant for a number of reasons. First, she references “other organizations in the community” as engaging in problematic practices that presumably involve proselytization and the moral evaluation of clients. Furthermore, she

clearly delineates the position that service provision should ideally be devoid of expectation for client participation in religious activities. She expresses that a failure to make this separation is somehow insincere, deceitful, or self-serving. I heard similar opinions reiterated in the talk of other volunteer advocates: “making judgments” is problematic, compelling religious participation for the receipt of resources is an undesirable practice, and “relationship building” should instead be the primary focus as this is what compels “life transformation” and lasting change.

On another occasion, during the afternoon debriefing meeting that followed the end of client meetings for the day, Nadine described a conversation she once had with a client about his experiences living at the Salvation Army shelter downtown. She emphasized the client’s estimation that the people working there were hypocritical—they were not treating clients in a manner consistent with the religious teachings they subscribed to. Nadine further noted that many clients had reported to her that volunteers and staff at the Salvation Army and other such large, “bureaucratic” faith-based organizations would say they subscribe to “Christ-like love,” but then would speak to clients in disparaging tones, judge their character and behaviors negatively, and then treat them accordingly.

Ultimately, Nadine explained, it’s exactly that kind of hypocrisy they were seeking to avoid at *Integrity Intervention*, and if keeping faith out of the equation helped them do it, then so be it. The volunteers that had assembled for the meeting nodded in agreement, and offered up examples of other clients they had served with similar stories. In general, instances of other faith-based, religiously permeated or morally conservative service provision environments were cited during meetings as counter-examples of the “caring

and compassionate relationships” the organization sought to cultivate with clients. In addition, *Integrity Intervention*’s practices were represented in juxtaposition to other large and “uncaring” organizations where clients were “numbers” instead of “names.”

One conversation that occurred during the afternoon debriefing session between Nadine and the day’s volunteers illustrates well the organization’s self-definition as attempting to distinguish themselves from more bureaucratic and judgmental service environments, despite a level of frustration with client behaviors:

Cora: I just don’t understand this whole thing with [clients] not remembering [advocates’] names! They get to my desk, I ask them who they need to make a follow-up appointment with, and it’s like, [mocking tone] “uhhhh, I don’t remember!” I always tell them, “I bet your advocate would remember your name!”

Nadine: Well, it kind of makes sense to me. It’s about seeing people as functionaries, or as means to an end, and not necessarily as someone wanting a genuine relationship in your life.

Cora: Uh-uh, no way. I think it’s just a listening problem.

Joseph: Well, that nature of the positive relationship is just something that’s absolutely foreign to their lives. These people go to multiple different agencies in a single day, and lots of names and faces gets confusing.

Nadine: Right! Go to the Compassion Center! It’s an absolute cattle-call! Truly, it’s a miserable place, and way different from what we do and who we are. Clients can sit and wait all day in line and not see anyone. What makes it even worse is that [the director] sits there, like a pious queen on a throne, and people have to grovel in front of her. She is totally the queen of direct services, and she does everything independently because she doesn’t want to cooperate with government. For women and children, they get more help, and they make it a little bit easier, but for men, they really have to have a sob story and do some serious groveling to get cash assistance or any kind of help, really. And it’s another one of those pray-before-you-eat places, which is just ridiculous to cram that stuff down people’s throats before you help them. Like the Salvation Army. And I’m sorry, but sometimes, they just treat people like crap.

Julia: [Sarcastically] Well, it’s hard to be the queen!

Cora: I don’t think so. There’s no excuse for it [name forgetting], because what we do is totally different. We address everyone by their name here, not by a number. We invite them in, and offer them something to eat and something to drink. We give them a warm and comfortable place to sit, and it’s not like they sit here and wait all day. We treat them like human beings. They could at least do us the courtesy of remembering our names.

Reverend Jerry: Well, that’s our unique contribution, right? That’s our niche. We have a different purpose. We build relationships. But you know, with generational poverty, some people just don’t know how to do that.

Nadine: *Yes, we do offer something different. Really, it's like the difference between a mud hut and a mansion.*

James: *Well, at the very least, I was just excited to see that [the client base] was motivated and accountable today. That's a very different experience from what I saw last week.*

Such conversations that compared *Integrity Intervention* to other service organizations were not infrequent, and led me to conclude that their de-centering of faith is likely due to their self-definition against the practices and values at faith-infused, conservative, evangelical religious social service organizations. This finding is further contextualized by the fact that the majority of gospel rescue missions for the homeless are fundamentalist or evangelical in their orientation (Hackworth 2012). In other words, *Integrity Intervention's* sentiment that they were doing “something different” was justified in that the near absence of direct religious expression, and expectations for client religious participation, may well be a unique approach among organizations that aim to help the homeless.

“Family Values” at Integrity Intervention

In addition to the relative lack of direct religious expression, family rhetoric was also notable in its absence at *Integrity Intervention*. This pattern of silence on matters of family demonstrated a significant similarity to the liberal congregation (also in receipt of faith-based initiative funds) profiled in Edgell & Docka (2007). A number of different factors worked together to keep family-talk out of the spotlight at *Integrity Intervention*. Perhaps most obviously, keeping family out of conversations with clients was prioritized out of a conscious organizational respect for clients' desire to avoid revisiting past wounds in their personal family histories. Many had experienced abuse, neglect, and

alienation. In focus group settings, a number of clients expressed their appreciation for advocates' general practice of addressing needs in the absence of questions about their relationships with family members.

Though advocates mentioned a willingness to help clients reconnect with estranged family members, or to work towards improving existing relationships, generally, this was not a central area of concern in advocate/client relations at *Integrity Intervention*.

Numbers from a review of a random sample of client case files over a 3 month period (Sept.-Nov. 2011) reflected the aforementioned absence of focus on family-related matters. Generally, family issues were addressed in only one of the twelve "key focus areas," labeled "relationships." The file review revealed that only 2% of clients were indicated by advocates as "making progress" in the "relationships" category. An *Integrity Intervention* volunteer's report on the three-month random sample included the following examples, which directly cited the language used in client files: "No fights since last visit; Got custody of daughter; Met with PACER [Parent Advocacy Coalition for Educational Rights] regarding her son."

The fact that leaders and volunteers situated more faith-permeated religious social service providers as 'other' in their self-definitions was another important element in explaining the absence of providers' talk about family at *Integrity Intervention*. Such 'other' conservative or faith-infused organizations were represented as wrongfully preoccupied with family life and family ideologies, especially in the context of marriage, childbearing, or gender roles. The beliefs and practices of their program were represented in conversations about organizational identity as fundamentally different, as *Integrity*

Intervention's providers saw 'other' social service programs as inappropriately or unethically concerned with clients' family living situations. As well, *Integrity Intervention's* providers' representations of their program served to highlight their orientation to both faith and family as fundamentally private matters.

The Assistant Director, Sally, provided some telling insight into *Integrity Intervention's* orientation to family morality. Sally is a middle-class, middle-aged, white woman. Generally, she arrived for work in colorful t-shirts, jeans, and Converse high-top sneakers. She came to volunteer at *Integrity Intervention* when she left her "unfulfilling and just totally empty" job as a corporate accountant. Though "the competition was stiff," when a paid position opened up at *Integrity Intervention*, Sally applied for the job and got it. Many long-time volunteers, some with the organization since its inception, had been anticipating the materialization of a paid position with the growth of the organization. Though Sally began paid work with *Integrity Intervention* as the part-time Volunteer Coordinator, a sizable donation from a *Community United* member gave the organization the necessary resources to create a second, full-time, paid leadership position. Again, Sally applied for the job and was selected, and again, she did so alongside a sizable amount of other long-time volunteer applicants. Sally endured a long commute in from an outer-ring suburb on the opposite end of the metro area on a daily basis, as she insisted, the "sense of community makes it all worth it!" When asked whether the organization abides by a set of "family values," Sally responded:

No, that's totally not who we are or what we're about. We are, after all, based out of a reconciling congregation.³ So I don't think that's what Bush and other conservatives had in mind when they were pushing the whole "family values" thing. But... well... I think if you think about family

values as wanting to care for people, and knowing that everyone is deserving of the same loving support that a family provides, then yes, I think we do have “family values.” They’re just different from what most people think that term means. And I guess I’ve never really thought about it that way.

Sally’s statement on “family values” is significant in that it both establishes the primacy of an ethic of care, and invokes a more conservative “other.” Though she’s “never really thought about” the term “family values” in the context of the moral standards embraced at *Integrity Intervention*, Sally admits that the organization *does* abide by a set of inclusive principles regarding family life and family ideology.

Much of what I learned about family ideals at *Integrity Intervention* was revealed to me in the context of interview questions posed to volunteers about parenting and family life. After asking one advocate—a retirement-aged, white woman—about whether children are better off with two parents, a mother and a father, I was informed:

Two dads or two moms work just as well. And we’re not here to tell single parents that they need to get married to provide a healthy environment for their children. Some places that help people see that as really important, because of what they think the Bible says, or that’s just what they believe. But that’s just not how we do things here. Really, what’s more important is that parents get paid a decent, living wage, so they can pay the rent and provide the essentials. If we have any “family values,” it’s that jobs are more important than marriage.

Another interview question that elicited relevant information about family and gender revolved around whether mothers and fathers should be responsible for different household duties. Joseph, the only volunteer advocate who had once been a client himself, related:

People should really just play to their strengths. In some cases, I think dads can be better at giving kids the emotional stuff they need. Maybe mothers can be better at doing the whole provider thing, by working longer hours, or bringing home a bigger paycheck. I’ve always thought the whole mom stays at home and dad goes out and works thing is pretty outdated—it just doesn’t work anymore. For a family to make it nowadays, both parents have to work. There’s just no way around it, unless you’re super rich and have the luxury of someone staying home with the kids. You’re definitely not going to see any of that around here [at *Integrity Intervention*]! ...And even if you are making good money, maybe it’s the dad that stays home. I know that’s not what some

people think God intended, but that's a pretty narrow view, and it just doesn't work with the way the world works now. I don't think anyone who works with the poor can keep up that viewpoint.

In general, my volunteer interviewees responded with relatively flexible views on family and gender, similar to Joseph's. My inquiries about family ideals with most advocates were met with responses such as "we don't try to tell people how to live their family lives, but there are plenty of other organizations that do," or "we don't really want to get into all that."

Such "other organizations" generally took the form of more faith-infused environments. For example, Katrina, a newly retired volunteer advocate who had formerly worked in retail sales, gave the following response when I inquired about "family values" at

Integrity Intervention:

Katrina: I don't think that something that most of us feel comfortable bringing up. That's just not who we are or what we do.

DDF: Mmm hmm... Why do you think that is? What's the reason for that?

Katrina: Well... There are plenty of other places that people who are struggling can go to that see that as part of their problem. I mean, they see family life as creating the issue. Maybe that's true sometimes, but it's not our place to say. It's not up to us. That's kind of a conservative thing, and we're not really that conservative. Maybe, I dunno, maybe [other organizations] want to try to fix them, or get them right with God, and they see part of the problem with the way they're living their lives. Maybe they had babies and didn't get married, or maybe they're just people living together without getting married, or even, you know, they can't get married, if they're gay. It's not our job to tell them what their family values should be or how they should do things. That's up to them. We're a pretty liberal place. I think you'll find that out. So we're not about to tell people how to do things. Lots of other places with more holier-than-thou attitudes are fine with doing that. We just want to see people get to a place where they can stand on their own two feet, and feel secure. Pay their bills, have a job to go to, get the rent paid. That's really what we're about.

As is evident from Katrina's statement, silence about family at *Integrity Intervention* was tied to their institutional legacy as both religiously and politically liberal. Much of their organizational identity therefore dictated that faith should be a private matter, and relatedly, "family values" were considered off-limits. Widespread acknowledgment of

the politically-charged nature of family rhetoric generally rendered it an inappropriate topic for polite discussion. However, this silencing of faith and family did not mean that faith and family were not important. Assumptions about family life and institutional rewards structures dealt with family, gender, and race in an indirect, yet powerful, manner. Though respondents stated openness to more inclusive definitions of family and gender in interviews, *Integrity Intervention's* organizational practices meant that traditional gender ideals and traditional familism were bolstered in an almost 'automatic,' unspoken fashion. In the absence of active or explicit consideration of "family" in everyday contexts of service provision, providers at *Integrity Intervention* encountered a lack of readily available alternative standards for gender identity and family life, which resulted in differential outcomes for male and female clients, and clients with and without custodial responsibility for children.

Widespread cultural schemas regarding the causes and consequences of poverty (in addition to family schemas), associated moral and evaluative categories (such as the "deserving" and "undeserving" poor), and such schemas' implicit (and sometimes explicit) ties to gender, family, and racial ideologies also had important consequences for providers' access to the discursive resources they used to construct the rhetoric they employed to describe the experiences of their clients. These same cultural schemas for representing poverty dictated specific relationships between poverty, gender, family, and race, which came to influence how clients were treated by leaders and volunteer advocates—most notably, in the ways client behaviors were evaluated and resources were distributed.

Gender and Family Ideology, Cultural Schemas of Poverty, & Client Outcomes

Upon arriving at *Integrity Intervention*, I was immediately confronted with a troubling, and equally puzzling initial observation. The vast majority of the clients served were single, Black, older males. This reality sat in stark contrast with claims made in the literature on the “feminization of poverty,” which observes that because women are overrepresented among those living beneath the poverty line, they are therefore more vulnerable to the risks associated with economic deprivation (Pearce 1992). Despite the claims of this influential body of literature, demographic research on the poor finds that racial minorities (especially African Americans), men, and the aged are overrepresented in counts of the nation’s single and homeless individuals. In 2007, a survey by the U.S. Conference of Mayors found that 76% of surveyed individuals living in homelessness were “single” adults. Of that population, 67.5% were male. However, of the homeless living in households with children, 35% were male and 65% were female (U.S. Conference of Mayors 2007; qtd. in Gowan 2010:326). The same survey found an overrepresentation of racial minorities as well: 42% of those surveyed were African-American, 38% white, 20% Hispanic, 4% Native American, and 2% Asian. Though such racial and gender imbalances characterize the homeless population in the United States, race and gender differences are even more pronounced among *Integrity Intervention’s* client base. In addition, *Integrity Intervention* served an older overall population than those represented in the ranks of the state’s homeless.⁴

Cultural schemas that distinguish the “deserving” from the “undeserving” poor are inflected by gender, family status, and race in a number of ways (Katz 1989; Pippert

2007; Susser 1996a, 1993; Gowan 2010). Discursive structures surrounding homelessness speak to assumptions about the embodiment of gender difference.⁵ Homelessness is seen as more physically dangerous for women, who may be more vulnerable to sexual and physical violence, or are represented as having a lesser capacity to withstand inclement weather. “Able-bodied” men, in comparison to women, are seen as having greater capacity to defend themselves against physical attack and “tough out” exposure to the elements. Prevailing cultural presumptions also incorporate women’s assumed innate, biologically dictated caretaking tendencies, and men’s greater likelihood to be inclined towards more wild, wanderlust, and undomesticated ways. Therefore, the female homeless are considered deserving to the extent that they display traditional female passivity/pliability, highlight their gender-specific need, and render their ‘dependency’ visible through the lenses of their assumed obligations associated with motherhood, potential motherhood, or other forms of caregiving. Feminine worthiness is judged against perceived capacity to rehabilitate into the roles of wife, mother, and caregiver.

The ‘undeserving’ male homeless, on the other hand, are understood as failures of traditional masculinity, as they not only cannot care for themselves, they also cannot provide for a family—one of the primary means through which ‘manhood’ is demonstrated in a society that values nuclear arrangements. Barring disability and reaching “retirement age,” men in homelessness are deemed worthy on the basis of their prospects for reentry into the labor force, and (re)assumption of the social role that coincides with breadwinning. In addition, subtexts regarding family are also mapped

onto this binary of deservingness and undeservingness, as homelessness is one of the primary arenas in which the ideology of the nuclear family is reproduced, rewarding those who conform (or those deemed in possession of the potential to rehabilitate) with the cultural norms consistent with nuclear family forms, and punishing (or refusing services to) those individuals defined outside the ‘domesticating’ influences of the nuclear family.

Early on in my experiences at the site, my observations about race, gender, and family status imbalances were a frequent subject of inquiry for me with *Integrity Intervention’s* providers. I was matter-of-factly and repeatedly informed that because the needs of women and children are served by federal block grant-funded state emergency assistance programs, other government programs, and local service non-profits, those most in need ended up on the doorstep of *Community United*. As in most cities, women and families with children are given priority in the assignment of shelter beds and the allocation of other emergency services. *Integrity Intervention’s* providers also cited protectionist trends in social policy in accounting for the overrepresentation of single males in the program’s client base. Respondents explained that such realities governing the intersection of poverty, family, and gender were primary reasons behind the program’s decision to focus on the needs of single, older men. Furthermore, the general silence surrounding family, or lack of ‘family-talk’ at *Integrity Intervention* is also attributable to their decision to serve men who presumably live their lives ‘outside’ the family.

Targeted interview questions that asked whether male and female clients might have “different needs” elicited responses indicating that women and men had similar basic

requirements in their efforts to survive in extreme hardship and escape poverty. When answering a question about gender difference and need, one advocate explained: “When you deal with the homeless, you’re dealing with people at the level of survival and basic human needs. ...when you get down to that level—shelter, food, water—it’s all about Maslow’s hierarchy.” One conversation I had with an older, retirement-aged, male advocate about *Integrity Intervention’s* decision to target single men with their programming was especially representative of providers’ explicit orientation to need and gender:

Sometimes, I think it’s even worse for the guys out there! Many of the men I work with in here are tired of being victimized. When they’re out on the streets, they’ll get beaten for what little they have on them. They are like, easy prey. They are incredibly vulnerable—especially if they are older guys. That’s part of why they come in wanting a change. ...I think they just get tired of running. That’s why most of the guys you see in here are older. They just don’t have that fight left in them that they had when they were younger. Maybe they could do it when they were ready to take on the world and were young, strong, and tough. Now they’re ready to get their lives together and be accountable, so they don’t have to suffer anymore.

However, when pressed about the additional dangers women might face in the form of sexual or domestic violence, most volunteers would then concede that this was an additional aspect of “life on the streets” that women might have to deal with, but I was again reminded that those women that needed it and sought it out would be given emergency shelter.

Another reason behind *Integrity Intervention’s* focus on the needs of male clients was associated with the consequences of the relationships fathers had with their children. Respondents explained that as women generally maintain custody of children when relationships dissolve, this left many men beyond the reach of existing federal, state, and civic programming designed to protect families with young dependents.⁸ Some providers

cited their impression that custodial mothers used access to children, and the resources that access entailed, as either incentives to inspire desirable behaviors in their children's fathers, or as tools in more manipulative efforts. As one volunteer related:

Some of these women just tell these guys they can't see their kids to get them to do what they want. Or they hold the promise of being able to return to the house and share the welfare check to squeeze what little they have left out of them. And these guys just go along with it because they're desperate to see their kids. A lot of them just want to be a part of their families' lives again.

Such observations on the part of *Integrity Intervention's* providers are consistent with Susser's (1996a) estimation that the state's practice of tying resources for survival to the control of children and associated household resources serves to exacerbate gender tension among the socioeconomically marginalized. Despite such observations, advocates remained puzzled by stories of men who would spend their last remaining dollars on cell phones, elaborate birthday parties, and brand name clothing for their children.

Integrity Intervention's otherwise scant attention to matters of parenting and family should be understood in the context of their conscious and explicit choice to serve childless and single men. The organization's stated commitment to providing support to single males is relatively unique in the landscape of social provision for those living in extreme poverty, thereby addressing policy-fueled gender disparities among the homeless population. Simultaneously, however, *Integrity Intervention* also reinforced the normative status of the nuclear family model, but did so in subtle ways—most often, in an unstated, implicit manner.

The overrepresentation of single men in *Integrity Intervention's* client base largely stemmed from the organization's explicit commitment to serving greater numbers of

single men without children, as their assumed disconnection from family leaves them without sources of material and emotional support, and vulnerable to holes in the safety net of social service provision. As Nadine explained, “a lot of these guys are just totally alone and isolated. Relationships fall apart before they even get started. They end up having kids from these fleeting sexual encounters, and then they’re just gone.”

Nevertheless, my on-site observations pointed to less “isolation” than was generally assumed by volunteers and leadership at *Integrity Intervention*. Family living situations for clients sometimes took forms that deviated from ideal nuclear models, and they were therefore not defined as living in “families,” or as living “alone.” However, many of the clients I spoke with were living with adult siblings, their elderly parents, with roommates, in boarding houses in close proximity to other tenants, in “sober living” facilities where they shared either bedrooms or common areas with other residents, in shelters with a good amount of shared public space, or “on the street,” sometimes setting up camp nearby other individuals with whom they would develop resource exchanges and supportive friendships. Though indeed, a good number of clients were living emotionally and physically “isolated” lives in the absence of close interpersonal bonds, many in fact were not. The structure of *Integrity Intervention’s* intake paperwork and client interviews did not often leave space for capturing such relationships, as the primary question used to determine the degree of client “isolation” asked about other individuals living with the client in their “household.”

Ultimately, the language of “isolation” was informed by the fact that many clients were living outside the bounds of the traditional, nuclear family—many times, away from their

children and/or a partner of the opposite sex. Therefore, interpersonal relationships that did not coincide with generally accepted definitions of nuclear family relationships went unrecognized by providers. Advocates would often take stock of other members of clients' "households" to advise them as to who they might be able to turn to when in need of emotional or material assistance. Consequently, relationships outside of those traditionally associated with nuclear family roles were often overlooked as potential sources of help, broadly conceived.

Nuclear family models were also influential at *Integrity Intervention* in that clients were rewarded for their perceived association with or performance of traditional gender roles. Volunteers' perceptions of genuine (and therefore legitimately serviceable) needs and their converse—perceived manipulation of "the system," or "bullshit artists"—varied considerably according to the gender and family living situation of the client. Volunteers and leadership were constantly on the lookout for "bamboozling" behaviors they defined as manipulative or exhibiting baseless entitlement. In the past, surveillance efforts to apprehend such perceived slights went as far as unannounced home visits, though the organization had since redefined such efforts as beyond the purview of volunteers—mainly because the couple that had previously served this function had permanently retired to a warmer climate.

Advocates related that one of the primary client strategies for "manipulation" included comparing the specific resources they had been given with other clients' received resources, or in some cases, misrepresenting the resources received by other clients. For example, as one volunteer explained: "Some clients will come in and give you a line, like

‘my friend got such-and-such last week—why can’t I have that, too?’ Such comparisons were deemed inappropriate, as each client came in with a “different situation,” which was defined by advocate perceptions of qualitatively different levels of need or “household” structure. Clients’ practice of demanding similar treatment was deemed especially inappropriate given the level of “flexibility” *Integrity Intervention* tried to maintain in order to best meet the needs of individual client circumstances. In order to maintain this level of flexibility, and minimize client objections to the discretionary practices of advocates in allocating resources, the leadership continually emphasized that volunteers should never discuss either official or unofficial standards for resource allocation with clients. Volunteers were also instructed on practical strategies for dealing with client objections to resourcing strategies, and encouraged to bring stories of such disagreements with clients to staff meetings to both get advice from leadership on how to deal with these situations and provide instructive examples for other advocates to follow. One example included a conversation about a disagreement with an agitated client over the amount of bus tokens he’d been awarded, as he cited another female client he knew of that had been awarded a ten-ride voucher card the week prior, as compared to his five individual ride tokens. Nadine explained to the advocate that she should tell her disconcerted client:

Maybe she had kids she had to take to school, or the doctor, or daycare, or whatever! Maybe she’s got meetings she needs to go to after the sun goes down, and it’s not safe for her to be out there walking on dark streets after the sun goes down! You know, I do that kind of thing all the time. We give different clients different resources, and that’s just the way it goes. We really shouldn’t have to explain what our reasons are anyway.

Nadine’s explanation was noteworthy in that she directly and explicitly invoked both gender and family in her rationale for allowing for discretionary flexibility for advocates. Significantly, she cited presumptions about the greater need of female clients, both

because they may have dependent children, and because women have the potential for a greater level of vulnerability in situations deemed “not safe.”

Additional client tactics for “working the system” involved clients approaching multiple agencies for resources to service the same need; claiming a need for furniture and household goods when already in possession of such items; declaring “new client” status at return visits; and “advocate hopping” (or seeing a different advocate for each subsequent visit to obtain greater levels of resources). My observations of client/volunteer interactions, and discussions at the daily debriefing meetings, revealed that whereas some of these behaviors on the part of a “deserving” mother with children might be interpreted as resourcefulness, the same behaviors enacted by an “undeserving” male would be criticized as attempts to manipulate the program and prey on the kindness of volunteers. Therefore, despite a recognition of the problems created by gender disparities in the existing social safety net, resources at *Integrity Intervention* were sometimes distributed such that families with dependent children were attributed greater levels of emergency assistance (food, clothing, and referrals to emergency and transitional housing), and more often than not, it was women who arrived at the doorstep of the church with dependent children in tow and at home. In addition, women were less likely than men to be ‘punished’ through the allocation of lesser amounts of resources, forced “exit” from the program (either indefinitely or for a waiting period of six months), the outright refusal of services, or less stringent moral evaluation of their behaviors by providers.

One example of a client interview I observed provides an especially illuminating example of this pattern, as demonstrated in the following fieldnote excerpt:

Robert's next client, a "new intake," was a young African-American woman, Justine, who explained she had just relocated to the area with her toddler-aged son. . . . Things had been especially tight for Justine lately because she has another baby on the way. She also recently had to quit her job because her morning sickness had made it too difficult for her to consistently make it to work. She explained that while she had one chair in the living room, a "pad" to sleep on, and a couple of kitchen utensils, she really needed furniture and household goods. She and her son had only been able to bring two suitcases with them when they moved, so they were also in need of clothing—especially since the weather would soon be getting colder. Justine also told Robert that having a computer would ease her post-partum employment search and help her file her financial records. Robert explained that while he would be able to help with furniture, household goods, and clothing through vouchers to a thrift store, Justine may not be able to get a refurbished laptop because they are short in supply, and are generally reserved for students. However, if she would be willing to "really commit to the program as a full participant," he might be able to make an exception.

When Robert and I exited the room to fetch the vouchers, we ran into Ronda [another advocate] in the resource room. Ronda mentioned that it was odd that Justine, "her client," was meeting with Robert—though Ronda admitted her schedule had been full lately, so perhaps Justine had a pressing matter that could not wait. Both Robert and I were a little confused—Justine had represented herself as a first-time client, telling us she had found out about the program "from a friend." Upon hearing this, Robert requested that I check the existing, paper-based client case file system (my usual 'job') for any background information on Justine's "situation."

I did locate a file on Justine, which indicated that she had been in five months prior, expressed many of the same needs, and had been correspondingly resourced and referred. I presented the file to Robert, who was still in the resource room processing Justine's vouchers and bus tokens. He expressed little surprise, sighing and saying "this happens all the time." He continued to process Justine's resources, though official protocol and Nadine's continual reminders dictated that clients are to be either asked to make an appointment with their "regular" advocate, or "exited" for a period of six months for misrepresenting themselves.

I had no interest whatsoever in "catching" Justine, but I was very interested in exploring the gaps between official program standards and the individual discretion of advocates. In weeks prior, I'd seen Robert handle other similar situations with male clients more stringently, and he was notorious for his "tough love" approach. Robert usually had no patience for "advocate hopping," and had once related the tale of a client for whom he'd arranged the drop-off of a donated couch, only to find the client already had a couch (admittedly, in poor condition) in his apartment—what angered Robert was the client wanting to "trade up." When I asked Robert about his leniency, he explained: "Look, she's got a young son and a baby on the way, and she just lost her job. What am I supposed to do—turn her away?" "No," I explained, "absolutely not. I just want to see how you deal with it."

Robert continued to process Justine's resources as I watched and recorded the disbursement in the database. While program standards allowed for a \$10 thrift store voucher for individual clients, and an additional \$5 voucher for each dependent child, Robert signed off on three \$10 vouchers, telling me that Justine would need them "to get ready for the baby." While furniture donations are generally reserved for clients who've made and kept a "handful" (usually, four to six) of

appointments with their advocate, Robert began arrangements for a drop-off upon returning to his seat in the interview room alongside Justine.

Robert's exercise of flexible judgment in Justine's situation was telling on a number of levels. First, their interaction gains an additional layer of meaning in the context of my past observations of Robert's strategies in dealing with other clients engaging in "advocate hopping" and misrepresentation of their status as "intakes." His treatment of Justine demonstrated a greater level of leniency for this particular female client as compared with past male clients. Normally, the finding that female clients, and female clients with children, get greater levels of resources, and enjoy the benefits of 'rule bending' more than male clients would be unremarkable, given insights from existing literature on protectionism in social welfare (Mohr 1994; Skocpol 1992; Watkins-Hayes 2009). However, patterns of resource allocation at *Integrity Intervention* that systematically privilege women and mothers were, to some degree, unexpected, as the program voices an explicit commitment to granting access to resources to single men, a demographic group leaders and advocates felt were systematically disadvantaged.

Those clients perceived by providers as exhibiting behavior consistent with norms for 'acceptable' masculinity were most likely to be seen as candidates for rehabilitation into roles associated with the nuclear family model, were considered to have a capacity for 'redemption,' and were treated accordingly at *Integrity Intervention*. For men, meeting the expectations of advocates involved treading a thin line between being perceived as passive and dependent or undomesticated and unruly. Those who most easily fit this model for deservingness were morally repentant men "ready for a change" and re-entry into the labor market. One fieldnote excerpt illustrates this tension well. While

discussing the consequences of “generational poverty” and the need to remind clients of the import of keeping appointments, Nadine explained:

“Well, this is part of our job, right? We need to serve as interpreters.” She once had a felon, she recounted, that was very difficult to serve. It was a struggle just to get him to get a haircut, and he still refused to cut the long, braided beard that hung from his chin. This is the type of advice, she explained, that clients don’t necessarily get at other service organizations. “They just give hand-outs and send clients out the door.” Jim offered, “Yeah well, this gets ticklish because it’s a cultural issue.” Nadine became visibly animated, waving both hands, leaning forward, raising her eyebrows and voice: “But who runs jobs? The middle class! So you need to look like them! You need to talk like them! And you need to learn to think like them, so you can get a job, and you don’t go back to prison!” Mostly, she explained, this guy had so much anxiety about getting a job in order to keep himself from getting locked up again that he couldn’t even think about what he needed to do to get that job. Rev. Jerry scoffed: “maybe he just needed some tough love.” Jacob then inquired, “we need to know more. What’s this guy’s experience been?” Nadine explained, “Well, he’s very negative, so people don’t want to help him”. Rev. Jerry again interjected: “You know, that’s the problem. So many of these clients are defensive, they’re aggressive, and they come in with a chip on their shoulder. A wise woman once said, ‘Take your pride and put it in your back pocket and hold it in abeyance.’ Some of these people, they just feel they’ve been ‘dissed’ before anyone even talks to them! Just by the way you look at them!” Nadine offered, “This guy lacks the social sensitivity. Will he get it before he goes back to jail? Will he get it when he’s back in jail? No, I don’t think so!”

She went on to explain that she had another “interesting case study.” Another one of her clients was a man who lost his minimum wage job and therefore could not pay the rent. The landlord started calling and leaving angry messages, and left an especially “intimidating” note. But the tenant didn’t do anything, “because he got scared, rolled over, and played dead.” Now, in this instance, Nadine insisted, it’s very important for volunteers to advocate for their clients. Which is precisely what she ended up doing—she called the landlord, discussed the matter with him, and got him to delay the eviction process for one month as it would have been just as expensive for the landlord to pay for the beginnings of the eviction proceedings as it was for him to give the man a one-month grace period to wait for his unemployment to process and the first check to arrive.

Nadine’s juxtaposition of her bearded felon and meek tenant was especially telling. In the first instance, Nadine’s client had entered with a “bad attitude.” Because he lacked “social sensitivity,” he was represented as “undomesticated”—his unwillingness to compromise and masculine pride nearly cost him his freedom via a return trip to jail. When elaborating on the story later in the group meeting, Nadine expressed her belief that much of the trouble she encountered with this client was not only associated with the gap between them in social class status, but also, in gender. A combination of undesirable, unrepentant behaviors and “other” social service organizations’ practice of

“just giv[ing] hand-outs” in the absence of attention to “cultural issues” ensured that this particular client, in Reverend Jerry’s words, “might just be a lost cause.” Both Nadine and Reverend Jerry agreed that this was a common problem, especially with young, *male* clients. Jerry’s reference to the situation as a “cultural issue” contained reference to clients’ understandings of providers’ work to modify clients’ demeanors and communication styles as perceived affronts to clients’ understandings and representations of their masculinity. When clients “feel they’ve been ‘dissed,’” they respond accordingly by reasserting their manhood through being “defensive” or “aggressive.” Furthermore, as I demonstrate in the following section of the chapter, Nadine and Reverend Jerry’s talk of clients for whom “cultural issues,” “defensive[ness],” and “aggressive[ness]” present barriers to effective service provision also had overtones associated with prevailing cultural assumptions about the intersection of “deservingness” and masculinity, race, and class. Ultimately, the conduct and deportment of the first client in the above excerpt was a matter for concern primarily because providers’ perceptions of his underlying character had the potential to forestall his efforts at reentering the labor force, which in his case, would have meant reincarceration.

In contrast, providers’ interpretations of similar conduct on the part of *female* clients did not receive nearly as much attention. When “aggressive” or “defensive” female clients *were* debated at staff meetings, women clients more often had their behavior interpreted by providers as less a matter of them having “a chip on their shoulder,” and more as a sign of “underlying mental illness.” One female client who got into a disagreement with Cora over her feeling that she had been “disrespected” was interpreted by Nadine as

evidence that the woman shouldn't necessarily have been negatively judged for her "mental health problems." Gowan (2010) provides insight into the unique relationship between mental illness and femininity: "The self-examination required by sick-talk is a highly feminized... cultural form... It is not surprising that those most attracted by the disease discourse were far more likely to be female..." (194). Though Gowan's statement refers to the *self*-understandings of the homeless, clients' self-representations undoubtedly impact the ways they are perceived by and subsequently represented by providers.

Nadine had referenced her second client as an "interesting case study," and discussed the stories of the two men in juxtaposition with one another, which demonstrated her intention of comparing and contrasting the two men as opposite in orientation and outcome. In making her comparison, Nadine implicitly contrasted the passive behavior of her second client with her first more "aggressive" client. She did so by telling the story of her submissive second client after Reverend Jerry's use of key words such as "aggressive" and "defensive." As I argue above, these are traits generally associated with masculinity and the "undeserving" poor, as are their converse, passivity and submissiveness, as they are associated with 'failures' of traditional masculinity. Nadine's descriptions, and the responses of the other advocates in the room, together painted a picture of the ideal, "deserving" male client—one who is not too "aggressive," but one who is also not too submissive. As in the above example, patterns in my observations of client/advocate interviews over time further bolstered my impressions about the import of a tightrope of masculinity that clients deemed "deserving" were expected to walk.

In the instance of the first client, Nadine highlighted efforts such as talking him into a haircut and recognizing (and assumedly, subsequently attempting to instill) a level of necessary “social sensitivity” as her client’s most important needs and associated appropriate solutions. In the instance of the second client, however, she took a far more active role in addressing the *material* needs he approached the program with—calling his landlord, checking on the status of his application for unemployment, and making both phone calls in her client’s presence in order to model for him how clients can “advocate for themselves.” As the staff/volunteer group conversation unfolded, this second client’s story was cited as an exemplar for the appropriate use of meager program funds. Because the second client had a “good attitude” and was making steps towards “self-sufficiency,” cutting him a check for enough rent to prevent his eviction would have been an appropriate use of program funds, as it would have helped him avoid homelessness and been a step in the direction of “positive change.” Nadine related that had her strategy of negotiating with the landlord been unsuccessful, the next line of action would have been to find money, either from another organization or out of *Integrity Intervention’s* budget, to “keep him off the streets.”

Overall, providers’ interpretations of clients’ behaviors and mannerisms had a significant impact on their perceptions of clients’ performances of masculinity and femininity and resulted in gender differentials in resource allocation outcomes. Outcome differences also existed for clients with children in their custody and either childless clients or clients living without their children. Furthermore, gendered client behavior was interpreted through lenses constructed by drawing on broader cultural discourses regarding the

“deserving” and “undeserving” poor, which were further informed by both gender ideology and familism (or cultural schemas for family life which entailed notions of the ‘good family’). As I argue above, *Integrity Intervention*’s lack of explicit attention to, or focus on, matters associated with family life resulted in circumstances where providers defaulted to relying on prevailing normative structures in the broader culture about associated family ideals. Though leaders and volunteers at *Integrity Intervention* made little public, explicit mention of family, gender, or faith, values surrounding all three informed the cultural schemas used to sort clients as either “deserving” or “undeserving,” and worked to influence the specific ways providers interacted with the clients they served. It is important to note that support for such forms of traditional gender and familism were born less of conscious support for such ideals, and resulted more due to a lack of alternative discursive resources for providers to use in orienting their strategies of service provision to the gender and family lives of *Integrity Intervention*’s clients.

Race and Clients from “Generational Poverty:” Program Shifts, Unlearning the “Culture of Poverty,” and Ruby Payne’s “Bridges” Curriculum

When pressed as to the reasons for the over-representation of African-Americans among *Integrity Intervention*’s client base, volunteers frequently gave explanations citing the effects of “generational poverty,” which led to the perceived familial cultural inheritance of a host of social ills such as sexual promiscuity, absentee fathering, disconnection from or fragmented family units, increased levels of substance abuse, and more frequent encounters with the criminal justice system. Taken together, I was informed, these behavioral issues resulted in significant barriers to employment, “social isolation,” and a lack of client understanding of the normative conventions governing middle class social

life for ‘the rest of us.’ I was generally advised—sometimes explicitly and unabashedly, sometimes in hushed tones, and most often, through coded implication—that the effects of “generational poverty” were especially prominent among the African-American community, given the legacy of substance abuse, welfare dependency, and fatherlessness for black Americans.

In addition to gender and family, binary conceptualizations of the “deserving” and “undeserving” poor are further inflected by race, as in distinctions drawn between “white trash” and the “ghetto” (read: black) poor (Gamson 1999). Race therefore informs the specific ways gender is lived for the homeless, creating a truly unique “social location” for each individual living in poverty. In addition to constituting a “gender crisis,” homelessness is further informed by gendered expectations for those living with or without racial privilege:

For homeless men... they are viewed as both hypermasculinized and emasculated. These men appear to be independent of the control of women, family, and society, and thus they are considered dangerous, violent, and aggressive. If they are “nonwhite,” racism reinforces and exaggerates these fears. Accompanying these hypermasculinized images are emasculated ones... (Passaro 1996:1-2).

In turn, simultaneously gendered and radicalized constructions of homelessness come to influence the forms of social provision and public resources available for individuals living in homelessness (Gowan 2010; Passaro 1996; Susser 1996).

Eva, a white, middle-class, retired educational administrator, informed me that most of the problems with African-American clients stemmed from the “80s and 90s mentality of scoring with women as defining their manhood.” In so doing, she emphasized a pattern of sexual conquest associated with poor, Black men’s masculinity—though she did so

with considerable trepidation about speaking “with such sweeping generalization.” I encountered similar sentiments in a conversation I had with Reverend Jerry, a retired white Methodist pastor, originally from a working-class family, who had relocated to the area from the Northeast: “Women are just throw-aways to these men. It’s all part of the gangster mentality.” However, whereas Eva voiced her opinions with apprehension and misgivings, Reverend Jerry expressed his views on race, masculinity, and sexuality with equanimity.

Conversations about masculinity and race would sometimes lend themselves to subsequent conversations about “broken families,” though not without significant probing on my part. Though rhetoric regarding race, poverty, masculinity, and family sometimes surfaced in staff/volunteer group meetings, it was not generally part of the everyday conversational environment, and instead surfaced more frequently in interviews and private conversations. This does not mean, however, that race was entirely absent in daily, public conversations. Instead, it was invoked in a coded fashion in references to the dictates of clients’ experiences with “generational poverty.”

Alan, another white retirement-aged advocate, who had formerly worked as an accountant, and was recruited into volunteering by his also-retired, former psychologist wife, explained to me that many of the Black male clients he saw had multiple children by multiple mothers, which pointed to their lack of responsibility about the children that came from sexual unions he depicted as illicit. “They [Black men] feel like they don’t have to stick around [after their children are born], and that’s a problem.”

According to the director, Nadine, also problematic is the fact that “people don’t get married because they can’t afford it. But this makes it easier to leave when the going gets tough. Plenty of men are okay with fathering these kids, but when it comes to paying for them, they’re nowhere to be found.” According to Nadine,

Women usually have more family concerns, where men are more detached and theoretical about it. Men tend not to be attached to their kids. All of this goes back to a change in sexual mores. There’s a generation of men out there now with kids from multiple relationships, and they’re not necessarily engaged with them. There are plenty of broken relationships here, and relationships that never even got off the ground. Lots of times, these amount to just sexual encounters that never even went anywhere, but they produced a kid. It seems like people want to do something different, but they don’t have the moral or the cultural foundation to do it.

After expressing similar sentiments, Cora, another now-retired African American, female advocate—formerly, an executive at a large financial firm—expressed to me that the way the state structures their social benefits was an important factor to keep in mind, as “men need to be out of the house for the family to draw welfare benefits”—providing another perceived disincentive to marry. This reality, Cora explained, generally resulted in women pushing men out of the house, as most otherwise absentee fathers would look to the mothers of those children “to support them with her welfare benefits.”

Changes in the vision, focus, and practices at *Integrity Intervention* were another important context in which the import of racial identities and racial ideology was brought to the forefront of my analysis. Under the headline “Change Comes to *Integrity Intervention*: A New Direction Improves Client Success Rate!,” *Integrity Intervention*’s annual newsletter detailed the contours of the program shift that occurred during my tenure at the organization:

...The new direction is a full-participant client program that helps clients make a decision about their best long-term courses of action. Not every client is ready for a full-participant partnership, however. For example, clients whose immediate needs take top priority will be directed to other programs. But those who have the desire and the potential to make long-term progress as a full-

participant client will work with one advocate towards stability and self-sufficiency... All advocates have been trained to implement these changes... [*Integrity Intervention's*] resources will be better utilized with this new focused, defined, and deliberate approach, which will also ensure program consistency.

A number of notable elements are included in the above description. First, whereas previously any and all clients were invited to partake in services offered (barring, of course, those obviously intoxicated or engaging in abusive behavior), advocates were now expected to make a distinction between those “ready” for a “full participant partnership,” and those “whose immediate needs take top priority” (who would need to be redirected to other programs). Advocates were now expected to distinguish between those clients with “the desire and potential” for “long-term progress,” as contrasted with clients whose more pressing material needs might prevent them from embarking on the road to change (elsewhere signaled by the language of “personal transformation”). The inclusion of the language of “desire” and “potential” indicated an important evaluative standard for client participation—clients must want change, they must have the capacity to change, and they must demonstrate as much to their volunteer advocate through word and deed.

However, though there were official guidelines (“a defined and deliberate approach”) for making distinctions between clients who were ready for “a full participant partnership” and those who were not, in practice this created a flexible space where advocates operated with a considerable degree of personal discretion. In turn, this discretionary space sometimes stood in contrast with the stated goal of “ensur[ing] program consistency.” As well, the statement about advocates’ training in the new approach was also important. Implementing the changes required a number of very detailed training

sessions, deemed vital for both relatively “new” advocates and for volunteers who had been with the program for some time in order to aid advocates in developing a greater level of “cultural sensitivity” to the realities of life and “learned behaviors” for those in “generational poverty.” Lastly, the language of “stability” and “self-sufficiency” implicitly spoke to the undesirability of the previous program model due to a failure to extricate clients from a perceived cycle of dependency on charity and state resources. Organizational identity, self-definition, and representation for internal and external audiences increasingly involved a move towards a more comprehensive, “life coaching” model emphasizing “self-improvement,” “empowerment,” and “personal accountability.” In general, clients from “generational poverty,” and by association, African American clients, were seen as struggling with the new program requirements to a greater extent. Client aversion to cooperation with the new dictates was explained by Nadine as associated with reactions to

...having a white lady in their face telling them what to do. A lot of them don't realize that the purpose is to build a relationship, and to help them achieve their goals. Generational poverty means that they and their family members sometimes haven't had a lot of positive interactions with white authority figures.

Thereby, taken together, volunteers' desires for and efforts towards establishing the “personal transformation” of clients sometimes worked to reestablish age-old binaries between the deserving/undeserving poor, and associated race, gender, and family stereotypes written into the script of the culture of poverty framework.

Ruby Payne's *Bridges Out of Poverty* texts and curriculum provided an important discursive resource in providers' efforts to rationalize the logic of the program shift.

Originally, Payne's (2003) model was developed to help educators understand the differences between the "majority culture" and the "mindset of poverty" so as to most effectively teach children from such backgrounds. Many of Payne's original writings have been used to develop curricula for training both educators and other professionals working with impoverished populations. Payne's model posits that those living in poverty can best prepare for success by learning the 'rules' by which middle class individuals and institutions function, while simultaneously unlearning "the hidden rules of poverty" (Payne 2003). Materials written by Payne, and others building upon the foundation of her precepts, have become popular among those offering poverty relief programming in the non-profit sector. Two of my four case studies make use of *Bridges* trainings. The director of the single mother mentoring program profiled in Chapter 7 (*Mastering Motherhood*) is a certified *Bridges* trainer, offering for-fee workshops for professionals working with the poor throughout the metro area. Revenue generated from these training sessions is one strategy deployed to keep the organization fiscally viable.

The assumptions that undergird the *Bridges* curriculum are deserving of sustained critical attention, and speak directly to many of the main concerns of the analysis at hand. First, *Bridges* posits fundamental and entrenched cultural differences between the poor and the middle class, which hearkens back to older "culture of poverty" discourses and carries the potential for 'victim-blaming' framings of marginalization. Second, the curriculum contains a number of normative codes that reference race in the context of gender and poverty. At *Integrity Intervention* in particular (and *Mastering Motherhood* as well, though to a comparatively lesser degree), such codes remained implicit in elements of the

programming modeled after the *Bridges* curriculum. As a result, the necessary language for naming and critiquing racial disparities went unarticulated, thereby inhibiting any potential efforts to address systematic racial, as well as socioeconomic, injustice.

The *Bridges* curriculum was frequently cited as providing an especially useful framework for those working with clients from “generational poverty” by members of *Integrity Intervention’s* leadership and volunteer advocates alike. *Bridges* references comprised one of the most telling instances in which race surfaced in a coded fashion, as racial difference was inferred when leaders and volunteers drew on the culture of poverty rhetoric used to explain “cultural” differences that arose when dealing with clients from “generational poverty.” *Bridges* provided a powerful and frequently mentioned reference point in volunteer trainings, in afternoon debriefings on “problem” clients and exceptional/difficult circumstances, and in daily reference to the worldview gap between clients and volunteers. References to the difficulties clients experienced in making appointments and arriving for them on time provides one such example, as well as the practice of understanding clients’ chronic unemployment as a “cultural” incapacity to successfully secure employment in a failing economy. As one advocate explained:

It’s kind of a cultural difference... A lot of our clients, and especially our African American clients, come from backgrounds of generational poverty, which means that they just don’t have the same relationship to time and appointments and following up on employment leads. That kind of thing takes time, and you have to find a way to balance everything and keep up with it. But a lot of these people just have a different time horizon. Instead of thinking about next year, or next month, or even next week, they’re just thinking about getting through the rest of the day and whether or not they’re going to have anything to cook for supper. A lot of this job has meant educating myself about those differences. ... We’re really here to help guide them through that and get them to figure out how to start thinking further ahead.

Redeaux (2011), an educational professional, holds that the *Bridges* curriculum is particularly alluring because it mirrors “common sense” notions that root the causes of

class inequality in their most “convenient” location: the “cultural” distance between the poor and the middle class. She convincingly argues that many of these “common sense” notions about poverty have distinctly racial overtones:

Payne’s work appeals to... assumptions of the poor as promiscuous, young, welfare queens and gangbanging, gun-toting drug dealers. Even as she uses chosen “scenarios” to deemphasize race, Payne reifies and promotes stereotypical perceptions of race and illustrates how class is racialized. ... They, those from poverty, supposedly behave, feel, and think differently than those of us in the “mainstream.”

Redeaux (2011) argues that “culture of poverty” frameworks central to the *Bridges* curriculum serve as a stand-in for understandings about the essential and inborn cultural poverty of racialized others. *Bridges* instructs that poor people of color should be taught to abandon patterns of behavior represented as self-damning if their efforts to escape poverty are to prove successful. Therefore, *Bridges* advocates that poverty professionals must understand such cultural differences for their service provision efforts to be effective.

Leaders and volunteers at *Integrity Intervention* subscribed to Payne’s teaching in *Bridges* as the new gospel of effective social service. Though Payne and *Integrity Intervention*’s volunteer base both claim the *Bridges* framework is indifferent to race, the weight of the history of race in the context of discourses of poverty is unavoidable and undeniable. Ultimately, according to Redeaux, the *Bridges* curriculum superimposes a race-neutral, class-based framework on “the same discourse that has been used to exclude... people of color for centuries” (Redeaux 2011). Indeed, when asked whether Black clients likely had different needs than white clients, I was often told that no, they did not, as “we are all God’s children and have the same needs.” Such rhetorics of

colorblindness were pervasive at *Integrity Intervention*, despite the racial coding implicit in the curriculum.

In addition to implicitly indicting the behaviors of people of color, the *Bridges* curriculum does not lodge a structural critique of the causes of poverty, and instead represents poverty and homelessness as the result of individual differences in behavior and “culture” between the middle class and those from “generational poverty.” Existing research demonstrates that continuing un/underemployment, racial discrimination in all major social institutions, the lack of a living wage, access to health care for many, and an absence of affordable housing, together with other forms of social and structural exclusion, serve to perpetuate the forms of racism, sexism, and classism that fuel the “new homelessness” (Hopper 2002; Snow & Anderson 1993). Redeaux argues that such structural inequalities ensure that: “...as long as this is the case, ‘all the right behavior in the world’ will not eradicate or even ameliorate poverty.” Furthermore, she cautions, “We must be wary of solutions that seem too easy and cause no discomfort to the comfortable” (Redeaux 2011). In line with Redeaux’s insights, the use of the *Bridges* curriculum at *Integrity Intervention* provides just that: an illusory escape from victim-blaming, via subscription to the belief that the individual poor cannot be blamed for “cultural” patterns learned from family and community, passed down through “generational poverty.” Ultimately, *Bridges* offers a solution to poverty that compassionate volunteers can undertake using their cultural expertise as members of the middle-class as their primary resource.

Though Redeaux locates the allure of Payne's *Bridges* curriculum with its resonance with "common sense" notions of the causes of class inequality, I instead emphasize that *Bridges*' popularity lies in the fact that it is easier to engage in its subtle form of victim blaming than it is to assume responsibility for changing problematic social structures. As well, *Integrity Intervention's* *Bridges*-fueled model for the resolution of inequality gives providers access to a discursive framework that enables 'easier' and indirect discussions of racial difference that do not require explicitly citing racial differences or racial inequality. I argue the widespread appeal and use of *Bridges*-inspired frameworks is born less out of a desire to find the least "uncomfortable" solution (though this certainly plays an important role), but more importantly, a lack of access to the discursive resources to understand and subsequently articulate the structural sources of racial inequality. As a result, however, racial differences and racial inequality go largely unnamed. This has important consequences for the environment of service provision, as one cannot critique that which one cannot articulate. Given that African American clients comprise the overwhelming majority of *Integrity Intervention's* client base (77%--see Table 3.1), this reality is especially problematic.

Conclusion: Mechanisms of the Reproduction of Marginalization

At the end of the day, family rhetoric was largely absent at *Integrity Intervention*, and therefore did not inform family practices. One notable exception included Nadine announcing to me, in the context of a conversation about racial disparities in high school graduation rates: "Do you know who these kids' parents are? *Integrity Intervention* clients! Want to know how I think clients can become better parents? By getting

training, and getting better jobs!” However, there were no explicitly stated models for family formation, as family ideas generally went unarticulated in organizational rhetoric, which I trace, in part, to a de-centering of faith through *Integrity Intervention*'s juxtaposition of their organizational identity to ‘other’ more conservative, faith-infused, and “family values”-preoccupied organizations. Nuclear family forms, however, and their associated stereotypes of gender, race, and class, were implicitly privileged in practice. Though organizational rhetorics did not openly stigmatize clients for non-nuclear living arrangements, they were systematically privileged and punished for conforming to moral assumptions associated with traditional gender and familism through differential levels of resource allocation.

Explicitly stated gender rhetoric was present at *Integrity Intervention* only insofar as leadership acknowledged men’s greater need as stemming from a gap in services, which in itself was a progressive frame of reference, generally not present in most other homelessness service institutions which tend to focus on the greater need of women and children. However, leadership and volunteers at *Integrity Intervention* did not necessarily connect their understanding of single men’s greater needs with broader reference points regarding the way cultural schemas of poverty, including standards for “deservingness” and “undeservingness,” are gendered. Due to this gap between rhetoric and practice, “deservingness,” therefore, was often precisely most out of reach for the homeless, as they had to struggle with volunteers’ reproduction of ideologies that represented them as perceived gender ‘failures’ or deserving of additional protection. Ultimately, traditional constructions of gender (manifested not necessarily through androcentrism, but in

polarization and essentialism) and family (via the implicit moral authority of the nuclear unit, despite *Community United's* status as a reconciling congregation) persisted, largely due to a lack of availability of alternative schemas for gender and family.

Ultimately, the implicitly normative status of the nuclear family model at *Integrity Intervention* worked to thwart social critique that might otherwise reference the structural roots of homelessness as stemming from the normative status of the nuclear family. The causes of poverty were instead located within the presumed “generational,” moral deficiency in poor and Black families and the gender failures of their male clients. In due course, providers’ perceptions of clients’ deficits of cultural competence, interpretations of client behavior as self-sabotaging, and estimations of the worldviews of clients as defeatist were then deemed self-perpetuating through learned behaviors associated with “generational poverty.”

At *Integrity Intervention*, silences surrounding family and gender created a space which allowed—indeed, sometimes compelled—volunteers and leadership to ‘fill in the blanks’ when addressing the causes behind the disproportionate number of single African-American men that arrived at the doorstep of the church seeking services. In the absence of substantial structural resources, and very few available cultural schemas which might have served as discursive reservoirs for rhetorical alternatives, leadership and volunteers were left to draw on existing understandings of family, poverty, and race. Powerful discursive constructions regarding the family, originating in worship communities, social service settings, media depictions, and middle class institutions were the major reservoirs from which *Integrity Intervention's* volunteers and leadership drew. This included not

only the implicit desirability of nuclear arrangements, but also colorblindness, recycled culture of poverty arguments, and the associated assumptions about poor and Black families. In particular, *Integrity Intervention*'s practice of drawing heavily on the racially-coded rhetoric of "generational poverty" served to inhibit an articulation and subsequent critique of the structural forces driving racial inequality, forestalling the program's capacity to address problems at their structural roots.

Integrity Intervention's "stewardship" of the poor also sits in firm alignment with religiously liberal traditions. In addition, serving as a "steward" of the poor often implied working *for* the poor as opposed to *with* the poor—the choice of the language of "advocacy" as opposed to "partner" or "ally" highlights this appropriation of voice. Despite organizational self-definition against more conservative and/or Evangelical mission work among the poor, and a disdain for other organizations with "pray-before-you-eat" orientations, *Integrity Intervention* reproduced politically and theologically conservative rhetorics that tied the causes of poverty to individuals as opposed to social structures. I explore this matter in greater depth in a discussion of the wide reach of discursive frames associated with the ideology of "religious neoliberalism" (Hackworth 2012) in the conclusion to the dissertation.

In addition, in the context of the frustrations associated with daily service provision (mainly in the form of the gaping maw between client need and available local resources), front-line volunteers often felt that acknowledging the structural sources of poverty would amount to giving clients "an out," an excuse for past failures, a reason to only give half-hearted attempts in the future, or a rationale for unearned entitlement to

resources. Instead, volunteers deployed pragmatic strategies involving training and grooming clients to identify and lay claim to what little resources were realistically available to them. Therefore, the organization's focus on "self-sufficiency" and "self-reliance" pre-empted understandings of client barriers that might otherwise have referenced larger social structures that perpetuate racial disparities. However, as time and material resources were often short, volunteer advocates found themselves wanting to make the most of what little they did have. For the volunteers, spending time engaged in critiquing "the system" was not viewed as a productive way to alleviate immediate and pervasive crises. Therefore, the project of moral reform refocused the onus of problem-solving squarely back onto the behaviors of the poor.

6. “THEY ARE OURS AT THE END OF THE DAY:” FAMILY, GENDER, RACE, AND NEED INTERPRETATION AT *GRACEFUL GIRLS*

Graceful Girls is a youth mentorship group striving to “increase the self-esteem, self-worth, and self-regulation of young urban women, ages 13-19, through education and mentorship.” The organization was founded five years ago, in February 2008, by an African American woman named Jasmine who is now in her late 30s. In addition to running *Graceful Girls*, Jasmine also works as the primary administrator at a magnet school whose mission is to close the achievement gap for youth of color. This same magnet school donates the space in which *Graceful Girls* hosts weekly programming. Currently, the organization’s programming model includes both a series of volunteer speakers and individual “consultants” assigned to mentor groups of 3-4 girls. There are usually 15-30 girls enrolled in any given year, and at the time of data collection, about 16 young women participated on a regular basis. All mentors and youth were women of color, and nearly all were African American. The majority of the girls lived in either single mother homes or extended family arrangements—some were being raised by grandparents, older siblings, or aunts. In addition, most of the girls came from families that either sat below or uncomfortably close to the poverty line.

The group met weekly on Saturday mornings, and proceeded with the following format: group prayer, “check-ins” with the girls about any significant personal events occurring over the previous week, 1-2 speakers on “hot topics” (including emotional self-regulation, sexual activity and health, career readiness, building healthy relationships, avoiding peer pressure, etc.), “takeaways” from the girls regarding what they’ve learned and how they intend to apply it, and lastly, sharing lunch. Speakers are drawn from local

non-profits, businesses, mental or health care professions, financial planning organizations, or institutions of higher education. Women of color were especially sought out to perform this function. The year's programming culminated in an "awards and fashion show," which included a runway walk in elaborate formalwear, a videotaped statement from each of the girls on their career aspirations, skits that showcased messages from the year's curriculum, and ended with a choreographed dance performance. The fashion show was the organization's largest yearly expense, as dresses were rented, theatre space for the evening was purchased, glossy program books with profiles on each of the girls were printed, and outside performers were hired.

In this chapter, I make three main arguments. First, despite Jasmine's conscious decision to identify the organization as "community-based" (as opposed to faith-based), religious symbolism and content was nevertheless prevalent and influential in organizing daily affairs. Interviews with the leadership at *Graceful Girls* and 'Black flight' critiques present in the post-civil rights era provided a level of insight into why some organizations with explicitly religious content and commitments choose to eschew the moniker "faith-based."

Second, at *Graceful Girls*, family-related practice and rhetoric exhibited a measure of distance from traditional familism. The extended family was valued both in word and deed, which served to de-center the SNAF ("Standard North American Family;" Smith 1993). While marriage remained a valued ideal, such valuation was tempered with a pragmatism that called for the dissolution of heterosexual relationships (both marital and non-marital) in the face of self-compromise. However, this measure of flexibility with

regard to family norms did not extend to corresponding levels of flexibility in the way *Graceful Girls* functioned as a gendered social space. Gender traditionalism was an important organizing device, both in the ways gender was enacted, and in the ways femininity and masculinity were spoken of in the everyday environment. Throughout the formal curriculum and informal conversations, religious rhetoric was interwoven with talk of gendered biological mandates. The import of childrearing and women's responsibility for emotional labor were also central elements of the social construction of gender at *Graceful Girls*. Overall, therefore, traditional representations of femininity and masculinity exhibited a level of disconnection both from idealizations of the nuclear family unit and the valuation of marriage as the proper culmination of relations with the opposite sex. Examining the specific form this decoupling takes is a fruitful avenue for inquiry, given the historically strong discursive and practical bonds between the idealization of nuclear family structures, and the promulgation of androcentric, polarized, and essentialized constructions of masculinity and femininity.¹

Third, poverty prevention efforts at *Graceful Girls* were primarily oriented around strategies for moral reformation. Moral strategies for change were far more prominent than strategies designed to increase the girls' access to material resources, or otherwise change the material circumstances of the girls' lives. Largely, this sprang from the assumption that material change would logically follow from moral reform, as the latter would be rewarded by the achievement of the former. Although material strategies were present, they were not the primary areas in which efforts were focused. Most of the programming and associated plans for the girls involved ideas of "self-empowerment,"

where the onus was on the girls to make the right decisions to prevent hardship in their lives. In part, the rhetoric of “self-empowerment” reflected a lack of resources available to program directors—both material and rhetorical. In the absence of alternative, resonant, and available discourses that might have otherwise highlighted a lack of access to material resources as dictating the texture of hardship in the girls’ lives, *Graceful Girls*’ leadership team instead applied default discourses about the individualistic causes and consequences of poverty. Relatedly, *Graceful Girls*’ lack of organizational material resources played a role in explaining the leadership’s use of individualizing rhetoric. Without funds, mentors were left to focus on the consequences of personal choice. In addition to a lack of funding and available alternative discursive structures, part of *Graceful Girls*’ “self-empowerment”-associated, moralizing approach to poverty prevention stemmed from the program leaders’ desire for the girls to be “good women,” which is, in some ways, an individualist position that can leave out, preclude, or forestall dialogue that might otherwise launch structural critiques.

All three arguments take into account the fact that at *Graceful Girls*, being a “good woman” was inextricably linked to what Hill (2009) refers to as the three revisionist “mandates” of Black womanhood: strength, motherhood, and beauty. Largely since the 1970s, stereotypical images of Black womanhood have been “inverted, valorized, and repackaged as reflecting a distinct set of African-based cultural values” by scholars and activists looking to actively reject and replace negative depictions (2009:736-37). Such work should be understood as an effort to resist one of the most pernicious consequences of racism: “...a set of cultural images for African American women... depicting them as

deficient mothers, sexually promiscuous, and matriarchal” (Hill 2009:734; derived from Collins 1990). As Hill points out, the work of revisionists clusters around three key concepts as they relate to Black womanhood: strength, motherhood, and beauty.²

However, the three mandates offered the young women and the mentors of *Graceful Girls* a double-edged sword, as they carried the potential to represent “...an equally toxic set of images that have important health consequences. ...this cultural construction of Black womanhood merely inverts derogatory stereotypes” (Hill 2009:734, 737). All three mandates were engaged to some degree at *Graceful Girls* in an overlapping and mutually reinforcing fashion. Mentors themselves actively engaged in rewriting cultural scripts for Black femininity regarding strength, childbearing and rearing, and standards for physical attractiveness. Fundamentally oppressive cultural narratives were thereby actively engaged and critiqued, equipping participants with an important set of rhetorical and practical tools for challenging the myths of the dominant culture that create stereotypical and problematic caricatures of Black womanhood. However, *Graceful Girls*’ revision of the aforementioned cultural standards did not come without a price, as they simultaneously reinscribed the worth of female identity as defined through motherhood, which stood in juxtaposition to—or in tension with—the organization’s emphasis on teen pregnancy prevention efforts. Mentors also engaged in redefining what it means to be “beautiful” as a necessary and important task, but their emphasis on such matters simultaneously worked to center practices and standards that tied self-worth to physical appearance (i.e., doing one’s hair and dressing well). Lastly, the unique texture of “strength” at *Graceful Girls* was established through conversations that emphasized

“self-empowerment,” “self-esteem,” and “personal responsibility.” Defining strength in this manner worked to create an environment where admissions of vulnerability were sometimes read as the absence of feminine strength, and also created significant barriers to intimacy and relationship-building between women, leading to a situation where young women sometimes struggled to find adequate and suitable language to describe their personal encounters with sexual and domestic violence. In addition, organizational rhetorics referencing the need for “strength” exhibited a good deal of resonance with the individualistic, meritocratic, and potentially victim-blaming discourse of the post-welfare reform era. Therefore, I argue, despite *Graceful Girls*’ work to create a space where participants could relate their experiences in terms that might renegotiate damaging and limiting stereotypes, the limitations presented by prevailing cultural scripts worked against the best efforts of leaders and mentors.

Race and “Community-based” Organizational Identity

For *Graceful Girls*, and a number of other community-based organizations included in the study, identifying as community-based had less to do with the absence of spiritual orientation, and more to do with the felt responsibility of leadership for their self-defined “community.” At *Graceful Girls*, a good amount of this sense of community responsibility should be understood in the context of the mentors’ own tenuous status as members of the middle class and the girls’ markedly lower socioeconomic status. While gender and racial identity served as a basis for connection between mentors and the girls, the social class distance between them fed into mentors’ invocation of rhetoric that resonated with “Black flight” critiques popular among middle class Black academics,

activists, and community leaders. Furthermore, the mentors' understandings of the unique risks faced by their teen participants was another important element in adults' definitions of their mission and responsibilities. *Graceful Girls'* adults' anxieties about the girls' potential barriers to upward social mobility was generally framed in individualistic terms, and was sometimes coupled with religious symbolism. The mentors' status as women of faith further bolstered their moral authority in dealings with the young women, and informed their understandings of religious commitment as an integral part of being a "strong, Black woman."

"Consultants" were recruited through *Graceful Girls* events, family connections and networking efforts on the part of current leadership, and participants' social ties at school and church. Promotional materials for the organization provided the following job descriptions for volunteer mentors:

We are *every day women* who choose to share our trials and triumphs from *where we are at* in our lives with young ladies *where they are at* in their lives. *We don't put on a mask like we got it all together.* We are transparent to them so that they can see that *YES this life is hard*, but if we can get through it SO CAN YOU! We share with them tools that we currently use to make it through our daily trials and triumphs! (If we were to wait until we got it together we would have to come back from the dead!!!!!!!!!!!!). These babies are ours and our *Consultants* are dedicated... *to sharing breakfast, hot topics, laughter, tears, lunch, as well as, resources, speakers and words of wisdom* with young ladies who just want some conversations on how we as every day women are making it happen!

As is evident from the above excerpt, mentors were encouraged to avoid "...put[ting] on a mask..." which served to place a premium on 'straight talk' with the teens. Such language also emphasized a need for achieving realistic perspective on the challenges young adults face in their contemporary social milieu. *Graceful Girls'* normative conventions regarding appropriate exchanges between teens and their mentors asked that

adults make their own flaws and mistakes evident and visible to encourage honesty and pragmatism in mentor-child relationships.

With the exception of one married mother and one single woman who had not yet had any children (though she expressed a desire to do so), all of the mentors in the organization at the time of data collection were single mothers. Though most were divorced, some were cohabiting with male partners. In addition, extended family living arrangements among the mentors were the rule and not the exception, as many were living under the same roof with parents, adult children, siblings, cousins, and the children of their siblings. Therefore, the family structure of the mentor's lives mirrored that of the participating young women's in many regards. However, there was notable distance in social class status between the mentors and the teens. Nearly all were either middle class or lower middle class, working in positions such as police dispatcher, marketing specialist, social worker, juvenile court officer, human resources officer, and educational administrative assistant. Most described their status and background in the terms of upward social mobility. The girls, on the other hand, nearly all qualified for the reduced and free lunch programs in their schools. Whereas all of the mentors drove their own vehicles (which seemed to be in reliable enough condition), many of the girls required rides or used public transportation to get to the weekend sessions. References to the youth as "at-risk" and/or "urban" were in documentation produced for outside audiences, but unsurprisingly, were never used internally.

One mentor, Shana, is the young mother of two boys and works as a hairdresser at an upscale salon. She also attends night classes in her efforts to secure a degree in criminal

justice, and is married to a man who works as a teacher's aide in the public schools. She gave an especially telling response when I asked her about why she decided to volunteer with *Graceful Girls*:

Shana: I'm doing alright for myself right now. [My husband] brings home a good paycheck, and I'm getting paid alright, too. ...I always got gas in my car, and there's always food in the fridge. But it wasn't like that for me coming up. It got pretty rugged sometimes. I know what some of these girls is dealing with, and it ain't easy not having money for clothes or shoes, or the things you need for school, or worrying if your Mama's gonna be able to make rent. I'm doing okay right now, and you know what? That means I need to be doing something for somebody else. Because if I'm not, I'm not giving back. I'm *not* selfish... It's like *I'm not* turning my back. I promised myself if things turned out for me, I would *never* do that. These girls need us, and if we're not there for them, we're doing something wrong. It's like forgetting where you came from. You need to pay it forward. ...Things used to be different. Like when I was coming up, and when my parents was coming up, if you did something bad you knew you wasn't supposed to do, *anyone* in the neighborhood would give you a whoopin' [laughs]. There was always somebody watching you, and looking out for you. ...And doctors lived right down the street from poor folks. They lived on the same block sometimes! People looked out for each other and stuck together because it was a community. Everyone looked out for everyone else. And we just don't have that anymore.

DDF: What changed? I mean, what do you think is different now? Why aren't things like that anymore?

Shana: Well, people get to making money and they decide they want to move out, move away, go somewhere safer and get themselves a nice, big house outside of the city. In the suburbs. So they just up and leave. Lots of those people, they don't look back. And that's just messed up. It takes a village to raise a child, and we just don't have that village mentality anymore. We're not living that, and we need to get it right. Now it just like, 'it's all about me. Me, me, me, and my family. I'm not about to stop and help you.'

The above exchange with Shana especially highlights implicit reference to 'Black flight' social critiques, which posit class segregation as a major cause of the problems facing Black communities. Wilson (1980) first popularized this perspective in his description of the "social isolation" of the "truly disadvantaged" (1987), indicting the Black middle class for abandoning the "inner city." Consistent with the narrative of Black flight, Shana's description puts rising individualism at the root of the problem. She lays the blame for the perceived fracturing of the Black community at the feet of Black middle class individuals and their perceived abandonment of collective responsibility.

Therefore, she argues, because of her class privilege, and because other have stepped away, she has a social responsibility to help remedy the problem—especially because of her modest origins.

Jasmine also referenced community needs and community responsibilities in a public statement describing the rationale for the program:

For some reason our generation believes that you have to 'make time' to give back when in reality giving back is something that we *must* make time for. The babies that we witness being loud on the bus & disrespectful at the mall, the ones cussing and being 'ghetto' as they walk down the streets and... the utmost disheartening, the young lady pushing the stroller with a baby on her hip are ours essentially... our cousins' kids, our friends' kids, our sisters' and brothers' kids or the 'I grew up with their Daddy' kids. ...they are ours at the end of the day.

Jasmine's statement highlights the leadership's felt responsibility for ensuring the girls do not engage in behaviors that will mark them as "ghetto" in public places such as at the mall and on the bus: "being loud," "disrespectful," or "cussing." Taken together, her description of the behaviors she finds problematic in the next generation culminate in the "utmost disheartening" outcome for a young woman: teenage pregnancy. Implicit in her words is the notion that if members of her "generation" do not step up and assume responsibility for youth, these teens may end up lacking and in a difficult position.

In addition, *Graceful Girls*' self-identification as "community-based" has much to do with the leadership's orientation to religious labels and their consequences. Although the program explicitly identifies as "community-based" as opposed to "faith-based," spirituality is very much a part of the daily environment at *Graceful Girls*. The chosen theme for the 2011-2012 academic year was "standing on faith," the "guiding scripture" for the organization was prominently displayed on the website and in the majority of printed documentation, each weekly meeting opened with an impassioned prayer, and

personal religious understandings and journeys were a frequent topic of discussion in both casual conversation and more formal programming.

However, despite the presence of explicitly religious organizational symbolism and language, Jasmine made a conscious choice *not* to identify her organization as “faith-based” because doing so might have meant “we exclude more than we include.” She went on to explain, “We’re not about putting it in people’s faces. If they like what they see, they will want it for themselves, and will seek it out themselves.” She is also highly critical of what she sees as the profit-motivated logic and moral hypocrisy of self-defined faith-based organizations. She elaborated:

Some of the folks out there in the so-called “faith-based” community aren’t really coming from a place of faith at all. They say that’s what they about, but then you look at what they doing, it’s like... whaaaat? They’re not always putting the Lord at the center, and they get... they get distracted, I think. It’s easy to hide behind the church, or to say you’re using the church as your foundation. But that’s just it, you’re *using* it. You feel me? Sometimes, they just out there for themselves... you know, to make themselves look good. Now, that’s not everybody. Some of them really care about the community, and about our kids, and they’re out there to make a difference and do something positive in someone’s life. But some of them just see dollar signs, like, ‘cha-ching!’ ...or they want to go around telling everyone else how to live without taking a good look at themselves. ...I didn’t want nothing to do with that. I wanted us to get as far away from that as possible.

Jasmine’s apprehension about religious identification and distaste for those who “go around telling everyone else how to live,” gains an additional layer of meaning in the context of Sullivan’s (2011) findings on the ways single motherhood and race interact to influence church attendance for low-income women. Sullivan cites a report (Franklin 2004) detailing the “conspiracy of silence” African American churches exhibit in dealing with the gaps between members’ behavior (such as premarital sex and cohabitation) and theological teachings. Although Sullivan argues that Black women were the least likely among her single mother respondents to encounter stigma for their ‘lifestyle,’ they were

simultaneously more likely to experience feelings of sinfulness for bearing children outside the bonds of marriage. To provide further context, Sullivan cites a practice in Black churches where single mothers (and not fathers) are asked to deliver a public apology before the congregation for bearing children out of wedlock. Edgell & Docka's (2007) profile of an African Methodist Episcopal (AME) church found that despite the presence, visibility, and active contributions of a number of single mother families, the family arrangements of such single mothers continued to encounter stigma from leadership and members of the worship community. In the end, Jasmine explained, disassociating organizational identity from religious identity was her way of "mak[ing] sure we're doing the right things for the right reasons."

As I came to find in my interviews with program directors across the metro area, aversion among community-based organizational leaders to the "faith-based" label was not unique. Many other authorities cited concerns about perceived hypocrisy in their rationale for self-identification as "community-based," despite strong religious affiliations, symbols, and beliefs. Such apprehensions were expressed by a co-founding Baptist pastor I interviewed at another after-school college prep and tutoring program for predominantly African American youth—despite the fact that the organization was housed in a Black church. Another African American single mother running a tutoring program for athletes in the public schools had a similar orientation to the "faith-based" label, despite beginning each morning session with an optional prayer. In addition to concerns about being perceived as hypocritical by the broader community, Jasmine and the leaders of the two aforementioned programs also mentioned a fear that they might be

perceived as hypocritical by potential participants, which was problematic given their desire to appeal to an audience that might otherwise be put off by the “faith-based” label. Indeed, even leaders of organizations identifying as “faith-based” expressed grappling with the potential stigma associated with the term. Notably, concerns about being seen as “hypocritical” were sometimes also coupled with a need to turn to more secularly-oriented sources of funding and other resources.

As mentioned earlier, Jasmine’s misgivings about the “faith-based” label did not translate to an absence of religious language and practices. Given the strong African-American presence and prevalence of religious expression at *Graceful Girls*, the incorporation of many elements of the Black Church tradition is perhaps unsurprising. The majority of participants frequently talked about community service as an integral part of their faith, maintained an active personal relationship with God, discussed what it meant to be “saved” and “accept Jesus Christ as your savior,” and referred to their efforts to carry out God’s intentions for their lives. For many in the organization (most often the adults), racial identity was inextricably linked to religious identity.

When asked about the faith-based components of the programming, despite *Graceful Girls*’ “community-based” identification, Jasmine reflected:

That’s not just something I can leave behind as a Black woman. It’s part of my identity, who I am, and who we are, as a community. To leave that part out would mean leaving a piece of me, and a piece of us, at the door. I’m just not willing to do that. ...That’s what I grew up with, and it was important for a lot of us coming up. I don’t know how to explain it... It’s like, it’s almost like it goes without saying when you’re a Black woman from a good family. I’m not gonna check that at the door.

Similar language was present in my interviews with other mentors. Therefore, at *Graceful Girls*, faith and worship were inextricably linked to the “strength mandate,

comprising an important part of what it meant to respondents to be a “strong, Black woman.”

Further illustrative examples came from daily practices in session as well. Many of the mentors’ and the girls’ prayers involved requests to God for strength in dealing with life’s challenges. Part of the program for the year’s end fashion show for the 2011-2012 school year involved the girls addressing the audience with a personal answer to the question, “What does it mean to you to be standing on faith?” During one of the rehearsals for the fashion show, the teens struggled with scripting their answers to this question. The mentors therefore determined that providing clarifying models might be instructive. One of the mentors decided it would be helpful for her to answer the question in the context of her own perspective. She explained:

I’m standing on faith because it means that I know that whatever I decide to do, God has got me. He’s holding me in his hands. ...When things get rough, and I feel like I don’t know what to do, or I just don’t feel strong enough to do the right thing, I call on Father God. He picks me up when I’m down and he guides me. I pray for strength, and my prayers are always answered. It might not always be the answer I *want* [laughs], or what I wanna hear, but those prayers get answered. God will always hear you, even when you think he’s not listening. ...As long as I have God in my life, I know I’ll be strong enough to roll with it. Y’all should never forget that. A strong woman will *always look to God*.

Conversations such as these established prayer and one’s relationship with God as the appropriate place for a “strong woman” to turn for strength in times of vulnerability, and not necessarily to community resources or relationships with other women.

Tellingly, while there was much discussion about statistics on domestic abuse, and what the girls should do to avoid situations where they might find themselves vulnerable to sexual violence or “becoming a statistic” (further exemplars are provided in the next section of the chapter), there was a dearth of conversation that cited specific incidents of

experience with such trauma. It is important to note that personal tales of sexual abuse were not completely absent—the one instance I observed of a young woman sharing such an experience was well-received in a supportive environment by both adults and peers. Again, however, this was the one exception.

Hill (2009) argues that the prescriptions of the strength mandate dictate that ‘strong, Black women’ should be able to “‘go it alone’ without others, a notion that fosters silence and social isolation among those who feel they are ‘less than a woman’ if they show signs of weakness and vulnerability” (738). My findings at *Graceful Girls* add another layer of nuance to Hill’s framework—specifically, that the association between “good” Black womanhood and “strong” religious commitments” dictates that the proper place to lay down one’s burdens is in conversation with God—perhaps to the exclusion of alternative, female networks of peer support. Certainly, there is a level of stigma within the broader culture surrounding victimization. However, associating experiences of abuse and violence with personal indiscretions of judgment, and establishing prayer as the primary and preferable reservoir for drawing the power to cope, may have contributed to a collective reluctance to address such matters beyond the level of abstraction.

In addition, *Graceful Girls*’ faith-related concerns, especially as they related to individual and communal identity, were all the more resonant in the context of the historical role of the Black church in civil rights, community-building, and family-affirming efforts in the African-American community in the United States (Lincoln & Mamiya 1990). The historical, dialectic relationship between family and faith for African-Americans in community-building efforts was a recurring theme in my interviews with Black leaders

from both faith-based and community-based organizations. Despite the strength of religious frames of reference, however, many of my respondents at *Graceful Girls* voiced strong religious commitments in the absence of official membership to a worship community. Though they would accept invitations from friends to attend church, and mentioned going occasionally for special events and holidays, many mentors did not regularly attend worship services at any given congregation. Such patterns were consistent with Sullivan's (2011) findings of low formal religious participation among single mothers, despite their high levels of personal religious commitment.¹

Ultimately, Jasmine's claiming "they are ours at the end of the day" highlighted felt responsibility for grooming and protecting the youth of the leadership team's self-defined community, reinforced the mentors' sense of social responsibility, and signaled moral authority claimed on the basis of the mentors' status as professionals and women of faith. The boundaries of "community" at *Graceful Girls* were defined, in part, by leaders' notions of the responsibilities they felt followed from their social location and understandings of themselves as strong women of faith, which was further informed by their perception of the barriers the girls faced to upward social mobility. At *Graceful Girls*, identifying as "community-based" signaled a code of race, class, and responsibility. Despite the mentors' concerns about the girls' prospects for upwards social mobility, however, *Graceful Girls*' lack of available, sufficient, and consistent assets left the adults few other resources for action beyond their moral authority.

In the end, the mentors' lack of resources beyond the symbolic points to one of the fundamentally problematic foundations of the faith-based initiative. The fact that

Graceful Girls' survival depends on the commitment of women already pressed for time and resources reveals the bitter irony of positioning such work as a legitimate alternative to welfare state safety nets.

Gender & Family in Rhetoric & Practice

Given the dominant culture's normative constructions of ideal femininity, historically coded white and middle class⁴, and the notable distance between nuclear family ideals and the family lives of mentors and mentees, I expected to find affirmation of alternatives to both traditional familism *and* traditional gender at *Graceful Girls*. However, my observations and interviews revealed considerably more flexibility in family schemas than in social constructions of gender. In particular, the privileged status that childbearing and childrearing conferred at *Graceful Girls* [Hill's (2009) "motherhood mandate"] fed into a pattern where gender was performed and spoken of in more traditional terms. As well, *Graceful Girls*' language and practices primarily referred to female identity in terms that referenced gender polarization and biological essentialism, which was further reaffirmed via appeal to biblical authority. Much of the aforementioned gender polarization and essentialism occurred in the context of discussions of heterosexual relations between men and women, and some occurred in the context of conversations about the division of household labor within families.

At *Graceful Girls*, one of the primary contexts in which family and gender ideals came to the forefront was in conversations about female reproduction and femininity. The most notable exemplars come from the "Celebration of Womanhood" sessions, which were

designed primarily to discuss the onset of menstruation. One life coach, a nurse

practitioner, began the Celebration of Womanhood session by explaining:

Your body is now the body of a woman. Which means you can do what? Yes, that's right, you can make a baby. Which is what the Lord made you to do! ...This is what God put us on the Earth to do, and only women can do it. Now, think about the power of that! It takes a man to have a baby, but only women can actually give birth. There's an amazing amount of power in that! ...Have y'all ever actually read what the Lord has to say about this in the Bible, in Genesis? He tells us to be fruitful and multiply. Women were created to populate the earth. ...Getting your monthly means that you are becoming a woman. You might not be grown, but this is a huge step, and something we should celebrate. Now there's some knowledge you need that comes along with that, and that's what we're here for today.

This event involved a series of speakers on matters pertaining to female reproductive health, including the use of birth control and prophylactics to prevent STD contraction, the physical mechanics of the female reproductive cycle, and the emotional investment and vulnerabilities involved with the onset of sexual activity. The session ended with invited parents and mentors making statements to the girls about what type of woman they thought each was on the path to becoming (adjectives such as "kind," "loving," "compassionate," and "sweet" were used to describe the girls' personal growth and the adults' visions for their future trajectory). The reality of their biological transition from youth to adulthood was defined in the context of menstrual capacity, and was then juxtaposed against a listing of each young woman's accomplishments over the last year. In keeping with the theme of "celebration," the girls were presented with a brightly colored gift bag. Inside, there was a book explaining the physiological process of menstruation, and a small zippered cosmetic bag that contained sanitary napkins. Again, throughout the course of this session, leadership frequently expressed that childbearing and childrearing are what define a woman.

Normative and valued female identity was thereby directly tied to biological, reproductive capacities, even when coupled with teen pregnancy prevention efforts. In this fashion, the girls received a somewhat contradictory message regarding motherhood: the capacity to bear children was a marker of adulthood, and something of a rite of passage into womanhood. Despite the status motherhood could and does confer, however, pregnancy should be avoided until adulthood, after one has had the chance to experience sufficient personal emotional growth and material self-sufficiency. In other words, the underlying logic of the message was somewhat circular: the capacity to bear children should not be exercised until one has fully reached adulthood, but was also implicitly framed as a status-conferring rite of passage.

The Celebration of Womanhood occurred relatively early in the school year. In subsequent sessions, discussions about the import of the young women having conversations with their parents about contraception, role-playing in order to develop strategies for demanding condom use from sexual partners, and demonstrations on how to properly use prophylactics were juxtaposed against the representation of motherhood as the defining moment of adulthood, and the fulfillment of religious mandates for female identity.

The gender-based dictates of biology also surfaced in nearly weekly statements about the innately “nurturing” and “emotional” proclivities of women, and was contrasted with the lesser emotional tendencies of men. In the words of one mentor, men “aren’t made all emotional.” During a session on “relationships,” she explained to the girls:

There are some things you just can't talk to your dude about. You need to go to your girlfriends about that stuff. ...Guys just don't care about the same things that girls do. You can't go to him all, "I can't believe my momma said that," or, "my sister was actin' crazy today," because he's just going to be confused, or he's not gonna wanna hear it. ...They just aren't wired that way... it's not in their programming. A good guy will sit and listen to you, but it's just hard for them to understand, sometimes. So if you go to him with something like that, and you're expecting to get a reaction out of him, you're just going to be disappointed. You shouldn't expect your man to do that. ...Guys don't feel, they just *do*. My man is a good man, but when he comes home from work, sometimes I know if I want to talk about my day, I just gotta find someone else.

Overall, the content of this mentor's statements painted a picture where any woman who seeks such "emotional" support from her spouse or partner is asking a man to deviate from his biological and God-intended purpose. Therefore, in order to avoid disappointment, and to make a relationship "work," the girls were instructed that they should instead draw on other available resources. Such conversations worked to reinscribe essential notions of difference between the genders: women like to "talk about [their] day" and their "feelings," whereas men go to work and come home tired.

The "strength mandate" of Black womanhood was further redefined to include developing the capacity to allow oneself to be cared for. While addressing the topic of women's earnings, one life coach explained:

Just 'cause your paycheck is bigger than his doesn't mean you don't still need him, that's he's not still at the head of the household. ...He shouldn't be pushing you around, but you shouldn't be pushing something like that in his face. No man wants to come home to that—men have egos, you know? They want to be able to take care of you, and sometimes, you need to be strong enough to let them do that. ...Just 'cause you get paid more doesn't mean that you stop being a woman and he stops being a man.

The above passage highlights *Graceful Girls'* pointed emphasis on the ways women's biological capacities for nurturance provided skills applicable in other areas of life—especially in relations with the opposite sex. The girls were frequently reminded that they *did* need *their* men, they should be conscious and wary of "damaging their [men's] egos," they should try their best to maintain a supportive attitude in the face of the

challenges “their” men were likely to face (such as incarceration, victimization, and unemployment), and despite these challenges, they should always defer to their men in making major decisions that affect family life instead of deciding to “just do your own thing.”

Such instruction was usually delivered in the context of workshops that were designed to instruct the young women on how to work towards “healthy relationships” and identify “unhealthy relationships.” Mentors emphasized that despite the value in maintaining ongoing monogamous heterosexual relationships with men, one should always check the status of one’s relationship, as such arrangements should necessarily be exited in the event that they become “unhealthy.” Primary reasons for both marital and non-marital relationship exit ranged from physical violence, to sexual infidelity, to emotionally controlling behaviors, to simply being trapped with a man lacking in drive, ambition, and the capacity to foster such qualities in his partner. The girls were consistently reminded by the mentors to “never change who you are for a man” and to be sure not to “lose yourself in a relationship, because it can always end, and then you will be alone.” In the words of one mentor: “...men come and go. But your family, and your real good friends... they’re in it for life.”

At one particular overnight event (referred to as a “retreat,” but seemingly more like an all-night “lock-in”), Jasmine invited one of the men from the board of directors to speak to the young ladies about “what goes on in the minds of our young men.” Keith, a middle-aged, remarried man with four children, works as a bus driver when not teaching contemporary dance classes or giving his time in community service. He began by

explaining to the girls that he would be talking about “thinking you’re in control when you really don’t have a clue.”

In reality, Keith explained, God holds the reins to the direction of our lives. He told the girls he grew up on Chicago’s south side through the early 80s, right when hip-hop was starting to get big. Keith then proceeded to elaborate on the things that occupied his own teenage mind: “Sex, basketball... sex, getting a new hat... sex, clothing... sex, learning how to break-dance... sex, and then some more sex!” The girls looked on with astonished faces when he explained that such young male sexual motives begin as early as eight—one can find evidence in what every young male toddler engages in when left to explore himself in the bathtub. Therefore, Keith cautioned them, young women must always be vigilant and never put themselves “in compromising positions.” Such positions, he detailed, included becoming intoxicated, dressing provocatively, “hanging out with the wrong crowd,” and allowing oneself to be led away by strange men.

The young women’s clothing choices were represented as an especially important part of making personal decisions to secure their “self-esteem” and ultimately, their physical safety:

You need to have more self-esteem than that to dress that way and let your body hang out in public. Because only certain kinds of men are going to want that. Men will take it from you, but they won’t stick around afterwards.

Such situations are recipes for sexual assault, he explained, and can and should be avoided. In addition, Keith reminded the girls, sex is only intended for two purposes: marriage and procreation. Anything outside of that is against God’s will and therefore

problematic. Some of the female mentors interjected to offer their opinions that one must realistically remember that teenage sex does happen, because girls crave affection, boys crave sex, and “hormones make it feel good for both of them.” So, although sexual encounters between boys and girls were described with biologically and biblically ordained referents, female pleasure-seeking was also acknowledged by the mentors as legitimate and “natural.”

However, despite this progressive affirmation of female sexual desire, the young women were continually cautioned against being tricked by their young male “friends” into sexual circumstances. In one mentor’s words, “you may think he’s your friend, but he’s all about getting his hand in that cookie jar!” Therefore, although all of the adults agreed that they would prefer the young ladies wait for their first sexual encounter until they are married, they likely would not do so, and should instead seek out and use protection to avoid STDs and pregnancy. ‘Boys will be boys,’ but also ‘girls will be girls.’

Unfortunately in this picture, young masculine heterosexuality was depicted as seeking out sex with an almost depraved and predatory compulsion, young female sexuality was depicted as the potential prey, and both roles were seen as informed by biology and therefore part of the “natural” order of things.

Although femininity was defined through more traditional referents such as essential biological difference, female responsibility for emotional labor, and women’s more emotional proclivities, traditional nuclear familism was not the central reference point for idealized family life. For example, family-talk affirming the practice of social versus

biological parenting surfaced when mentors frequently cited the folk proverb, usually believed to be African in origin, which holds “it takes a village to raise a child.”

Furthermore, both the adult leaders and the young women spoke of marriage as an optional component of family life.⁵ Participants’ orientation to marriage as optional, and their fundamental ambivalence about marriage, is best illustrated through reference to a significant portion of the content of the year’s end fashion show. A spoken word performance, given mid-way through the event, involved each teen reading aloud a portion of a collectively written poem. One line read: “Where are we going? To marriage and children... maybe.”

Consistently depicting marriage as an optional component of family life worked to directly challenge the SNAF. However, this did not mean that marriage was devalued at *Graceful Girls*. Indeed, there many occasions where the opposite was the case. As well, nuclear family arrangements were occasionally affirmed through discussions of what it takes to have a successful marriage, and how to treat a husband. By implication, then, marriages sometimes failed because women failed to defer to their husband’s authority. Indeed, women who chose to never marry were occasionally spoken of in disparaging terms. One mentor explained:

Some females be acting like they got it all together and they don’t need a man, but you know what? Women and men were meant to be together. They need each other. It is hard to make it alone in this world. And kids need to have their dads around. Especially boys. You cannot raise a boy up right without his daddy. His daddy needs to be somewhere in the picture, spending time with him somehow.

In this fashion, the two genders were represented as complementary, as women and men are not only “meant to be together,” they also “need each other.” Women who decide

otherwise were represented as somehow ‘unnatural,’ problematic, and fundamentally mistaken about their own needs and the needs of their children. As the majority of mentors were divorced, they were therefore not included in the category of women who act like they “don’t need a man.” They had tried marriage, things didn’t work out, and they generally did not address such matters. The occasional impossibility and undesirability of marriage was a reality to be acknowledged, grappled with, and met without stigma in more general, or implicit, terms.

Narratives about ideal marriage and families in interviews, however, rarely extended beyond a stated desire for “love” and “open communication.” Similar to patterns in my other field sites, it was very hard for me to move beyond superficial descriptions of marital and family life with my respondents. Ethnographic observations made during sessions and events therefore afforded me a much more complex view of messages regarding gender and family.

Overall, the women and young women of *Graceful Girls* were profoundly ambivalent about the role of marriage in their lives; a reality I argue was fundamentally informed by a pragmatism grounded in life experience. Participating youth echoed such sentiments. Skepticism about marriage, however, did not extend to skepticism about motherhood.¹ Mothering was framed as the most important role women fulfill, discussed in terms of a gendered division of labor (men should provide and women should nurture), defined on the basis of complementarity and the resulting ‘naturalness’ of male headship, and referenced in defined social roles extending from biology (women are especially well-

suited for caring for children—and for men—because of their innately “emotional” tendencies).

During another weekend session, the girls were asked to envision their future selves, ten years down the road, in order to determine what kind of career training they would need and how they would budget their future income. At the outset, the girls were asked whether they would be “married with children.” Most of the girls mentioned their desire for kids, saying, “I’ll have a daughter,” or “I want two—a girl and a boy.” All of the girls except for one stated that they wanted children, and the one girl who did not was met with quizzical glances from her peers. However, the girls were less certain about marriage, and most were only willing to commit to predicting they would be “in a relationship.” One young woman explained that she would be a “heart doctor for little kids,” and her boyfriend would be a lawyer. Because they would both be busy with their careers, however, she explained that they would only get together on the weekend, and she would be living in an apartment with one or two of her children. When one of the mentors asked, “Aren’t you going to get married?,” the girl answered, “I got my own stuff to do first. I’ll worry about me first before I worry about *that*.” Such responses were met with laughter and knowing nods from the leadership.

Ultimately, *Graceful Girls*’ revisionist inversion of problematic cultural stereotypes placed participants at the center of a double-bind. On the one hand, the cherished and esteemed status attributed to motherhood served to counter constructions of Black motherhood as pathological or neglectful, offering a valuable and life-affirming counter-narrative. On the other hand, the value attributed to motherhood was tied to feminine

biological capacity, which was assumedly associated with a host of ‘natural’ differences between the sexes. Furthermore, the unique texture of *Graceful Girls*’ valorization of motherhood also invoked heteronormative ideals. Therefore, motherhood was coupled with a social construction of gender that reinscribed some level of the three “lenses of gender” that work to reproduce sexism: androcentrism, polarization, and essentialism (Bem 1993).

Available cultural schemas of family and gender rendered articulation, critique, or resistance to sexism or representations of aspects of traditional familism a difficult prospect indeed. Therefore, while placing motherhood as a central value afforded the young women an important discursive resource in countering negative cultural representations of Black womanhood, doing so also created problematic limitations. Overall, *Graceful Girls*’ premium on motherhood gave with one hand, and took away with the other.

Individualism and “Self-Empowerment”

Graceful Girls’ “strategic plan” for the 2012-2013 academic year details the organization’s programming as designed to address the following “societal symptoms:” “...1) families in crisis, 2) crime involving more girls, 3) more girls using drugs, 4) self-abuse & drug abuse, 5) rampant promiscuity and 6) truancy/high drop out rates.” One portion of the guiding mission states that their

goal is to educate and mentor young ladies on how to maneuver through dangerous cycles of “Teen Pregnancy and Sexually Transmitted Diseases” (STD’s) while developing healthy habits of academia, emotional, social and fiscal responsibility. Our mission is to “Motivate One Young Lady at a Time”.

The landscape of potential risk for participating young women was reminiscent of a mine-field. Personal risk was signaled by repeated in-session references to “living a life of the flesh.” This phrase was used as disparaging shorthand for highly personalized, individual moral failings and indulging this-worldly pleasures such as sex, alcohol, drugs, and base emotional impulses. Potential disasters to be avoided also included peer pressure, sexual predation, and domestic violence. Generally, risks were located “on the street,” at parties, and in unsupervised friends’ homes. School, church, and home were located in juxtaposition to these risky places. Safety risks were represented by the leadership as best avoided through personal reflection, exercising self-discipline, and placing oneself in safe spaces—all of which required the conscious cultivation of ‘strength.’ The girls were frequently warned against “becoming a statistic” or repeating the often-cited cycle of “babies having babies.” Concurrently, solutions were individualized as well, as demonstrated by the organization’s commitment to “motivate one young lady at a time.”

I argue that invocations of the “strength mandate” at *Graceful Girls* also resonated with individualizing and moralizing representations of marginalization pervasive in the post-welfare reform, post-civil rights era. Therefore, *Graceful Girls* offered young women a double-edged sword. On the one hand, the organization’s representation of what it means to be a strong woman of color afforded them a resource to draw on when looking to counter negative cultural images of Black womanhood. Furthermore, *Graceful Girls*’ ability to provide a forum for youth to discuss the challenges encountered in daily life, have their self-worth reaffirmed, and receive emotional (and occasionally material)

resources from loving adults beyond those in their immediate families is a noteworthy achievement, especially given the time and resource limitations the organization faced. On the other hand, traditional representations of gender (built on a platform of biologism, gender polarization, and religious legitimacy) left many aspects of entrenched sexism unchallenged, and limited access to cultural schemas of gender that might otherwise have equipped members of the organizations to name instances of sexism as such and lodge critiques.

One specific group conversation about double-standards for sexual activity was especially telling. The session began with a conversation about “self-esteem” and making good choices as to whether or not one should engage in sexual activity (and with whom). One of the young women spoke up to relate to the group that when a rumor got around that she was sleeping with two boys at once, despite being in a long-term monogamous relationship, an especially ironic fact became clear to her:

Dudes can sleep around all they want, and people think it’s cool. He’s a ‘playa,’ and his friends think he all that. But if a girl starts to do something like that, she a slut. They don’t call her a ‘playa...’ Or if they do, it’s not a good thing! People think that means she be like... sneaky. What’s up with that? What the hell *is that?*

Everyone in the room agreed that such double-standards were problematic. From there, the mentors focused on emphasizing to the girls that *no one* should be sleeping around, but that girls and boys have different reasons for doing so, and therefore, there are different consequences. Girls do it because they want attention or are seeking affection: “Maybe they have daddy issues.” But for women, being “promiscuous” will always get you the wrong kind of attention. Boys, on the other hand, have different problems to deal with. Because they are driven by a nearly uncontrollable sex drive, they have the

potential to end up in situations where they can be manipulated by disingenuous women. They have to deal with the reality that “their woman” might be sleeping around on them, or just out for their money, or “straight up crazy.” The message became that girls should not allow their innate desire for love and affection to compromise their self-esteem and capacity for sound decision-making. Boys, on the other hand, would do well to avoid allowing their sexual appetites to compromise their judgment. Ultimately, what might have been a point of entry for the young women to talk about the impact of sexism in their daily lives instead turned into an entirely different conversation. Instead of discussing the young woman’s concerns about systematic differences in the ways the girls and their peers experience sexuality on the basis of gender, such gender differences went unchallenged in the group, and problematic notions of essential differences between the sexes were reinforced.

Ultimately, sexism and racism were generally not explicitly named at *Graceful Girls*. In fact, there was a good amount of stigma surrounding the mention of racial stereotype as a potential barrier to personal success. One workshop led by a local, powerful female civil rights attorney concluded with her asking the girls what sometimes gets in the way of their efforts to achieve their goals. One of the young women spoke up to explain:

...some people get to thinking that just because I’m Black and I’m young I should be pregnant already. They don’t see that I have straight As on my report card, and that I’m applying to good colleges. They don’t know I’m a writer, or that I want to be a psychologist. Sometimes I feel like people want to see me do something else with my life. Something *easier*, or something more *practical*, and I think it’s because of who I am. Ooooh, that gets just gets frustrating sometimes! I get so angry!

At that point, the speaker became visibly irritated, and asked the young woman:

What? Well, wait a minute... Are you sure that’s not just what you’re expecting people to think? Is that what you think people are thinking? Listen, you can be your own worst enemy. What *you*

think of yourself is so much more important! This sounds like it might be a self-esteem problem. Are you sure that's not just a voice inside your head? Because if that's what's happening, you need to learn to stop now.

Not all conversations between mentors and the young women were nearly as dismissive of their perceptions of negative stereotypes as the above example. However, it was generally accepted that most negative messages came from within, and all could be surmounted through a change in perspective and drawing on personal strength.

During one particular meeting, a teen previously known for her “bad attitude,” was held up to the group as an exemplar of personal transformation after a promising report card. According to her mentor, the girl had found “an inner peace” by taking “personal responsibility” for poor choices, and learning how to better regulate her emotions “in the heat of the moment.” Another mentor interjected to relate how “getting to know Jesus on a personal level,” and leaving behind a “life of the flesh” helped her find a similar calm. Over the course of the year, most stories of personal transformation followed a similar formula.

Many meetings revolved around identifying the troubles the girls face in their daily lives, which were identified by asking the girls pointed questions about their experiences in group discussion. Mentors then provided alternative ways of perceiving and responding to problems. The format of most meetings involved adult (and sometimes youth) testimonials of what I refer to as *sin and redemption*. Speakers would frequently delineate experiences with “living a life of the flesh” or having misplaced priorities. These biblically-inspired narratives sometimes involved a perceived lack of self-control in encounters with a handful of identified “risks.” Such experiences were to be overcome

through an examination of individual perspective and reevaluation of personal tendencies. Therefore, growth often required realizing one is ultimately responsible for one's own destiny. Demons such as absent daddies, strict mothers, philandering partners, negative friends, "the man," or "white folks" were not to be blamed.

One vivid example of *sin and redemption* came from a visit paid by a "career mentor." Alisha, a middle-aged Black woman with a reserved and stern demeanor, arrived in a neatly pressed grey suit. When explaining her career trajectory as a debt collector, Alisha related that she had to train for another career upon her release from prison. She could not renew her certified nursing assistant licensure with a felony conviction. The girls immediately wanted to know what she had done to get her prison sentence. Alisha related that when she found out her husband was cheating on her with another woman, she decided to find the woman's apartment, douse the front door with gasoline, and light it on fire. She was in such a rage that she did not consider the safety of the other people living in the building, which led to both an arson charge, and a felony charge of arson endangering persons. Though the fire was quickly brought under control and no one was harmed, she was given the maximum sentence. Though her lawyer felt this outcome was unlikely, she now faced a considerably lengthy time in prison. The girls' attention next shifted to the matter of Alisha's experience in prison: How did she cope while "locked up?" Alisha explained:

It took me a long time being angry. I had to stop blaming other people for my problems. I wasn't there because of my man... the judge, the court system, or 'the white man.' I was there because I didn't control my temper, and I had to pay the price... I ain't gonna lie, I was mad as hell when I got [to prison.] It's a lot of people in prison who feel like everybody else put them there but themselves. They all mad... I had to take a good, long look at myself. ...The only way I was gonna get through... was by realizing that didn't nobody put me there but me. I had to take

responsibility... Once I was able to do that, it made me much more peaceful. I could stop blaming everyone else for my problems and start working on me.

Many of the speakers' stories followed a similar format of self-discovery—though few had such dramatic tales to tell. Together, while they might have otherwise described their experience in the language of systematic injustice, events and personal challenges were instead seen as individual instances of failings of perspective, personality, and self-control. Solutions were always described as a matter of changing perception and achieving insight.

In her study of homeless men in San Francisco, Gowan (2010) refers to similar narratives as “sin-talk,” whereby her research participants engaged in self-blame for the difficult circumstances of their lives, and did so largely because of the agency it afforded them. In other words, by (re)claiming the authority to define the terms of their circumstances, and their self-defined personal role in creating them, the men she followed were able to preserve a level of self-determination—despite the problematically shame-inducing aspects of such self-portraits. Gowan contrasts the agency-affording qualities of “sin-talk” with the trappings of “system-talk,” the latter of which would have otherwise painted a picture of a web of immobilizing, enfeebling, or hope-sapping social trappings. Those who deployed “system talk” relinquished a measure of agency to the social institutions (and the inequalities embedded therein) governing their lives. Ultimately, I argue *sin and redemption* narratives were deployed among mentors and youth at *Graceful Girls* for many of the same reasons—primary among them, a desire to maintain a vision of their lives with the capacity to grant a level of self-determination for one's own destiny.

An original handout titled “Mindset is the Key to Self-Empowerment” was distributed to the girls during the year’s first meeting. The messages therein were reinforced throughout the curriculum. The document explains:

It is your state of mind that will determine your LIFE! ...What you think about yourself is what you will become and what you become is what you will attract. ...The truth is that real success in life is based more on your MINDSET. Your state of mind determines the way you think, the way you feel and how you behave... *Reality is a state of mind.* ...you know that if you don’t control your state of mind by working on your ‘INSIDE SELF,’ then your state of mind will be controlled by things outside of yourself. ...you will not be as powerful as you can be.

Ultimately, structural factors that create a situation where young women of color have little control over their sexuality and potential negative outcomes (higher levels of sexual abuse, rape, greater difficulty in negotiating condom use with partners, lesser access to prenatal care, and the long-term negative health consequences of childbearing in the teenage years) became difficult to address in the context of an emphasis on individual discretion, choice, and “empowerment.” One conversation in particular highlights this well:

Jasmine: You know if you use someone else’s razor to shave your legs, you’re leaving yourself open to anything they might have. I don’t care if it’s your friends’, your sisters’, or even your mommas’, you should never share stuff like that. Because you don’t know what they be doin’ on the downlow. You don’t know what they got. People don’t always look like they sick when they got STDs. You can’t tell just by looking at them. Why do you think you might make decisions like that, in the heat of the moment? What are the reasons? When you do something like that, do you know it might be dangerous?

[Long silence in the room. The girls look down at the floor, fidget with their clothing, shift their eyes, and glance uncomfortably around the room. Finally, one of the young women offers an answer].

Tiara: Sometimes we be like, we just doing what’s easy, because we’re in a hurry, or we just don’t think about what might happen. We’re not thinking ahead. Maybe we just need to get ready and get out the door. ...I dunno [long sigh]... maybe it’s also a self-esteem thing.

Jasmine: Right! But we need to get you to where you’re always thinking ahead, with every decision you make. And you know, if you ever need something like that, a razor, or anything else to keep clean, deodorant, whatever, you know you can always ask us for stuff like that, right? You need to remember that it all comes down to making that choice, in the heat of the moment. ...And when you make a bad decision, you need to take personal responsibility for it. ...There’s a point where you can make that snap decision, and do what’s easy, or you can think everything through

and pick the good choice. We just want to make sure that you know that there's a right choice and a wrong choice and figure out how to get you making the right ones when the pressure's on.

The above conversation is illustrative of the way problematic outcomes the leadership team hoped to avoid for the girls were framed as potentially dangerous, with an emphasis on the decision-making process. Jasmine mentioned and acknowledged access to razors as a potential problem. However, more important than access in the above exchange is the theme of *choice*. Pregnancy, STD contraction, drug use, getting into cars with unfamiliar men, and other such risks to safety were nearly always framed in the context of individual choice and conscious decision. Problematically, however, framing such matters in the context of choice can lead to the implication that when negative outcomes occur, it is because of a failure of individual discretion.

To cite another example, the HIV contraction rate among African American women was a constantly cited fact, in conjunction with conversations about "self-esteem." One of the volunteering nurse practitioners constantly reminded the girls of such statistics, telling them:

...we need to start loving ourselves enough to make good choices. I don't care what your boo tells you he's gonna do for you, or how much he says he loves you. You make him wrap it up! No party without the balloons!

In the context of conversations such as these, the HIV contraction rates for African American women were not necessarily with associated higher levels of victimization through rape and sexual abuse. Girls were frequently told that they needed to have enough "self-respect" to be able to tell boys "when to stop," but conversations about what to do if their partners *refused* to stop did not occur.

In some regards, the mentors' appeals to the girls to find individual strength through "self-esteem," "empowerment," "mindset," and "personal responsibility" resonated with post-welfare reform discourses that place the blame for poverty and racism squarely on the shoulders of individuals. The structural basis for social class and racial inequality remained, in many regards, inarticulate, and hovered in the background. This tendency towards individualistic frames of reference, in combination with the organization's limited access to material resources, rendered structural critique, more collective frames of reference, and communitarian strategies for action difficult prospects.

Conclusion: Decoupling Family and Gender & Individualizing Need

Ultimately, *Graceful Girls'* revisionist inversion of dominant cultural stereotypes surrounding Black women's motherhood, strength, and beauty afforded participants an alternative and powerful lens through which they could view their standards for self-worth and physical appearance. Hill (2009) argues, and my experience at *Graceful Girls* confirms, however, that aspects of the African American community's revision of dominant values may have detrimental consequences for the emotional and physical health of girls and women of color.

For example, appeals to the strength of Black womanhood are nearly always tempered against the consequences of needing to be "strong" in the face of adversity, which has the potential to result in silence, barriers to intimacy and interpersonal interdependence, confining personal struggles to religious devotion, illusory representations of gender egalitarianism within the Black community, and may feed into a reluctance to approach

community and familial resources in the event of domestic abuse. Revisionist valuations of Black motherhood may have detrimental health consequences as well:

...for poor African American women, the notion of motherhood as a cultural value may mask the fact that, from the moment of conception through the childrearing years, motherhood is an especially perilous journey” involving higher rates of coerced sex, unwanted pregnancies and abortions, lesser access to adequate health care for mother and child (including correspondingly higher mortality rates for mothers and children), and less overall support for childrearing once children are born (Hill, 2009: 740).

At *Graceful Girls*, messages about motherhood were potentially conflicting: despite cautioning the girls against the dangers of early, unintended pregnancy, motherhood was simultaneously represented as a rite of passage into adulthood, and thereby offered the promise of a conferral of a measure of social status to young women who might otherwise lack such avenues. Revision of the “beauty mandate” to include fuller bodies and darker skin inhibits a serious engagement with continuing colorism within the Black community.

Voicing experiences with sexual and domestic abuse, naming sexism, the perils of young pregnancy, and navigating broader cultural discourses of emasculation were all pieces of the young women’s everyday landscape that presented multifaceted challenges. Given the individualizing frameworks deployed at *Graceful Girls*, effective strategies for the girls to deal with these realities did not often extend beyond a more general rhetoric of “self-esteem” and “personal empowerment.” In many ways, the formal curriculum and everyday talk at *Graceful Girls* directly or indirectly referenced these ongoing efforts at resisting the normalization of oppression implicit in negative and stereotypical images of Black femininity. Ultimately, mentors found themselves in a situation where they were forced to perform a difficult tightrope walk, balancing a need for the redefinition of

stereotype with the consequences of inverting historically inherited negative labels and assumptions.

Mentors at *Graceful Girls* work hard to provide a loving, supportive environment for girls who need it. Mentors do not, however, possess the material resources to provide a structural foothold for the girls' upward social mobility. Participants are therefore left with normative cultural schemas as one of their only resources for fashioning a prosperous life. The SNAF, meritocracy, self-control, and avoiding a "life of the flesh" offer the best possibilities for crafting a good life in an imperfect world. These ideas are gendered in such a fashion that "good womanhood" especially requires a keen ability to navigate female vulnerabilities mapped in "the landscape of risk." Arbitrary violence and punishment may seem less threatening if one possesses a roadmap for avoiding it, and in many cases, the best solution mentors could offer involved strategies for removing oneself from potentially dangerous places and reframing one's thinking about strength and vulnerability.

Graceful Girls also provides a particularly useful case for understanding the coupling between organizational models of gender and models of family in the context of need interpretation. My experiences in this organization demonstrated that traditional models of gender may be linked with more flexible models for family life. *Graceful Girls'* flexibility in family models, and their language and practices that decoupled the traditional family from traditional gender, prompts an understanding of the organization as pragmatically tailored to the unique needs of the participants it serves—or at least,

those participants with a willingness to live lives consistent with, or subscribe to, the organization's definitions of femininity and masculinity.

In the end, *Graceful Girls*' emphasis on therapeutically-defined needs, through referencing "self-control," "self esteem," and "self empowerment" facilitates a measure of agency. Their emphasis on self-discipline, personal responsibility, and self-determination provides access to the symbolic resources assumed to best satisfy needs (such as positive role models, social skills, the proper value system, etc.).

Despite facilitating agency, however, individualizing and therapeutic models leave very little room for gaining purchase on alternative interpretations of need. Narratives citing systematic institutional exclusion on the basis of race, class, and gender are either absent or rendered mute by such frameworks. Presenting "life skills" as solutions for structural problems such as violence against women, sexual victimization, institutional racism, and socioeconomic disenfranchisement may work to preempt broader critique. In turn, this carries the potential to render strategies for collective action and claims to public resources difficult. As I argue elsewhere in the dissertation, both are desperately needed in an era of neoliberal governance and the rollback of state protections.

7. “JUST YOU WAIT UNTIL YOUR HEAVENLY FATHER GETS HOME!”
MINISTERING TO SINGLE MOTHERS AT *PARENTING WITHOUT PARTNERS*
AND *MASTERING MOTHERHOOD*

Parenting Without Partners and *Mastering Motherhood* are both programs housed in conservative evangelical Protestant churches, and are designed to serve single mothers. In my examination of these two programs, I began with the question of how religious communities that promote traditional (nuclear, male breadwinner) models of family life serve “non-traditional” families. Conservative religious ideology provides a number of bases for the potential stigmatization of the identities and ‘lifestyles’ of single mothers. Foremost among them are single mothers’ greater tendency to engage in welfare receipt (Sullivan 2011), deviance from norms of female domesticity through participation in the labor force (especially with young children; Glass & Nath 2006; Blair-Loy 2003), divorce (Bartkowski 2001), cohabitation (Sullivan 2011), and non-marital childbearing as evidence of departure from conventions governing sexual abstinence (Franklin 2004).⁴ However, in the context of everyday life, worship communities exhibit far more flexibility in their practices than their elite-level leadership and doctrine are likely to accommodate in ideology.⁵ Overall, however, single mother families represent an especially poor fit with models of religious familism most prevalent in religiously conservative communities.

Relevant here is how religious communities reconcile the reality of single motherhood, an increasingly common form of family life, with the ideological dictates of their theological and biblical imperatives. Single parenting defies the very premise of the SNAF (Standard North American Family; Smith 1993) due to the absence of an

additional parent. Single mothers must perform both the female-associated caregiver role *and* the male-associated breadwinner role. Childrearing in single parent families can therefore neither maintain traditional gender ideals associated with polarization/complementarity, nor can it be characterized by gender ‘sameness,’ companionship, or egalitarianism in the absence of a spouse.

Specifically, I examine the ways in which *Parenting Without Partners* and *Mastering Motherhood* maintain their moral order when confronted with breaches in the family and gender ideals commonly promoted by conservative evangelical Protestantism. Such focus is consistent with the broader themes of the dissertation: the moral implications of need interpretation, the connection between religious familism and gender ideals, and whether organizational rhetorics match with the realities of more diverse family structures. To address these questions, I completed case studies of the two programs mentioned above. I conducted interviews with leadership and volunteers, facilitated focus groups with participants, engaged in participant-observation at weekly and bi-weekly sessions, and attended a four day “single moms’ family camp.”

In this chapter, I make three main arguments. First, of the two, the more conservative organization (*Parenting Without Partners*) was able to provide a significantly less stigmatizing environment for its participants—an especially ironic finding, as the literature suggests that more theologically conservative and “faith-permeated” environments are more likely to be less welcoming to the “lifestyles” of individuals living in family structures that deviate from the traditional, nuclear ideal. *Parenting Without Partners*’ capacity to create a less stigmatizing environment is attributable to a

combination of two factors. Primarily, programming at *Parenting Without Partners* was designed to serve members of their own ‘flock’ (other “good” Christian women) as opposed to ‘outsiders’ (non-believers and those who did not share the social class and racial status of leaders and the host congregation). In addition, *Parenting Without Partners* is led by a member of the host congregation in good moral standing with the worship community who is herself a single mother, thereby decreasing the moral ‘distance’ between those who serve and the targets of their service.

My second major finding was that service providers (and recipients) at *Parenting Without Partners* repair the moral breach represented by single motherhood through reference to God as fulfilling the role of “strict father.” They did so by deploying a model for family life I refer to as the *stretched strict father* model. Plugging God into this absence in the nuclear family unit allowed for the restoration of the moral status of single mothers, and allowed the leadership space to serve families they perceived to be living lives consistent with biblical teachings. This perceived consistency between family life and biblical imperatives also allowed the leadership to make broader appeals for support to the congregation in which the program was housed—a project which might otherwise have proven difficult. *Mastering Motherhood*, on the other hand, could not engage this strategy because of the moral (and social) distance between providers and recipients, because biblical tenets did not occupy a position of influence in daily programming, and because the program served both the faithful and non-believers.

Lastly, as *Parenting Without Partners* conceives of itself as having the capacity to execute vital functions associated with playing a central role in constructing the social

safety net (indeed, leaders feel they can execute such functions more effectively and efficiently than state entities), the fact that their moral framework limits the participation of ‘outsiders’ is problematic. Identifying the contours of schemas such as the *stretched strict father* is important work, because such cultural frameworks provide the basis upon which people make claims to both public and private resources. Doing so provides insight into questions regarding the extent to which more religiously conservative settings can effectively provide services, and do so in a manner sensitive to the lived realities of those clients whose family lives might deviate from traditional orthodoxy. Despite this flexibility, however, single motherhood remains a stigmatized condition at both *Parenting Without Partners* and *Mastering Motherhood*. These families are still “broken,” but they are nonetheless deserving of compassionate care. In and of itself, this reality is deserving of positive recognition, especially given the theologically conservative context in which it occurs.

Organizational Profiles

Parenting Without Partners is a thirteen week classroom-based parenting education program, and meets weekly at *Promise Church*. The program is operated by a group of three women: the founder/director, Lisa (herself a single mother and a paid member of the church staff); her volunteer co-leader, Mary; and another woman who volunteered to provide childcare during meetings. *Parenting Without Partners* represents one piece of founder Lisa’s larger outreach organization, *Little Miracles*, which serves single mothers with a three-pronged approach that involves: 1) individual prayer, 2) speaking and teaching, and 3) ministry. Another aspect of *Little Miracles*’ programming is a “single

moms family camp,” which is offered at the “retreat” property owned by *Promise Church*.¹ Mothers find out about *Parenting Without Partners* via the church newsletter, ads in neighborhood newspapers, postings at other area conservative Christian churches, radio announcements on local religious stations, and personal invitation from the director. Faith formation and religious symbolism are important components of programming. Ten to fifteen women participate in any given week.

Programming at *Mastering Motherhood* consists of both a mentoring relationship and a classroom education component. Mentoring occurs between a single mother and a volunteer mentor who regularly and actively participates in a worship community (preferably, at *Devotion Church*, where the program is housed). Mentors provide resources such as emotional support, advice, and physical help with the tasks of child-rearing—rides, babysitting, etc. The content of bi-weekly classroom meetings includes curricula addressing budgeting/financial health, “life skills,” help with building healthy relationships, and parenting education. Mothers may also access an emergency food shelf the organization maintains. In addition, the organization makes as-needed referrals to local social service agencies and programs that provide resources consistent with participant needs. *Mastering Motherhood* also has a paid staff of three—the Executive Director, Julie; the Program Director, Lana; and lastly, a former program participant who was paid to provide childcare during meetings. Mothers arrive via referral through the leaderships’ professional contacts with county child protection and social workers, counselors and social workers in the public school system, and homeless shelter staff. Eight mothers were participating during the time I spent with the organization.

Comparative Insights

Both programs are similar in some regards—primary among them is their conservative theological orientation and a commitment to evangelism. Church members founded both organizations, and members continue to be influential in building and maintaining the groups. In addition, both *Mastering Motherhood* and *Parenting Without Partners* are located in relatively affluent suburbs and housed inside largely white, middle class congregations. Participants at both organizations reported low levels of formal church participation.²

However, *Parenting Without Partners* and *Mastering Motherhood* differ in some important respects. Some differences are largely structural, or associated with practices, whereas some were more ideological in nature. *Parenting Without Partners* is more connected to the church, whereas *Mastering Motherhood* maintains a greater degree of independence. *Mastering Motherhood* also requires a significantly greater number of volunteers to execute programming than *Parenting Without Partners*. Whereas *Parenting Without Partners*' program has more of a drop-in, as-needed model (designed to accommodate the demanding schedules of single parents and allow new mothers to join at any time), *Mastering Motherhood*'s participants make a more long-term and involved commitment (six months to one year, though this is flexible and tailored). *Parenting Without Partners*' founding leader is a single mother herself, contrasted with *Mastering Motherhood*'s leadership and mentors, all of whom live family lives consistent with the traditional, nuclear family model.³ The majority of participating mothers at *Parenting Without Partners* are middle to lower-middle class (despite the self-defined

financial struggles they experience as single parents) and white, whereas the majority of *Mastering Motherhood*'s single mothers are from comparably lower class backgrounds, and many are women of color. Furthermore, all of the participants I spoke with at *Parenting Without Partners* self-identified as Christian, while *Mastering Motherhood*'s beneficiaries included a sizable number of women with no religious identification or low levels of commitment beyond the purely symbolic. Lastly, faith formation and meeting participants' spiritual needs were primary goals at *Parenting Without Partners*, but religion and spiritual matters took a back seat to addressing the material needs of clients at *Mastering Motherhood*. Ultimately, an understanding of the above-listed differences between the two programs works to contextualize the varying degree of acceptance single mother families faced with regard to their family structure, the differences between the two programs in the level of practical and rhetorical flexibility in their idealization of the nuclear family model, and their moral framing of single motherhood.

Faith and Service Provision

The content of *Parenting Without Partners*' programming relied heavily on religious symbolism and scriptural references. Biblical citations were prevalent in the curriculum, leaders often referenced God's desires for their lives, and the room in which programming was held had a ten foot high stone tablet displaying the Ten Commandments painted on the wall. When asked whether she felt the religious content of the programming might make some mothers uncomfortable, or deter them from attending, volunteer co-leader Mary explained to me:

Well... we offer our programming in a church, and everybody that makes this happen is a committed Christian looking to serve others. I think if you're approaching a church and you're asking for help, you kind of have to expect [explicit religion] is going to come along with it!

In many ways, then, the religious content of programming had a taken-for-granted status.

Specifically, messages presented at *Parenting Without Partners* sprang from the conviction that growing closer to God was the primary way participants could hone their parenting skills and make the most of their already-stretched emotional resources. The videos viewed during each session would generally present content that included the problems single mothers were assumedly commonly confronted with: for example, dealing with problematic or confrontational situations with ex-spouses, balancing dating and a social life with the needs of their children, disciplining children in a manner consistent with biblical teachings, etc. Solutions to these problems were always presented with either explicit reference to biblical passages or interpretations of God's intentions or desires. In addition, the "hope-work" sections of the manual mothers were given and instructed to reflect on throughout the week also involved interpreting scripture in the context of childrearing. Discussion questions raised by the leadership usually centered around asking the mothers how they called on scripture and/or their relationship with God throughout the week as a resource in dealing with the challenges of single parenting.

Lastly, each meeting ended with a prayer, led by the founder. Lisa would first ask the group for their prayer requests, and mothers would then cite various needs requiring God's guidance in dealing with the practical matters of running a household "alone." Generally, the subsequent prayer would involve asking God for strength and thanking

him for his support. Ultimately, references to faith, and growing in one's faith, infused nearly every element of the programming structure. Tellingly, the majority of references to the strength one can glean from scripture and relation with God involved engaging in the practice of looking to one's faith for information on how to 'fill the void' created by the absence of a male breadwinner or disciplinarian.

In contrast, the only context in which faith is explicitly mentioned in *Mastering Motherhood's* program sessions is near the end of the meeting, when mothers are given the opportunity to write out "prayer requests" and place them in a small wooden box. These requests are later distributed among members of the church who have expressed a desire to "help single mothers," and have chosen to do so through praying for their needs to be met. Leaders were quick to emphasize, however, that participation with the "prayer box" was optional, though most (but not all) mothers chose to participate.

Furthermore, leaders and mentors describe *Mastering Motherhood* as motivated by "Christian values." Though generally this took the form of scriptural mandates about care and compassion, the organization's Christian values were also made manifest in one of the requirements for participants—they must be single mothers "living alone." This requirement was motivated by a number of factors. As the program was designed for single mothers, participants needed to be truly "single," which was defined both as being unmarried, and not living with a man "outside the bonds of marriage." This sprang in part from concerns about the needs of children for safety and emotional consistency (which could not be guaranteed in homes where mothers engage in "transient" or "fleeting" relationships with men) and also, as Julie explained, "because we are, after all,

a *Christian* organization.” Such concerns were expressed by both mentors and the leadership, with mentors more often citing biblical mandates.

Mastering Motherhood further expressed its Christian identity in the context of the informational materials they distributed about their program. During my initial interview with Julie, she explained to me that the program uses two informational brochures—one for other referring organizations, potential funding sources, and volunteers, and one for potential participants. The language in the latter of the two is markedly more simplified—Julie explained they had chosen to simplify things to make the program and its goals more accessible for single mothers. While the information included in the first brochure is more detailed and involved, there is another important difference I noted: it included an explicit description of the program as “faith-based,” whereas the brochure designed for potential participants did not. Julie explained to me that they had intentionally decided to omit this language from the participant brochure out of a concern that it might be a “turn off,” as mothers might assume they needed to be Christian or convert in order to participate, or that the program “would be all about religion.” However, when mothers call to inquire about the program, they are then informed that their assigned mentor will be a “good Christian woman,” and are asked “if that will be a problem.” According to Julie, “no one’s had an issue with it yet.” The website’s only mention of the organization’s “faith-based” status is printed in the far corner of a downloadable brochure, in very small font.

According to Julie: “[*Mastering Motherhood*] is a Christian program that serves women regardless of their faith.” An article written about the program, printed in an area

neighborhood newspaper, included the following quote from one of *Mastering Motherhood's* longtime participants: "I think they're just there to be the hands and feet of Jesus," [Shelley—participant] said. "They're not cramming it down your throat. ... Wherever that person is, they'll try to meet them there."

A final way in which *Mastering Motherhood's* religious identity was expressed surfaced in interviews, where mentors expressed concerns about prospective mentors' status as "good, Christian women." Some of the volunteer mentor mothers expressed concerns about allowing mentors from other congregations to participate. Gail, a longtime mentor whose current mentee had just "graduated" from the program, expressed serious concerns about allowing women from other worship communities to participate. As one of the founding leaders of the program, Gail currently serves as the President of the Board of Directors. She describes her reservations as follows:

...you never know exactly where they're coming from, or what kind of belief system they're going to come in with. Do they say they're Christian women? Well, yeah. But lots of people do! I don't truly know what their foundation is, because I'm not in worship with them every Sunday, I don't know their families, I don't know their children, I don't know if the Lord is truly in their hearts and at the center of things, and I don't know what their priorities are. And that makes for a lot of unknown things, which can make working together hard and unpredictable. You have to be building from common ground in order for things to work and really get off the ground.

During the six months I spent with the organization, six of the eight participating mothers had assigned mentors, two awaited mentors, and a handful of women remained on the waiting list due to a lack of available mentors. Mentors are recruited mainly through their ties with *Devotion*. At the time of my arrival, all participating mentors were active *Devotion* members. However, about two weeks prior to my exiting the site, a small handful of mentors from other area worship communities had joined, begun training, and

were awaiting their mentee assignments. Though such efforts at including mentors from other worship communities had been attempted in the past, such efforts had failed as “outside” volunteers opted not to continue their relationship with the organization. Leadership speculates this is likely due to the fact that although every effort was made to make outside volunteers feel integrated, because they did not have the added piece of membership in the same worship community (which would have entailed attending Sunday services and other church activities together), they may have felt “like they were missing a piece of the community experience.”

Such anxieties about the extent to which prospective mentors are ‘sufficiently’ Christian speak to the organizations’ concerns about having mentors model ‘appropriately Christian’ behaviors for the mentee mothers. As well, it raises cause for concern regarding the organization’s orientation to non-Christian participants. When asked, members of the leadership emphasized to me that participation was open to all, but the hope was that through having the “Christian lifestyle” held up as an exemplar, mothers would then opt to choose it for themselves.

In addition, at *Mastering Motherhood*, the practice of having older, established, married mothers from nuclear families serve as exemplary “mentors” worked to reinscribe the nuclear family as the primary ideal, as their lives were held out as the exemplar to which single moms should aspire. By contrast, at *Parenting Without Partners*, the main role model for single mothers was instead the director and founder, Lisa, who was herself a single mother and presented herself as ultimately having overcome the challenges associated with single motherhood (as evidenced by her capacity to raise three children

who are now happy, healthy, and successful adults, and the level of spiritual “peace” she has achieved). At *Mastering Motherhood*, being a good (single) mother was defined as engaging in efforts towards self-improvement to accommodate for the absence of a spouse. Being a good mentor meant being married with children (only one mentor in the history of the program had divorced and remarried, and she was one of the founding members), living in a nuclear family arrangement, and implicitly, being a “good Christian woman” as all mentors were. At *Parenting Without Partners*, being a good (single) mother primarily meant being a good Christian, and growing in one’s relationship with the Lord so as to supplement for the absence of a husband. Being a good role model/leader/mentor meant having personal experience with the challenges of single motherhood, which served as a basis for empathy and a reservoir of practical information.

Parenting Without Partners’ practices therefore privileged the two-parent model to a lesser extent than *Mastering Motherhood*, though there were limits to this, as the leadership made it very clear that the two-parent, nuclear model remained the ideal. This was tempered by the leadership’s reminders that “two-parent families are the ideal, but we do not live in an ideal world.” Consistent with this rhetoric was the devaluation and stigmatization of extended family living situations at *Parenting Without Partners*.

Stigma and Single Motherhood: Framing Family Dissolution

Both organizations engaged in a number of practices designed to accommodate the reality of life in single mother homes. *Parenting Without Partners* offered childcare and age-appropriate activities for older kids, and their schedule allowed for drop-in and

intermittent participation—therefore many programming components were designed to accommodate common barriers to participation faced by single moms, and to just “give them a break.” Programming was held on Sunday nights in order to accommodate a variety of working mother schedules, ranging from nine-to-five jobs to more variable service-sector working hours. At *Mastering Motherhood*, mentors sometimes offered much-needed transportation, and meetings were also held in the evening (though in contrast, they were scheduled during weekdays on alternating weeks).

As well, offering the “single moms’ family camp” was another aspect of programming explicitly designed to meet the needs of single mothers. Participants for the family camp weekend were drawn jointly from both *Mastering Motherhood* and *Parenting Without Partners*. All cooking and cleaning were managed by college-age camp counselors, and supervised children’s activities throughout the weekend gave the mothers a chance to spend time with other adult peers, attend group-based faith formation sessions with Lisa, and “reconnect with Father God.” Many of the participants related to me that this was their “favorite weekend of the year,” as it allowed them to enjoy time with their children away from the demands of daily life and was also greatly anticipated by their children.

One significant aspect of *Parenting Without Partners*’ program is the fact that it was led by a woman who is herself a single mother. Lisa became a member at *Promise Church* prior to her divorce—before beginning *Little Miracles*—which afforded her the opportunity to get involved in the congregation’s previous incarnations of programming for single mothers. The ‘menu’ of programming options for single mothers increased significantly when Lisa assumed control of this arm of *Promise*’s ministry and

subsequently stepped up the church's advocacy efforts for single mothers. Other members of the leadership team and participating mothers spoke highly of Lisa and her status as a "good, Christian woman."

The leadership at *Parenting Without Partners*, *Promise's* website and newsletters, and the head pastor all explicitly described the program as a ministry of the church. Lisa relates that both the head pastor at *Promise* and the broader worship community had been very supportive of her programming for single mothers. The pastor often inquired as to how he could aid her in her efforts, and congregation members had often been known to donate time and resources. On one occasion, a few of the "church ladies" got together and decided to knit "prayer shawls" for the mothers in the *Project Peace* group.

According to Lisa:

...people here at *Promise* just seem to 'get it.' They know they [single mothers] need help, and they're willing to step up and give what they can. Whenever we [church leaders and congregants] have conversations about who to serve, single moms are always pretty high up on the list. We made a decision and a commitment as a community to serve them."

In contrast, despite *Mastering Motherhood's* practical efforts that acknowledged and planned for the difficult realities of single parenting, single motherhood was defined as a significant social problem in the official program rhetoric, which ultimately worked to pathologize non-marital childbearing.

In describing their target client base, *Mastering Motherhood's* website and promotional brochures cited a number of facts and figures on the problems associated with single parent homes. Such figures worked to establish a causal relationship between single motherhood and a number of negative outcomes associated with poverty and child

development. Under a heading titled “The Need,” the website lists the ways in which children and families are affected by single parent living arrangements. A number of state and national-level statistics are cited that tie single mother family arrangements to a greater likelihood that children will grow up in environments marked by both economic and emotional deprivation. The effects of such deprivation are assumed to follow many children of single mothers into their adult lives. Substance abuse, criminal behavior, and teen pregnancy are other social problems mentioned in the same breath as single mothering.

According to the US Census Bureau, one out of every two youth today will live in a single parent home at some point before reaching age 18. Children of single parent families are 4 times more likely to experience learning problems, and emotional and behavioral problems. Children of single parent homes are twice as likely to use drugs and alcohol, have law enforcement contact, commit suicide and become a teen parent.

Desired outcomes for the program are telling, and provide further context for the ways the needs of single mother homes are interpreted at *Mastering Motherhood*. Because single parent homes are presumed to have ‘unhealthy’ tendencies, strategies for “improv[ing] family health” are necessary.

A section labeled “results” describes the needs of single mother families as follows:

One to one mentoring provides single mothers with ongoing practical and emotional support of a trained, caring mentor. Goal setting provides single mothers with the structure, accountability and support to set and achieve individualized goals to improve family health. Our moms have finished high school diplomas, and received college degrees. They have moved from shelters, to apartments to becoming homeowners. They have found employment in their area of study or interest. Educational classes provide skills and education on budgeting, parenting, health and safety, job seeking and resume writing, home management and much more. Resource connection provides single parent families with additional resources to meet the day to day needs of their family as well as advocacy and individualized resources for special needs.

Taken together, the information presented paints a picture of single parent families as a problem to be addressed, as such unfortunate family structures affect the lives of

children, and therefore have a negative impact on both the immediate community and the broader social order.

“Results” detail the ways in which needs are to be addressed, and ways the problems associated with single motherhood might potentially be solved—through providing support, structure, and accountability. Such a framework implicitly assumes that such elements are generally missing from the family lives of single mothers, painting a picture of isolation, lack of structure, irresponsibility, and inconsistency. Again, such problems were seen as a cause for concern insofar as they negatively affected the lives of *children*. Consequently, concerns about the lives of children served as a stand-in for broader moral concerns about the future of the family in the U.S., and the social order as a whole—again, due to the organization’s rhetoric which linked such concerns to criminality, substance abuse, and teen parenting.

Such representations of vulnerable and endangered childhoods are rooted in historical precedent, with ties extending back to the efforts of the middle class moral reformers of the 19th century. In particular, a consideration of Beisel’s (1998) account of the “New England Society for the Suppression of Vice” demonstrates such linkages well.

Associated reformers tied the “imperiled innocence” of the children of their community to the perceived growth of criminal elements in ‘dangerous’ urban neighborhoods—areas where the immigrant population was rising at a rapid clip. Thompson (1998) argues that “moral panics” involving the safety and moral protection of children often serve as a stand-in for adult anxieties about rapid changes in the social order. Therefore, *Mastering Motherhood*’s focus on the well-being of children as the primary motive for—and

organizing principle of—their programming should be read against the accelerated (and assumedly, undesirable) pace of change in American family structures since the mid-20th century.

Echoing promotional materials, interviews with the Executive Director, Program Director, and volunteers frequently cited the rationale and motivating force behind all of the organization's policies and practices as concern for the well-being of children. Youth, and especially the children of single mothers, were frequently referred to as “future community members.” According to the Executive Director,

...everything we do... It's all about the kids. We wanted to know how we could make better homes for the kids out there in our community, and we decided that in order to help children we have to help their mothers.

Indeed, the tag-line displayed on all program materials is “...mentoring families to strengthen the next generation.”

During classroom sessions, biblical mandates (at *Parenting Without Partners*) and statistics regarding the harm single mother family arrangements posed to children (at *Mastering Motherhood*) were cited as authoritative narratives that ultimately worked to reinscribe the undesirability of single mother family structures. Especially at *Mastering Motherhood*, programming was motivated by the conviction that “better moms means better kids,” a better “next generation,” and therefore, a healthier future society. This established an implicit message that for single mothers and the programs that serve them, much hangs in the balance: namely, healthy, well-adjusted children, which is tied to the future health of the social order. It logically follows that both are in jeopardy in the absence of fathers from home and family, and mentors and leaders alike, from both

organizations, stated as such in their interviews. Furthermore, moral decay happens when families dissolve and parents do not stay together. Ultimately, this critique served to place quite a heavy moral burden squarely on the shoulders of single mothers.

Mastering Motherhood displayed a formal recognition of the broader social structures involved with the marginalization of single mothers (such as unemployment, the stagnation of wages, a lack of affordable housing, the rise of the service and global economies, deindustrialization, etc.) in official organizational rhetoric presented during mentor trainings. However, this was the only context in which structural critique emerged. Volunteers often grappled with their desire to “hold the moms accountable” and inspire “personal responsibility,” on the one hand, and the social structural problems leadership had informed them was an engine that drove the problems single mother families face, on the other. Ultimately, language used in the context of everyday practices, the mission statement(s) of the organization, and the content of interviews together devolved into individual-level framings of the problems participating single mothers faced.

Mentors and leaders at *Mastering Motherhood* constructed a narrative in which families dissolved because society had become too “me-focused,” women were too dominating and career-focused, and fathers were too often uncommitted to the children they created via their sexual exploits. Such discussions, therefore, were further reminiscent of culture of poverty frameworks, and were likely more often cited at *Mastering Motherhood* because of the race and social class differences in the client base (as compared with *Parenting Without Partners*).

As well, in interviews, leaders and volunteers at *Mastering Motherhood* would cite the individual's role in social problems associated with single motherhood when asked about the organization's mission, mentioning poverty, child development issues, problematic family structures, child abuse, mental illness, and substance abuse. In contrast, leaders at *Parenting Without Partners* would more often define their mission and priorities in the context of the practical challenges single mothers face in the absence of pathology. Instead, they mentioned a motivation to help mothers balance work and family demands, dealing with troublesome ex-spouses and partners, negotiating dating and the needs of their children, building healthy relationships with other members of the extended family, and spiritual growth as a resource for meeting these challenges. Therefore, *Mastering Motherhood's* orientation to single motherhood was far more problematic, despite, as I argue below, their greater capacity to address the material needs of their beneficiaries of services.

Ultimately, aspects of *Mastering Motherhood's* rhetoric and practice that engaged the philosophy of remoralization should be read as a *revision* of religious neoliberal scripts. Whereas *Mastering Motherhood's* service provision environment was imbued with a distinct set of religious values, and was modeled after organizational authorities' interpretation of biblical precepts, specifically articulated references to such religious prescriptions and other symbols of faith expression were few and far between in daily settings. While they self-defined as a "Christian organization," they did not cite religious authority in classroom instruction. However, as I did not observe any mentor-client interactions outside of formal meetings, I cannot speak to the extent to which religious

views and values were expressed in those settings. In contrast, religious values and symbolism permeated many aspects of *Parenting Without Partners*' formal curriculum, as well as service provider-recipient relations.

Material vs. Spiritual Needs

Another significant difference between the two organizations lay in the focus of their mission. *Mastering Motherhood* placed a greater level of emphasis on addressing single mother families' financial struggles in their programming efforts. Though *Parenting Without Partners* acknowledged that single mother families are more likely than other family forms to experience financial difficulty, helping address these problems was not necessarily seen as within the purview of the organization's mission, which was instead defined primarily as providing mothers with scripture-based parenting education in order to help them grow as both parents and Christians. When mothers with very obviously pressing material needs approached *Parenting Without Partners*, they were often referred to *Mastering Motherhood* for help. Lisa (Director at *Parenting Without Partners*) related that she would recommend participation at *Mastering Motherhood* if she observed mothers struggling with securing employment, budgeting their finances, obtaining child support payments, dealing with outstanding debt, or educational attainment. *Mastering Motherhood* also regularly made referrals to appropriate government agencies and non-profit organizations that could help meet material needs, whereas *Parenting Without Partners* offered little assistance in this regard, with the exception of what leaders referred to as "networking opportunities" whereby mothers could share information about access to needed resources. In sum, *Parenting Without Partners*' focus was therefore

more organized around fostering spiritual, as opposed to fiscal or material, health and growth. Although mothers with pressing material needs were not turned away at *Parenting Without Partners*, the lack of attention to such matters may have meant that those struggling most found what services were offered to be less than immediately relevant in meeting the material demands of their daily lives.

Partially, this difference in focus (material versus spiritual) was born of *Parenting Without Partners*' understanding of their work as a more internal project of "ministering to [Christian] single mothers" (serving *us*) versus *Mastering Motherhood*'s conceptualization of the work they do as more "community outreach" for both Christian and non-Christian women (serving *them*). In sum, *Parenting Without Partners*' leadership saw themselves as primarily engaged in "ministry," whereas *Mastering Motherhood*'s leadership, while also motivated by "Christian values," saw themselves more as engaged in the practice of social work. This pattern was also coincident with differences between the leadership's and the broader worship community's orientations to the matter of social justice.

At *Parenting Without Partners*, Lisa informed me that both the congregation and the organization were not motivated by "social justice for the sake of social justice," and instead saw such goals as secondary to, and only sometimes, coincidentally achieved through a dedication to living out scriptural mandates. Consistency with biblical teachings and "moral conviction" was the standard by which all potential efforts and focus should be measured. If social justice was achieved through the course of such efforts, it was an additional 'bonus,' but not to be pursued as an end in itself.

In contrast, though *Mastering Motherhood* maintained a higher degree of autonomy from the worship community that houses it (*Devotion*), there remained a good deal of ideological crossover between the church and the program, stemming from the church's provision of financial support, the space in which programming was held, and serving as the exclusive source of volunteers up until one week before my departure from the site (at which point volunteer mentors from other worship communities began training for their posts). As detailed in the site profiles in the methods chapter, *Devotion* is committed to social justice for the sake of achieving equality and transcending difference, and such commitments were echoed by leadership and volunteers. Their website delineates a dedication to "...equip loving, giving, growing Christians to reach out to the world with the good news of Jesus Christ, ministering to those in need, and seeking justice for the oppressed."

As Laudarji & Livezey (2000) note, churches tend to engage the poor more often as social service recipients, and less often as congregants or potential worship community members. In some cases, churches in poor, urban neighborhoods go so far as to see the poor as a population to be avoided (Price 2000; McRoberts 2003). Sullivan's (2011) study of the "everyday religion" of single mothers uncovered instances of women who had decided to exit worship communities as religious participants (generally due to the stigma they encountered), yet continued to access the social services they offered. Lana, *Mastering Motherhood's* Program Director, made the following statement during our discussion regarding the need for faith-based non-profits to maintain a modicum of independence from the houses of worship in which they are housed:

...churches can be very territorial. They are fine with tending their own flock, but when it comes to expanding beyond that, things get a little more difficult. They want their programs to be their own, they want to make the decisions and be in charge, they want to take credit for what happens, and they want what they do to serve the people they care about—whether that’s people in the congregation or whoever else in the community they think needs the most help, or whoever they decide deserves it the most. We don’t always have a lot of resources, you know? But that makes working together even more important. Even though the benefits of working together and cooperating are exponential, it can be really hard to get congregations to partner together on outreach work in the surrounding community, which is really kind of sad.

As well, Lana’s claim that individual church leaders “want to make the decisions and be in charge” when “serv[ing] the people they care about,” serves to undergird the claim that in circumstances where resources are limited, moral distinctions that sort out those who “[deserve help] the most” or “need the most help” become all the more salient.

The “Culture of Poverty,” Class-Based Stigma, and the Extended Family

Leaders at *Mastering Motherhood* held “Bridges Out of Poverty” trainings for mentors to educate them on extended family arrangements common among people living in “generational poverty” in order to discourage tendencies towards “judgmentalism.”

According to Julie, the Director:

...you really have to have a heart for single mothers and their children in order to do this kind of work, and make this kind of commitment. You can’t come in here thinking that you’re going to somehow save them from themselves, or redeem them for their sins. It’s more about helping them where they’re at, and meeting them where they’re at, than it is being judgmental about their lives and their decisions. Being judgmental just isn’t helpful.

Such efforts, however, were met with limited success, as many of the mentors I interviewed cited “culture of poverty” frameworks when explaining why single mothers had become single mothers, and why they struggled in the absence of a husband. In part, this sprang from rhetoric introduced in mentor training sessions, which were, ironically, designed using the “Bridges Out of Poverty” curriculum. As one mentor related:

You know, I once mentored a single mother, and her twin sister was in the program, too. Both of them were single mothers, *their* mother was a single mother, and *her* mother was a single mother.

And I think it just goes back to the whole generational poverty thing. When people come from poor families, they just have a different orientation to marriage—they see it as an optional type of thing—like, you don't have to be married before you have kids, and you don't have to have financial security before you have kids. They were a Black family, and I think it kind of comes back to that, too. There are just generations upon generations of single parents out there, and kids learn that it's okay from their parents. How are you supposed to do things differently if that's all you've ever known, or the only way you've ever seen people do things? So we try to teach them that there's a different way to live your life. We try to model good behaviors and good decision-making, and hope that it will rub off someday.

This mentor's comments are telling in that both race and class are interconnected themes in perpetuating family patterns defined as problematic. The solution, according to this mentor, is moral reform through subtle modeling.

The social class distance between mentors and participants was further invoked in mentors' descriptions of the "cultural" patterns they sought to help mothers "unlearn"—specifically, for example, with regard to their housekeeping habits. During one interview I conducted with a mentor, the conversation turned to the matter of one young mother of two who, despite being slated for graduation from the program, could not seem to adopt middle class norms for cleanliness in the home:

Barbara: You know, Jean has been with us for a long time, and she's been through about three mentors total because sometimes, it just didn't seem to work—either they just didn't "click," or mentors would give up on her once they realized there were certain things they weren't going to be able to change about her.

DDF: Hmm... Could you give me some examples of what didn't work?

Barbara: Well, she's a former mom-on-meth, and I think she learned some bad habits during that time in her life that she can't seem to unlearn. Some of the moms, you know, we can't seem to get them to stop dating men that are in and out of jail, so it's not like it's anything like that, but when you go over to her house, it's like, there's just *stuff everywhere!*

DDF: So is it like, *dirty*? Or unhygienic?

Barbara: Well no, it's not really anything like that, she just has stuff piled on top of stuff, piled on top of stuff—she never knows where anything is. In my house, there's a place for everything and everything in its place. Otherwise, things just seem to get chaotic, you know? But it just doesn't seem to bother her, and we can't figure out why, and we can't really break her of the habit. I know she was raised in a good, Christian home, so it's not like that's the problem. You know, she was offered the opportunity to get a government handout to buy her townhome, and she turned it down. We were really proud of her for that—she said she wanted to do it by herself, so she could

feel like *she earned it*, like it wasn't just given to her. She just doesn't seem to know how to keep house. And it feels like we've tried everything under the sun with her.

Again, Sullivan's (2011) study of single mothers living in poverty proves instructive in interpreting Barbara's estimation of Jean's domestic capacities. Many of the mothers Sullivan interviewed associated houses of worship with middle class values, and felt they were judged against such standards that sometimes, did not apply to their lives.

Sullivan's interviewees expressing such sentiments felt that this class-based clash in values between faith communities and the circumstances of their lives would then serve as a significant basis for 'othering,' at best, and discrimination, at worst.

Another basis for the recurring gap in understanding between service providers and single mothers revolved around extended family living arrangements. *Mastering Motherhood's* Executive Director Julie explained that the relationship between mothers and mentors often becomes a lifelong friendship. Mentor mothers and their families were seen as providing something akin to a surrogate extended family—especially since existing family relationships among participating mothers were viewed by leadership with suspicion, at best, and outright hostility due to the perceived negative influence they posed, at worst.

For example, during one particular session, *Parenting Without Partners'* co-leader Mary expressed her distaste for intergenerational living situations. One of the young mothers, living under the same roof as her own mother, had been relating her frustration over the disagreements she and her mother sometimes had over disciplining her son. She loved her mother, and usually, she liked living with her, but the matter sometimes became the source of arguments. Mary took the woman's complaints as an opportunity to express to

the group how very important it was for single mothers to achieve “self-sufficiency” and “independence” in order to avoid such disagreements. Mary wanted to know: Was she working? Was she saving up to move out? Could she find a way to establish her own household? During a later interview, I decided to ask Mary about the reason for her aversion to intergenerational living. She explained:

In a situation like that, where there’s a cooperative situation between a grandparent and a parent in raising a child, there’s just a lot of opportunities for conflicts with discipline. I had one parent in particular with the [program for mentoring children of inmates], and she and her daughter were still living with the grandmother. She just had too much going on, and because she was living in a situation like that, it was easy to make it [participating in the program and doing the right thing for her child] not a priority. She was able to rely on her mother for what *she should* have been doing *herself*. And I just think you get into that whole mess when you have adult women living with their parents, when they should be out making their own way.

Extended family arrangements were usually seen in a less-than-positive light—or were viewed as a liminal phase en route to a more desirable two-parent, nuclear family living situation—at *Parenting Without Partners*. At *Mastering Motherhood*, on the other hand, the leadership made deliberate efforts to honor extended family structures by educating volunteers about them in an effort to demonstrate that not everyone chooses to live in a nuclear family setting, and such choices should be respected. However, nuclear family arrangements remained the exalted norm.

For example, during the mentor training situation, Julie devoted considerable time to explaining the “cultural differences” between the ways those in generational poverty (and in particular, African Americans) organize their family lives. She explained that while “doing an intake” with one potential African American participant, the woman had mentioned that she had eleven children. Surprised, Julie noticed that many of the children in the home looked to be the same age, which prompted her to ask “how many of

them are [biologically] *yours*?” According to Julie, the way she approached the situation was especially problematic because she had insulted the woman—*all of her* children were *hers*. She explained,

...sometimes, I just have to make a map of their family tree. It’s like they have branches going in every direction you can imagine! They will have people that they call their “brothers” and “sisters,” but it’s obvious that they don’t have the same parents. But that doesn’t mean they don’t have the same kind of bonds.

Furthermore, extended family situations were presented as a hallmark of “generational poverty.” Therefore, in order for service providers to fully understand those they seek to serve, they must become familiar with different family situations. Though this didn’t necessarily place the extended family on par with the 2-parent or nuclear models, it did represent an effort on the part of the leadership to learn the unique contours of family life for those living “outside the norm.” My interview with Lana revealed a “learning curve” for her as well, whereby she also came to the realization that African-American families have different structures. Identifying this reality and acknowledging it was especially important, because, as she explained, she would never want children coming from such environments to “feel like they don’t have a real family.”

Though the matter of extended family arrangements was not explicitly addressed in the daily environment of service provision, such family structures were described in disparaging terms in interviews with program authorities at *Parenting Without Partners*. Single mothers who chose to live in the home of their parent(s) were viewed by *Parenting Without Partners*’ leaders as insufficiently “independent.” At *Mastering Motherhood*, extended family living arrangements received a greater level of affirmation through rhetoric that espoused a policy of nonjudgmentalism regarding “different” family

structures among people living in “generational poverty.” However, as extended family structures were associated with poverty, which was an implicitly undesirable condition and linked to other behavioral patterns deemed negative, *Mastering Motherhood’s* support for extended families was certainly limited.

The practice of citing authoritative narratives at both organizations resulted in reinscribing the two-parent nuclear family as normative. At *Parenting Without Partners*, biblical teachings were the authority referenced, whereas at *Mastering Motherhood*, statistical data was cited as authoritative. Single moms could “make it,” and were or could become “real families,” but not without God/the Bible at *Parenting Without Partners*, or help from family/community organizations/broader social networks at *Mastering Motherhood*. Therefore, despite the normative status of the nuclear family, there remained a potentially redemptive space for single mothers (which might not otherwise have existed elsewhere), and those single mothers engaged in practices designed to help them surmount the barriers imposed by single motherhood were left to enjoy a relatively low level of stigma. In part, the stigma faced by single mothers could be overcome to a greater degree at *Parenting Without Partners*, as being a good woman/good mother was more accessible through adoption of the identity of *Christian* mother. This status was less readily available to mothers at *Mastering Motherhood*, in part due to the program’s lesser explicit attention to faith, the lower socioeconomic status of participants, clients’ lesser access to white privilege, and a lack of a parallel or modeling precedent in Lisa’s identity as both a single mother herself and a ‘good Christian woman.’ Lastly, the practice of looking to the Bible at *Parenting Without*

Partners resulted in reinforcing this notion that “Father” God could fulfill traditionally masculine roles, occupying both the breadwinner and disciplinarian functions.

Re-Marriage and Cohabitation

Ultimately, the mothers at *Mastering Motherhood* were encouraged to participate in efforts towards self-improvement because becoming better mothers would make them better women, and thereby prepare them for healthy future relationships. However, mentors frequently emphasized to me that “the end goal here isn’t marriage.” As one long-time mentor explained it:

Maybe [eventual marriage] will work for some women, and maybe some women will never be ready for it. It’s definitely a nice thing, and pretty much everyone wants to be married, and to have someone there for them... someone to grow old with. But it just doesn’t work out for some people.

At *Parenting Without Partners*, many of the curricular materials warned against beginning relationships before healing one’s “emotional wounds,” as the hurt at the dissolution of a second relationship, especially during a time of vulnerability, could sometimes be worse than the dissolution of one’s marriage. Especially disastrous were relationships begun for the purpose of providing a second parent to one’s children, as step-parenting and blended family situations were “hard work” and “didn’t always work out.” Participants were frequently reminded that “it takes a new family a minimum of five years [for children and step-parents] to bond.” However, given *Parenting Without Partners*’ extended focus on preparation for dating, handling dating with children in the house, controlling one’s sexual desires before marriage, and meeting the needs of children in the event of a second marriage, taken together, the curriculum presented the

clear message that marriage (especially in the context of childrearing) was the prized ideal for family life.

At *Mastering Motherhood*, the requirements for participation were another area in which family practices relating to the idealization of marriage were either rewarded or punished. Participants were required to meet 3 criteria: 1) no “untreated” substance abuse problems, 2) no “untreated” mental illness, and 3) no man living in the house. Whereas members of the leadership cited the third requirement as part and parcel of the organization’s desire to serve only those mothers who were truly “single,” mentors more often referenced the third requirement as arising from the organization’s commitment to “Christian values.” However, when I would probe the leadership about the potential benefits of having another wage earner in the home for mothers experiencing financial trouble, despite living outside the bonds of marriage, a number of potential problems associated with such arrangements were listed. Leaders cited the perceived emotional and physical vulnerability risks such living arrangements posed to children, and would then explain that mothers who were drawn into the “knight in shining armor syndrome” also opened themselves to disappointment. According to *Mastering Motherhood’s* leadership, the types of men willing to live with a woman with children, outside the bonds of marriage, were also likely to leave women vulnerable to disappointment and abandonment. Eventually, however, leaders would relate that participating single mothers were barred from having men live in their homes because: “Well, we *are* a Christian organization, after all.” Indeed, mentors were trained in how to identify clues that might signal there was a man living in the home—the presence of men’s clothing and shoes, children’s

accounts of “sleepovers” involving non-related adult men, and mothers’ consistent unavailability for a “drop-in” visit from their mentor were all seen as potential cues that a man might be living in the home. Any of the above observations, the mentors were instructed, should always be reported back to the program leadership. Such surveillance mechanisms were reminiscent of those deployed in the early days of ADC, where social workers would raid the homes of recipients to find evidence of an “able-bodied” man in the house.

Relations with men also surfaced in conversations about why both organizations had made the conscious decision to exclude single fathers from their programming. At *Mastering Motherhood*, leaders mentioned that men had been excluded out of the organization’s desire to focus solely on the “unique issues single mothers face.” Upon probing, those “unique issues” cited by the leadership generally included single mothers’ greater emotional vulnerability after divorce/relationship dissolution, and higher likelihood that they will (appropriately) assume the primary practical responsibility of care for children, etc. However, such recognition of these uniquely female problems did not necessarily prompt a critique of the structures of sexism/patriarchy/life in a male-dominated society. Instead, such issues were seen as stemming more from women’s greater propensity for caregiving, their “natural” roles as wives and mothers, and the absence of an otherwise necessary male breadwinner.

Mothers’ Perspectives

Mothers at *Parenting Without Partners* cited logistical barriers and stigma as the primary reasons behind the difficulties they faced in attending religious services. In turn, these two factors also rendered their search for a “church home” difficult, and in many cases, barred their participation at *Promise Church*, specifically.⁶

As Tina, one young mother with two sons explained:

My family went to *Promise Church* the whole time I was growing up. I still love going to family camp, though the difference is that now I go when they have the single moms’ camp, instead of the “regular” family camp weekend [laughs]—even though I know I’m welcome at either. It’s just hard because I feel like my first son was enough of what people saw as a mistake, and then I had my second baby, and it was like, ‘How did she let that happen *again*, and with a different man this time?’ I’m a single mom, you know, so it’s not like I have someone waiting at home to take care of my son so I can go out and do things without him. And it’s not like I have the money to pay someone to do that for me whenever I want. So he goes everywhere with me, and it’s like I carry my sin with me, everywhere I go. Other’s people’s sins, you know, you can’t see them, so they’re not like, getting constantly judged. They can live out their sins privately, and it’s just between them and God. But my son goes *everywhere* with me. And there I am, walking into church with my sin riding right on my hip, for everybody to see. It’s like I have to wear a big red “A” stamped on my forehead, like in the *Scarlet Letter*, though my problem is being a single mom.

Tina’s perspective is especially interesting because instead of describing her son’s presence as what *others* see as sinful, she herself describes her child as “my sin.” Though it is likely that Tina does not craft her moral framework for understanding her experience without the assistance of cultural messages from existing religious discourse and institutions, it is significant that she uses the language of sin to describe her own circumstances.⁷ Tina went on to explain that because of such distressing and painful assumptions, she is especially grateful that *Promise Church* has the *Parenting Without Partners* group because it provides “a safe place where you can go and connect with the Lord and know everyone’s in the same boat. It’s not like everyone else is going to judge you, so you can get a break from that.”

Monique, another single mother from *Parenting Without Partners* interviewed during a focus group, explained that she was in the process of looking for a “church home,” and had been looking for quite some time (as were the majority of the mothers I interviewed in focus groups). She went on to detail the stigma she faces in worship.

I think also that some [married] women see us [single mothers] as temptresses that are going to come and try to take their man away. Because we don't have a man at home, people assume that either we are or we should be out looking for a man all the time, but I don't even have time to date! Seriously, I barely have a minute to myself some days! But there's definitely this idea that we're constantly out looking for a man to be a father to our children, so some women think we're going to come and start stealing husbands. And sometimes, that can really hurt, you know?

Monique's comments were met with agreement from the other members of the focus group—they felt they had similar experiences and had been perceived in similar ways. In part, then, the stigma unmarried mothers face in congregations springs from their perceived and assigned hypersexualization. One other theme that emerged in focus group settings regarding the stigma single, divorced mothers face was associated with the idea that failed marriages are somehow “contagious.” Mothers expressed that they sometimes felt that other congregants avoided them out of fear that whatever had caused their marriages to fail would also cause the marriages of others to fail, and could somehow be transmitted by proximity.

Despite the messages communicated in the materials and curriculum of both programs, many of the women in both *Parenting Without Partners* and *Mastering Motherhood* were parenting in partnership—with parents, siblings, and family friends. However, the model of family presented in the program curriculum was very much that of a traditional nuclear family, and did not always address the full reality of these types of extended family relationships. The language used to describe the lives of the participating single mothers

frequently referenced “isolation,” “loneliness,” and even in some instances, “desperation.” At the end of a session, immediately following the departure of all participants, *Parenting Without Partners*’ co-leader Mary remarked to me: “You can hear the desperation in their voices. I don’t know how they do it alone. I have a husband, and [parenting] made me crazy with two people sometimes!”

One especially poignant example came from a woman named Rachel, an unmarried mother with a seven year old son. She and her son very obviously had a very loving, close relationship, as evidenced by the two’s conversations and activities Rachel referenced as illustrative examples of the types of issues she deals with as a single mother. Though she also frequently referenced the time she spends with both of her parents, her son’s grandparents, adult siblings, close friends, and the parents of her son’s friends, she still thought of and talked about herself as being fundamentally alone and isolated. The following fieldnote excerpt demonstrates Rachel’s experience of emotional loneliness, as well as the related, envisioned role for religious belief and relationship with “Father God:”

Rachel spoke up next, relating to the group that God had recently called her to start attending family counseling sessions with her son—primarily because of all the questions he’s had about why his father is absent. So, they are both “struggling together to understand why God has called us to be alone together—it’s hard.” In later conversations, Rachel never gave any indication as to where her son’s father is—only that she “has always been a single mom,” though she maintains contact with her son’s father.

Lisa took over to explain that the absence of a father is something that is very difficult for children to understand, and they each experience it uniquely, and differently at each stage in their development. It is a continual struggle to make sure children know they have not been abandoned by a parent because they are not loved. However, they can be reassured by the fact that they will always be both loved and accepted by God. Lisa further explained that on occasion, when there is doubt, either in the hearts of children, or in [single mothers’] hearts, it is important to remember that God will “always provide,” because he is “absolutely dependable.” Children should be continually reminded of God’s presence as a source of support. “Father God” can be the ultimate source of strength and protection from fear and loneliness, and we sometimes forget that and need to turn to His word to feel that presence and strength.

As in the above fieldnote excerpt, God was often offered up as the solution to filling both the emotional and physical absences that resulted from single motherhood. The way to combat these feelings of loneliness, both for children and for their mothers, was to turn to God for companionship and guidance. As well, God was depicted as “strong” and as a “provider.” However, perhaps even more interestingly, when faced with the daunting task of providing children with emotional reassurance, God was seen as a potential replacement for the extra set of hands that having a father in the house would have brought. As I demonstrate below, God was called upon to provide a number of roles associated with “father” in the lives of single mothers and their children: protector, provider, source of strength, and perhaps most prominently, strict disciplinarian.

The Stretched Strict Father Model

The SNAF has exhibited variations in form and function over time and place—though the central tenets and main ‘ingredients’ remain the same (Hareven 1991; Skolnick 1991; Stacey 1991). Lakoff’s (1996) landmark work *Moral Politics* explores the cultural schematics that sit at the intersection of family ideals and the culture wars, offering insight into the contours of the contemporary SNAF. He argues that the two predominant versions of American political morality (conservative and liberal) entail two corresponding, idealized conceptualizations of the family: “nurturing parent” morality and “strict father” morality. The “nurturing parent” model is characterized by viewing the roles of men and women as relatively interchangeable. Marriages are a union of equals, and husbands and wives are free to ‘play to their strengths’ when dividing childrearing responsibilities and household tasks. Relationships should be maintained

insofar as they fulfill the emotional needs of those involved for self-expression and self-actualization. In contrast, “strict father” morality dictates that men and women are fundamentally different by nature, and therefore have different and complementary strengths and weaknesses in childrearing and household tasks. In the context of marriage, husbands are generally responsible for breadwinning, child discipline, and their responsibilities are located primarily in the public sphere, whereas wives’ efforts are considered best placed in domestic upkeep, child nurturance, and relegated to the private sphere. Instead of culminating in a sense of fulfillment and self-knowledge, relationships should instead be cemented and maintained out of a sense of duty, commitment, and tradition. Rules and discipline are to be imposed for the sake of maintaining continuity with the proper moral order.

As Edgell & Docka (2007) point out, one of the main differences between the “strict father” and “nurturing parent” ideals lies in the extent to which they rely on traditional notions of gender.⁸ Primarily, Lakoff develops these two models as an explanatory device for understanding the stakes of the battle over the culture war, which is rooted not only in gender and family, but more broadly, in disagreements over the extent to which the public (coded female) and private (coded male) dimensions of social life can and should be made separate. Lakoff postulates that there is a marked affinity between the “strict father” model of morality (and family life) and politically and religiously conservative communities.⁹ Indeed, some research that suggests this is the case, though some analysts argue that “male headship” does not necessarily imply clear-cut and

straightforward male domination and female submission, and is instead more ideologically symbolic and flexible in practice (Gallagher & Smith 1999).

The *stretched strict father* model is the term I use to refer to a specific “cultural schema” for idealized family life (Sewell 1992; cf. Edgell & Docka 2007). In particular, the term references rhetorical and practical strategies program leaders and single mothers used to conceive of participants as living out their family lives in a manner consistent with biblical imperatives (and therefore, organizing their family lives in a morally respectable fashion). Primarily, doing so involved reference to engaging in an emotional relationship with God that would potentially mirror two-parent, SNAF-inspired ideals. In practice, this involved mothers’ references to relying on their relationship with God, as engaged through conversation via prayer, quiet reflection, referencing the Lord and his desires in acts of child discipline, and interpreting scripture in the context of the daily challenges presented by life as a single mother. Under this paradigm, children disobeyed the Lord when they disobeyed their mothers, which was an affront both to God’s authority and Jesus’ self-sacrifice.

At *Parenting Without Partners*, adherence to *stretched strict father* morality was primarily upheld and demonstrated through a gender-coded division of labor between God and single mothers. This model for family life held single mothers responsible for providing love, compassion, and nurturance for their children, whereas “Father God” was seen as responsible for upholding discipline and serving as dependable provider—for both children and mothers. Because the “strict parent” model, and the traditional family forms that correspond, generally did not encompass the lives and experiences of single

mother families, I refer to this reconceptualization as “stretched.” Specifically, my use of the language of “stretching” and “innovation” is borrowed from Edgell’s discussion of worship community authorities’ practice of modifying traditional, male-breadwinner family rhetoric and practices to meet the needs of congregants—primarily those living in dual-earner households (2006).

However, although family models were “stretched” at *Parenting Without Partners*, traditional conceptualizations of gender remained, for the most part, upheld. Mothers were still primarily expected to function as loving, compassionate nurturers. Moreover, the mothers’ role as compassionate, caregiving nurturer was further conceptualized as mediating the strict “rules” put forth by biblical mandates. In other words, mothers were seen as functioning as intermediaries between their children and God’s strict rules *through* their caregiving roles.

In addition, while the needs for which God provides were sometimes framed in material terms (for example, prayer for the meeting of material needs was one strategy mothers were encouraged to deploy to face financial struggles), more often, God was seen as providing for immaterial needs (for example, protection in the face of adversity, consistency, and family stability). In Lisa’s words, her “passion is helping single moms realize how their lives can be secure and stable in a relationship with Jesus Christ.”¹⁰

Mobilizing the Stretched Strict Father Model at Parenting Without Partners

At the outset, mothers explicitly cited a need for assistance with discipline as one of their primary motives for coming to the group—a task they felt would be aided through growing in their relationship with God.

Joyce next decided to speak, relating that earlier that day, her daughter had decided to tell their landlord about the two cats they have, which were prohibited by their lease agreement. She said she was so angry, she didn't know what to do with her daughter or herself! So, she's been trying to pray to the Lord for guidance on how to appropriately discipline her child, as well as requesting inner strength to find the patience and understanding she knows He expects of her.

Similar stories were common. Cathy needed “help incorporating God” into her children's lives so “the Lord can help me teach them the consequences for their actions.”

After a negative progress report from her son's teacher, Samantha realized she “needed another resource beyond herself in figuring out how to lay down the law,” and recalled from her more religiously-observant youth that the Bible offered a number of instructive examples.

The curriculum offered many examples of how mothers could invoke God's wishes and desires for children and their obedience. The following fieldnote excerpt recounts one such example:

The video next switched to an interaction between a mother and her son. The mother was trying to explain to her son why she had grounded him—he was asked to turn off the television set and refused. The mother explained to her son that when he disobeyed her, he also disobeyed God. Therefore, he had not only disappointed her, he had disappointed God as well, and as the Bible teaches, there are serious consequences for disobeying God. Despite his disobedience, however, she still loves him and so does God. ...despite the fact that he may, sometimes, be disappointed.

In the above passage, the mother in the story explicitly invoked God's paternalistic “disappointment” as a strategy for encouraging her son's obedience. This was a recurrent theme in the weekly curriculum, and was offered up to mothers as a way to deal with the

fact that children would sometimes be rebellious, and dealing with that rebellion alone would be difficult, if not impossible, without the help of the Lord and his teachings.

A similar story helps to further illustrate the strategy of relying on God as disciplinarian.

One woman depicted in the video told the story of a rebellious son who did not want to go to church. She eventually dragged him in to speak with the pastor of the family church. The child explained that basically he was struggling with the question of “whether there might be another God, or another way.” The pastor had a very serious conversation with him, and “scared the heck out of him.” Non-believers, the child was warned, would face serious consequences on the day of judgment, and they would also likely lack the necessary direction they need in their lives to discern good from bad choices. The pastor then told the rebellious son that it was likely because of his mother’s prayers that God hadn’t decided to strike him down on the spot. He further explained to the child that when he does not go to church, he ensures his mother is disobeying God, as she is asked in the Bible to bring her children up in the ways of the Lord and is responsible for his instruction until he is an adult and no longer living under his mother’s roof. At that point, the insubordinate youth decided to start attending services regularly, as he was scared and “his arrogance” had been revealed to him. The mother related that she had been especially pleased with the outcome, as “it’s not just about what *I* want for him anymore—it’s about what *the Lord* wants.” As a single parent who is faced with the tasks of both a mother and a father, this was an invaluable experience. She related, “It’s like being able to say, ‘just you wait until your heavenly Father gets home!’”

This example is instructive on a number of fronts. First, serious consequences for “rebellion” were explicitly delineated—should the child choose to disobey, he would lack moral direction and be punished “on the day of judgment.” The consequences for the child’s misdeeds would be harsh, severe, and (potentially) swift. Furthermore, by disregarding God’s wishes, the rebellious youth had not only put his own fate in jeopardy, but his mother’s as well. It was only through the mother’s concerted efforts at ‘running interference’ that her son had not been “[struck] down.” Together, then, God and the single mother depicted in the video had decided the child’s fate, and most importantly, had cooperatively worked to inspire a meaningful change in the young man’s behavior.

Not only did the curriculum emphasize that Lord offered disciplinary models, it also provided instruction on the proper division of labor between single mothers and “Father God” (as in the above passage as well) in childrearing.

One mother appeared on the screen to tell the story of how she found out from a friend that her son had been using Facebook—despite being forbidden from it. So, she “decided to play the grace card,” and acted with forgiveness toward her son, asking him why he chose to disobey her, as disobeying her meant disobeying God himself. Sin, she explained to her son, incurs “the ultimate punishment”—a reality she hoped would make him sufficiently fearful to rethink his actions. Together she and her son read a series of scriptures on grace and mercy, and as a result, she and her son were so moved that they sat crying together. In the boy’s “time of need,” his mother was able to comfort him, remind him of Jesus’ self-sacrifice for our sins, and provide him with the necessary love to inspire change. Now, she has his password and full access to his account so she can monitor his activities. It was scripture that changed the situation for them both.

In the above passage, the mother depicted served as loving teacher and nurturer, working alongside and in complement to God’ role as punisher.

Later, in the same video, another mother explained that she used to be a “helicopter parent,” running after her kids at the slightest hint of danger. However, she eventually had to learn that she should “take a step back” and allow her children to “make mistakes and learn from them.” In doing so, she should always remember that God would be looking out for her children and protecting them. Thereby, again, the mother served as facilitator of her children’s learning, while God served as vigilant protector. As paraphrased in the below fieldnotes, the narrators in the video went on to relate:

When children disobey, you must therefore look for the reasons why they disobey, in order to “parent from the heart.” Doing so involves looking to “the emotional side of things” in order to better understand and support your children. ...you must remember that you are not God—you should not assume that you know what’s going on in your children’s hearts without taking the time to talk to them about it. Only God knows your children completely and knows what is best for them. ...As single mothers, it is important to remember that children need to be nurtured both physically and spiritually. Therefore, you must give them hope... However, it is important that single mothers not go “overboard” with their standards for consistency—doing so can create guilt especially in the hearts of single mothers. Instead of using a discipline-based approach, single parents would do well to try a “heart-based approach” to childrearing, as some other qualities are just as important as discipline and consistency, and God will provide for these elements if you rely on Him and allow Him to. ... An important struggle in “Christian parenting,” according to the narrator, is to be sure you don’t reduce your relationship with your child to rules, or a set of dos

and don'ts. Children should instead be encouraged to obey out of love for oneself, their mothers, others and God. Too many rules can cause rebellion in children that are so inclined. Rules are, however, necessary, as they are intended to save us from the consequences of breaking them. They are not rules for rules' sake, and you should tell your children as much.

As the above two passages make clear, ultimately, God should be responsible for meting out discipline, dictating rules for behavior and consequences for transgression, protecting children from the dangers of the world, as well as “know[ing] what is best.” Mothers, on the other hand, should be responsible for serving as instructors and acting as loving, compassionate caregivers in their traditionally feminine familial role. As the video curriculum detailed, instead of encouraging children to obey for obedience's sake, single mothers should instead inspire children to obey out of love, as mothers are particularly well-suited to a “heart-based” approach for parenting. Attempts at doing otherwise may backfire, instead eliciting feelings of “guilt.” Not only are such claims evocative of the ideal role of women as wives and mothers in traditional family structures, they are also suggestive of elements of traditional gender, insofar as they invoke the emotional tendencies of women. Similarly, during one of the prayer meetings at the “single moms family camp,” Lisa related that women were particularly well-suited to connect with God on an emotional level, and should try to build a relationship with him on the “feeling” level as opposed to the “thinking” level, as “you cannot both feel a kiss and analyze it at the same time!”

A final component of the *stretched strict father* model mothers were encouraged to develop was the recognition that God should serve as “ultimate authority” in their own lives as well. Claims such as these established a line of “familial” authority that extended

from God, to mothers, to children, and therefore mirrored the structure of a traditional nuclear family.

The narrators next mentioned that the audience should remember that God uses the experience of parenting to parent you. Parenting is a learning experience—full of messages and lessons from God. You should also always remember that your children will mirror your strengths and imperfections as a parent, and you should therefore look to God to model your own behavior as well—both for your own good and the good of your children. ...Single mothers should especially learn not to put their own desires for their children above God’s desires for their children. Therefore, they must learn to address matters of the heart and grow to love the Lord as ultimate authority. Living for anything else other than God is a “false existence.” If one does not have God in one’s life, one might engage in other self-destructive behaviors, such as looking for a “savior replacement.” ... Christian single mothers also do well to recognize they cannot achieve righteousness on their own—they need Christ. Self-righteousness, and thinking and acting as though you have all the answers, ultimately only serves to distance you from God.

Demonstrated above is the idea that as mothers guide their children, so too does God guide mothers. And “Father God” does so in a fashion reminiscent of the “spiritual headship” expected of husbands in the religious instruction and leadership of their wives as delineated in Gallagher & Smith (1999). In addition, an important element of the above passage is the message that single mothers cannot effectively engage in the duties and responsibilities associated with parenting “alone”—it is only with the presence of God that mothers can avoid “self-destructive behaviors” and “self-righteousness.”

Generally speaking, mothers were very receptive to the messages they received in the curriculum, from program leaders, and in group discussion. I recorded the following fieldnotes recounting the final minutes of one of the first sessions I attended:

When asked about lessons learned from the evenings’ materials, Samantha spoke up first. She explained that although she and her son love God, go to church every Sunday, and pray every night, she does not often bring God into her explanations of why her son should do something a certain way, or into their disciplinary conversations. She especially liked this part of the video, and said she found it helpful to see this type of discipline modeled for her, and will begin using the methods at home immediately. “I can definitely see how showing my son the proper way to handle situations will be much easier with God standing beside me and guiding me. I feel so much less *alone* after getting the information I got tonight!”

Stories like Samantha's were not unusual, nor were they confined to the first few sessions. Mothers would return to the group each week and enthusiastically share stories of how they had implemented new strategies of calling on God as authority figure, and relied on his wisdom and "dependable" capacity "to provide" throughout the week.

Discussion & Conclusion

Ultimately, *Parenting Without Partners* was able to provide participating single mothers with a significantly less stigmatizing environment than *Mastering Motherhood* for a number of reasons. First, they were designed to serve other "good, Christian women"—a status through which many single mothers were able to (re) claim their moral standing as community members entitled not only to assistance, but also respect. In contrast, *Mastering Motherhood* was open to both Christian women and "non-believers," which meant that participants could not lay claim to this face-saving status. Furthermore, the fact that *Parenting Without Partners* was led by a woman who had experienced single motherhood herself worked to decrease the moral distance between congregants and the religious leaders that provided vital resources for the program. Lastly, the availability of the *stretched strict father* model provided the ideological basis for the necessary legitimacy of single mother family structures—albeit partial and incomplete. Under this framework, providers served families they believed to be living lives consistent with biblical teachings, which also allowed them to make broader appeals for support to the congregation in which the program was housed—a project which otherwise may have proven difficult. *Mastering Motherhood*, on the other hand, could not engage this strategy because of the moral (and social) distance between providers and recipients,

because biblical tenets did not occupy a position of influence in daily programming, and because the program served both the faithful and non-believers. Though I suspect this dynamic may have been behind *Mastering Motherhood*'s decision to call for greater autonomy from the church that housed the program, their continued reliance on resources from the church, however meager, would have pre-empted their desire or capacity to lodge such criticisms.

Ultimately, the *stretched strict father* model was available only to participants at *Parenting Without Partners* and not mothers at *Mastering Motherhood*, given the greater prevalence (and acceptability) of explicit religious content and symbolism in programming at *Parenting Without Partners*. In the end, this meant that ironically, the less stigmatizing of the two spaces was available *only* to Christian women (moreover, only to Christian women for whom conservative religious theology was personally resonant), which poses problematic questions of access.

In the end, the *stretched strict father* model was the embodiment and partial fusion of both dominant and alternative understandings of gender and family, as it readily acknowledged that single mothers had to fulfill the functions of both breadwinner and caregiver—though God's presence made juggling both easier, as traditionally male functions could be delegated to the "heavenly father." It worked to accommodate both traditional gender by bolstering an ideology of separate spheres and a gendered division of labor (by insisting children need both the masculine and the feminine in order to thrive), and gender "innovation" through single mothers' legitimate efforts to perform both functions as "good mothers." Therefore, in some regards, the *stretched strict father*

model carried the potential to be a fluid schema that could be deployed to embody either/or and both, depending on the interactive context in which it is deployed, the institutional framework in which it is embedded, and the practices that work to make the conceptual a social reality. The model is significant because it demonstrates that not only can institutions (as in the worship communities in Edgell & Docka 2007) embody seemingly contradictory ways of doing and thinking about gender, but so too can cultural schemas themselves embody seemingly contradictory elements. I see it as an attempt to reconcile ideology and practice, or doctrinaire beliefs with the lived reality of changing family life.

Therefore, the *stretched strict father* is especially worth further consideration and examination, as it forces a fundamental challenge to the ways we conceptualize that which is “traditional” and that which is “innovative,” and how those categories map onto theological conservatism/liberalism and faith-motivation/faith-infusion. A direction for future research involves examining how and under what conditions cultural schemas are *both* traditional and innovative, in order to move one step closer to identifying the mechanisms and possibilities for social change. Ultimately, the *stretched strict father* is “stretched” because it provides a challenge to traditional familism (and associated gender ideology), though it is a partial, incomplete challenge, which leaves portions of the traditional intact.

My findings are further significant in the context of findings regarding traditional evangelical conceptualizations of “male headship,” wherein the man/husband is responsible for the spiritual development of the family and serves as the primary conduit

for the family's connection with God (Gallagher & Smith 1999). Under the *stretched strict father model*, women may perform this spiritual function, and indeed, may be able to perform it better because of their perceived greater capacity for *emotional* connection with God due to assumptions about higher levels of feminine emotional literacy. Again, however, this simultaneously reinscribes and challenges traditional notions of gender.

As well, sketching the contours of the *stretched strict father* model aids in answering questions about the capacity of religiously conservative social service programs to effectively provide services to clients whose family lives do not fit with the dictates of family ideologies rooted in biblical interpretation and traditional orthodoxy. Cultural frameworks such as the *stretched strict father* provide access to resources—both cultural and material—for those whose lived experiences can be described therein. Though family models at *Parenting Without Partners* and *Mastering Motherhood* displayed a measure of flexibility, single parent families remained 'broken.' Significantly, however, such family arrangements were not then regarded as 'undeserving.' In general, as designations of pathology may lead to the *exclusion* of non-normative family arrangements from increasingly constrained resources, the very *existence* of programs for clients living in non-nuclear family structures in institutions that have historically excluded them is noteworthy indeed. Such schemas and practices speak to the flexibility of the institutions that promulgate them.

Significantly, participating mothers also described their family lives as broken, problematic, in need of supplementation from outside programming, "sinful," etc. Single mothers in both programs also continually reinscribed the nuclear and strict father models

by citing their idealized notions of what a gendered division of labor should look like in an ideal family. This should cause analysts to call into question the extent to which the promotion of such ideology in programming is problematic when participants who subscribe to traditional gender and family ideologies *themselves* choose to participate in such program settings.

Overall, the two conservative cases I profiled present a very real example of what Becker (1997) has described as worship communities' efforts to strike a balance between "what is right" and "what is caring." In other words, such efforts represent attempts to bridge the gulf between doctrinaire ideals and the realities presented by the rapid and widespread changes in American family life. If, as I suggest above, such beliefs and practices are what feel "right" for some, and they allow for the creation of a "caring" community, on what basis may they be indicted as "wrong?"

Though their programming models might not fit with the progressive, feminist vision for a gender egalitarian future, *Mastering Motherhood* and *Parenting Without Partners*' efforts represent a step in the direction of change that is often slow and incremental.

However, though there is certainly a self-selection mechanism for clients (each is free to pursue programming that best meets their needs and reflects the unique structure of their own values and beliefs), a potential problem may arise when there is a lack of available alternative programming with more expansive models for gender and family life. Such observations point to the necessity and utility of future research that explores the extent to which programming with alternative models for gender and family life are available in specified, bounded local ecologies of social service programming—especially in an era of

privatization, marked by the rise and potential proliferation of rhetoric and practices that draw on religious neoliberal ideology.

8. GENDER, FAMILY, AND RELIGIOUS NEOLIBERALISM: ACCEPTANCE, REJECTION, AND REITERATION AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

In the concluding chapter, I delineate and expand the three main contributions of my research. First, I argue that the results of the study should be interpreted through a lens that trains the eye to recognize the deeply rooted normative status of the nuclear family and the associated gender norms that follow from this model for family life. Second, I contend that rhetoric tied to religious neoliberal discourse is pervasive, and extends beyond the theologically conservative coalition of elites that (re)produce and circulate it. Organizational leaders draw on the discourse of religious neoliberalism in unique and context-dependent ways in each site, either accepting, rejecting, or reiterating its premises in a fashion that suits their strategic ends. Third, and finally, I argue that the “faith-based” or “community-based” self-identification of small social service organizations should not be taken at face value. Indeed, when self-definitions are interrogated and examined, the religious content, symbolism, and references in such programs are revealed to be shifting and multidimensional, as well as exhibiting change over time. Such insights challenge analysts to reexamine preconceived notions that represent organizations’ religious identity as existing on a scale that ranges from religious to secular.

Decoupling Family and Gender in Faith-based and Community Organizations

The first point of insight that emerges from my findings is that organizational models for family life were more flexible than constructions of gender. Though the distance between nuclear ideals and traditional conceptualizations of gender (defined as

androcentric, polarized, complementary notions of essential differences between men and women) varied in each individual case study, the statement nevertheless applies to all of the organizations profiled. I make a number of other interrelated observations regarding family and gender, and associated rhetoric and practice, in the text that follows.

Although I found a good amount of practices accommodating family diversity, organizational rhetorics did not always reflect the full diversity of participants' family lives. Despite the deep entrenchment of nuclear family ideals, however, organizations that serve non-nuclear families 'stretch'—but do not displace—predominant models for family life to varying degrees, and do so in order to serve a wide range of individuals from a variety of family arrangements.

Furthermore, organizations' theological orientation as either conservative or liberal afforded little predictive purchase on whether or not they dealt effectively with the realities presented by the diversity of clients' family lives—nor did degree of religious symbolism, or the permeation of religious values, in the context of daily service provision. Instead, the degree to which participants had access to and were willing to adopt the mantle of “good Christian” often dictated the strength of their shield against gender and family-based stigma. Such patterns have important normative consequences.

At *Graceful Girls*, faith and biblical references were used to reinforce the primacy of traditional gender, in the form of biologism, essentialism, androcentrism, and gender polarization. However, as evidenced at *Graceful Girls*, *Mastering Motherhood*, and *Parenting Without Partners*, more religious content did not necessarily result in more stigma for individuals living outside nuclear family arrangements.

At both *Mastering Motherhood* and *Parenting Without Partners*, leaders had a well-articulated language to describe the negative effects of family dissolution and subsequently addressed these problems with associated organizational practices. They could describe well the heartache and loss that resulted when individuals are “left behind” by restrictive, nuclear family ideals, and sought to create environments where those living in single-parent and extended family situations would not be penalized or ostracized. This observation should be read in contrast with patterns noted at *Integrity Intervention*, where organizational practices did not address family or family-based inequality, and leaders and volunteers only engaged in ‘family talk’ in the context of interview questions designed to address the matter. In contrast, again, at *Mastering Motherhood*, and especially at *Parenting Without Partners*, in order for participants to avoid a situation where their family circumstances would be harshly evaluated, they had to conduct themselves in a manner consistent with leaders’ definitions of what it meant to be a “good Christian.” Therefore, nonbelievers and the less-than-pious could not access this redemptive space.

At *Integrity Intervention* in particular, a recognition of the existence of gender disparities (via the articulation of the rhetoric of gender inequality) did not necessarily result in practices designed to address the structural causes of these disparities, nor did it result in rhetorics or practices designed to address disparities fueled (at least in part) by differences in family structure. Many times, participants who lived their lives in accord with traditional, nuclear family ideals were rewarded, whereas those falling outside the bounds of traditional family and gender morality were either punished or stigmatized.

Ultimately, organizations' 'stretching' of traditional ideals was accomplished in a manner that built upon the discursive foundation of nuclear family ideals, and therefore also drew on associated notions of appropriate gender roles (as the two were interdependent and inextricable). Therefore, while family models were 'stretched' to some degree in all of the organizations I profiled, they nevertheless reproduced normative understandings associated with the nuclear family model and the trappings of traditional gender. In some instances, these reproductions of the traditional were intentional. In other instances (as at *Integrity Intervention*), they occurred despite an explicitly articulated commitment to honoring alternative ways of 'doing' gender and family.

In addition, rhetoric was generally more inclusive than practice with regard to both family and gender. Information gleaned in interviews about the types of family forms most valued did not necessarily translate into equitable levels of value for different types of family forms in on-the-ground practices—confirming the value of comparing interview data alongside observations of practices. Mainly, I argue this is because the demands of everyday family life typically dictate how gender is lived to a far greater degree than do stated ideologies. Hill (2001) makes similar observations in her study of gender role socialization in African-American families. Although the parents she followed showed overall support for gender equality, such support was mediated by their education, family background, religion, and homophobia. She writes,

There was also often a gap between their ideology and how gender was actually done in families. Structural factors, such as social class, marital status, and wives' employment, were more important than was gender ideology in shaping the actual distribution of work in families. ... The family is the prototype of a gendered organization, as roles and responsibilities are typically assigned on the basis of sex (Risman 1998). ... These findings suggest that, regardless of the actual gender ideology of parents, the practical realities of everyday life shape how gender gets done in the family (501-502).

Therefore, my findings regarding the gaps between ideology and practice echo Hill's observations.

A number of examples from the case studies bring the above generalizations to life. For example, at *Graceful Girls*, family rhetoric exhibited a degree of support—however limited—for elements of traditional nuclear familism. Leaders viewed the primary function of family as oriented around child-rearing; marriage was seen as a dignified (though sometimes impractical) way to cement heterosexual relationships; and healthy environments for children were defined as requiring both male and female parents in order for youth to achieve proper gender socialization. Overall, however, nuclear family models did not displace the value and pragmatism ascribed to extended family, single parent, or heterosexual cohabitating relationships.

Graceful Girls' mentors alternately viewed alternatives to nuclear family arrangements as commonplace, desirable, preferable, acceptable, or unproblematic. As well, both leaders and participants' family lives did not mirror the prescriptions of traditional familism. Ultimately, more doctrinaire family beliefs, inspired by biblical literalism, coexisted alongside innovative rhetoric and practice in uneasy and palpable tension, resulting in a number of conflicting messages regarding both family and gender. Therefore, I argue, *Graceful Girls'* organizational family models were built upon the bedrock of nuclear familism, yet extended to include and honor other forms. This extension, however, was limited by normative, nuclear foundations and assumptions.

Despite a level of flexibility in family rhetoric and practice, *Graceful Girls'* gender-associated rituals and ideologies were far more rigid and traditional. Mentors demonstrated gender traditionalism through voicing a belief in biological, essential differences between the sexes, complementarity in gender roles, and androcentrism as evidenced through a commitment to protecting the fragility of the male "ego." Practices demonstrating *Graceful Girls'* commitment to traditional gender involved the organization's largest fiscal expense: the girls' performance in the years' end "fashion show," which included a runway walk in elaborate formalwear. Additional organizational rhetorics evidencing gender traditionalism included self-improvement curricula designed to aid the girls in becoming "young ladies," and reminders that they were "princesses" growing into "queens of Africa." Ultimately, progressive and innovative models for family did not necessarily result in performances or principles with similar levels of flexibility with regard to gender. I argue *Graceful Girls'* comparatively low level of gender flexibility is attributable to the exacting demands associated with displacing the nuclear family model as normative. Therefore, gender and family at *Graceful Girls* demonstrated a unique decoupling.

At base, *Graceful Girls'* lesser flexibility in gender than in family should be understood in the context of the prevalence of revisionist ideals associated with "cultural mandates" for Black womanhood (Hill, 2009). These revised "cultural mandates" worked to alter traditional family ideals at the expense of reinscribing gender traditionalism. Such "cultural mandates" dictated a valorization of motherhood and family through valuing extended family arrangements, an emphasis on strength which dictated women should be

able to 'go it alone' and 'make it' without a husband (though women "need" "their" men, they don't necessarily have to marry them), and definitions of feminine "beauty" which entailed a redefinition of the four elements of the historically white, middle class ideals associated with the "cult of true womanhood:" piety, purity, domesticity, and submissiveness.

At *Graceful Girls*, the four primary elements of the "cult of true womanhood" were revised such that family ideals were stretched while gender traditionalism remained. While "submissiveness" required respect for men's "egos," it did not involve a command to marry. Purity was reconceptualized as not necessarily requiring abstinence (a historic prerequisite for 'marriageability'). Instead, it demanded monogamy and defined 'healthy' sexual contact as an expression of intimacy with a partner deemed capable of reciprocating with respect and fidelity. 'Impurity,' on the other hand, was marked by promiscuousness motivated by a lack of emotional self-reliance and misplaced attention-seeking. Domesticity was the final area in which traditional "domesticity" and familism were revised, despite the reinscription of expectations for traditional gender roles. The traditional emphasis on women's relegation to the private sphere was abandoned, and instead, good motherhood was characterized by a capacity to combine paid labor with perceived female biological predisposition for the primary emotional nurturing of children. Traditional responsibility for performing the majority (if not all) of the emotional labor necessary for maintaining heterosexual partnerships was also allocated to women. Piety, however, was the one component of the "cult" that remained unaltered, and remained an important part of 'good womanhood,' and especially, being a "strong

Black woman.” However, this did not translate into a decision on the part of leadership to self-define as a “faith-based” organization—a decision I explore in greater detail later in the chapter.

Overall, *Graceful Girls*’ redefinition of the family norms implicit in the discourse surrounding the “cult of true womanhood” should be considered in the context of the historic exclusion of working class, black, and immigrant women from rhetoric and practices associated with this framework. Again, despite their redefinition, subscription to ideals associated with the “cult” served to highlight their ongoing resonance and explain the persistence of gender traditionalism at *Graceful Girls*, despite the non-traditional family lives of participants.

Examples from *Integrity Intervention* serve to further illustrate my generalizations regarding rhetoric and practice in family and gender. As I argue in Chapter 5, an understanding of family and gender at *Integrity Intervention* first requires an exploration of their religious identity. Leaders and providers primarily articulated their organizational identity through contrasting their practices and orientation with ‘other’ faith-permeated, more conservative, faith-based service organizations. Because such ‘other’ organizations were depicted as hypocritical, judgmental, and inappropriately expressive of their religious values, providers at *Integrity Intervention* emphasized that faith should instead be a personal, private matter, inappropriate in advocate/client interactions. Just as articulations of religious values were deemed inappropriate, so too were “family values,” which resulted in a level of silence surrounding organizational ideologies for family life. Interview questions about the “ideal family” elicited responses

where family was described in prepackaged terms that emphasized love, open communication, inclusion, and compassion. However, this does not imply that cultural schemas for family life were irrelevant, or unimportant, as gender-based stereotypes, built around idealized familial roles, informed client outcomes in a number of important ways.

Ultimately, at *Integrity Intervention*, family rhetoric was decoupled from family practice, as evidenced through the gap between silences in ‘family talk,’ and differential client outcomes that varied on the basis of clients’ gender and their perceived capacity to rehabilitate into gendered identities consistent with nuclear family roles. Just as family rhetoric was decoupled from family practices, so too was gender rhetoric decoupled from gender practice. However, *Integrity Intervention* did display a level of consistency between family rhetoric and gender rhetoric (both were described in flexible terms), and between family practices and gender practices (both privileged clients perceived as having the capacity to ‘rehabilitate’ into gendered roles consistent with the traditional, nuclear family model). The fact that *Graceful Girls* decoupled family and gender and *Integrity Intervention* did not necessarily do so should be understood in the context of the fact that *Graceful Girls* was very explicit in their central focus on matters of gender and family, whereas *Integrity Intervention* generally avoided directly addressing the matter. Therefore, explicit articulation allowed for a greater level of flexibility in this regard. In addition, *Integrity Intervention*’s decision to avoid matters of family structure in their formal organizational rhetoric was somewhat ironic, given their explicit commitment to serving older, childless, single men.

As for *Mastering Motherhood* and *Parenting Without Partners*, both organizations promoted the rhetoric of traditional familism. However, practices at both organizations were far more accommodating for non-nuclear structures (specifically, single motherhood) than existing literature on family ideology in theologically conservative environments suggests. Despite such accommodating practices, however, at *Mastering Motherhood*, a level of moral stigma surrounding single motherhood remained. Such stigma was at least partially attributable to *Mastering Motherhood's* custom of ascribing moral authority to mentors living in nuclear family arrangements, as well as the social distance, and status differentials, between mentors and mothers.

In contrast, *Parenting Without Partners* spoke of single mother family arrangements as far less morally problematic. In part, this sprang from leadership sharing the status of single mother with participants. Family ideology was therefore decoupled—though sometimes to a limited degree—from family practice at both organizations. At *Mastering Motherhood*, on the other hand, practices demonstrating a limited level of support for traditional familism (via the stigma single mothers encountered) and traditionalism in family rhetoric made for the tightest coupling of traditional family practice with traditional familism in rhetoric than in any of the other case studies. Again, however, services at *Mastering Motherhood* were organized to pragmatically accommodate the difficulty single mothers faced in raising their children with limited resources. In addition, both organizations were traditional in their gender rhetoric and gender practices. As well, *Mastering Motherhood* and *Parenting Without Partners* therefore both coupled

nuclear family-based traditionalism in family rhetoric with traditionalism in gender rhetoric and practices.

Parenting Without Partners' capacity to maintain an environment where single mothers encountered lower levels of stigma was further associated with their practice of employing a 'stretched' version of biblical mandates for morality in family life.

Parenting Without Partners' 'stretching' of biblical mandates nevertheless dictated a preference for male-headed, two-parent family model, which involved drawing on evangelical rhetoric about the role of "Father God." Such rhetoric was deployed in such a fashion that "Father God" was represented as serving as a disciplinary, supervisory, and protective authority for children. As well, "Father God" was represented as a masculine provider offering a source of loving support that might otherwise be fulfilled by a husband. Single mothers were encouraged to rely on "Father God" as "absolutely dependable" in times of both emotional *and* material need. In this fashion, the practice of inviting "Father God" in as a member of the family unit allowed single mothers to represent their family lives as consistent with biblical teachings, and therefore, deflected moral scrutiny.

Parenting Without Partners' practice of representing single mother families as 'complete' and consistent with nuclear models was ironic, given the prominence of religious language and activities that would otherwise depict the physical absence of a father as problematic, given *Parenting Without Partners*' theologically conservative orientation. Notably, however, this "stretching" was only available to 'insiders'—other white, largely middle class, women who openly identified as Christian, or were otherwise

open to the prominence of religious symbolism and the specific flavor of *Parenting Without Partners*' expressions of faith. This reality points back to one of the central concerns motivating the dissertation—namely, the capacity of faith-based organizations to accommodate diversity. Participants at *Mastering Motherhood* were more socioeconomically, racially, and religiously diverse, and therefore, such “stretching” strategies may have proven untenable.

In the context of my case studies, the extent to which faith formation was an important part of organizations' goals and activities often dictated a focus on spiritual needs at the expense of focusing on material needs. Whereas *Integrity Intervention* was best suited to address material needs, they explicitly defined themselves against more faith-infused environments. Again, this led to a more general silence on matters of family, which inhibited the organization's capacity to address inequalities stemming from SNAF-associated ideals and traditional notions of gender.

In many ways, the findings at hand reach conclusions very similar to Edgell & Docka's (2007) study of worship communities with membership bases including sizable amounts of individuals living in non-nuclear arrangements. Edgell & Docka (2007) found family ideals and associated constructions of gender overlapped in simultaneously mutually contradictory and reinforcing ways. Similarly, I find the boundaries of 'innovation' in organizational family ideals are defined by the extent to which non-nuclear family models call dominant beliefs and practices surrounding traditional conceptualizations of gender into question. As in Edgell & Docka (2007), I find that those living outside the nuclear ideal are often invited to access services, or are even actively honored through

word and deed. However, again, leaders are less willing to ‘innovate’ in ways that challenge fundamental ideals about androcentrism and differences between the sexes that are viewed as complementary or essential, rendering ‘innovation’ incomplete and partial, which is consistent with existing knowledge on institutional change as an incremental process.

My findings thereby extend Edgell & Docka’s (2007) conclusions in that the contradictory and coincident relationship between the social construction of gender and family forms occurs not only in ministry to church members, but also in social welfare services offered to clients in faith-based and community organizations. Therefore, I make an important contribution to ongoing conversations about family, gender, and religion by extending inquiry to faith-based and community organizations, as well as bringing a feminist, intersectional perspective to the body of literature on the faith-based initiative.

Religious Neoliberalism and Need Interpretation

The second main finding I highlight is that the discourse of religious neoliberalism extends beyond the elite circle of theologically conservative political figures that propagate it. Local religious and community organizations’ leaders draw on this discourse when representing, interpreting, and subsequently resourcing the needs of the clients they serve. In all of the organizations I profiled, there was some level of social distance between providers and recipients. Shifting the lens of examination from ministry for members (or serving one’s own ‘flock’) to broader calls for stewardship of

the community and the 'less fortunate' brings conclusions regarding the interpretation of need into stark relief.

Religious ideology has historically been a central force in shaping powerful distinctions between the 'deserving' and 'undeserving.' In unique ways in each of the sites, leaders deploy, reject, and rework elements of the broad discourse of religious neoliberalism in creative ways to establish local interpretations of need. Leaders draw on broader, elite-established reservoirs of meaning when they weave together distinctive, context-dependent, and strategic combinations of one-of-a-kind articulations of the ethics of individual responsibility, orientations to antistatism, beliefs regarding the rule of the market over social life, advocacy for the most appropriate texture of religious projects of remoralization, and specific orientations to processes of welfare state devolution.

Many of these local narratives of need interpretation either explicitly or implicitly hearken back to the notion that nuclear family life is the primary moral standard for family arrangements, or the normative centerpiece by which alternatives should be evaluated. As well, cultural models that reference race, gender and family intersect with articulations of rhetoric that engages in conversation with religious neoliberalism in particular ways in each setting. These intersections result in distinctive formulations of the moral categories of 'deservingness' and 'undeservingness' (or in other words, entitlement or disentanglement), which together produce gendered client outcomes, and influence how organizations define successful clients.

Information from the case studies illustrates these observations well. For example, at *Graceful Girls*, need interpretation processes were an important part of the social construction of gender at the organization. Poverty and “risk” prevention efforts were bound to gender through individualizing promotions of “good womanhood,” whereby strategies for moral reform, designed to combat problems associated with marginalization, were more heavily utilized than strategies designed to address systemic inequality through looking to increase access to material resources. Because the causes of marginalization were defined in individualist terms, proposed solutions to the problems the young women faced were also individualizing in their focus on achieving “good womanhood.” Three important factors explain this pattern. First, there was a lack of material resources available to the organization due to persistent underfunding. Therefore, the moral authority of mentors was *Graceful Girls*’ primary available resource. Second, there was a distinct lack of alternative, available, and resonant discourses that would have depicted marginalization as stemming from systemic inequality, as opposed to individual-level problems. Lastly, individualizing rhetorics of “empowerment” sprang from the leaders’ genuine desire to see girls achieve “good womanhood,” given their tenuous prospects for achieving material prosperity.

Reverting to individualist rhetorics in the face of a lack of structural resources was by no means confined to *Graceful Girls*. Indeed, this was a pattern I noted in all three case studies, as well as in interviews with organizational leadership across the metro area. In general, it seemed that the greater the lack of consistent sources of funding, the more often I found organizations deploying individualizing, moralizing frameworks for

understanding poverty. Perhaps logically, when organizations can offer only moral resources, such resources are considered the most viable solution to defined problems. I conclude that such individualizing patterns of need interpretation are a likely hallmark of the underfunding of the work of community-based nonprofits.

In addition, many leaders at faith-based and community organizations throughout the sample associated the dearth of resources brought on by the economic crash, and subsequently, funders' desire to "get the most bang for their buck" as fueling less costly strategies for helping clients. When volunteer labor is the greatest resource available to an organization, relying on such volunteers to provide moral modeling for clients' lives becomes the most concrete way for programs to offer help.

However, such practices also served to reproduce and reinforce discourses of poverty that sort the "deserving" from the "undeserving," as this binary conceptualization of poverty provides a readily accessible standard for discerning associated needs and establishing criteria for preserving scarce resources. It is important to note that individualizing frameworks were not necessarily deployed out of a desire to attribute blame, but were instead fueled by pragmatism, as leaders were faced with the demands of deciding how to distribute ever-dwindling resources. I further conclude that if such programs were more adequately funded, the impulses that drive distinctions between the 'deserving' and 'undeserving' would likely become less salient.

Need interpretation at *Integrity Intervention* was also tightly coupled with gender and family models. Specifically, *Integrity Intervention's* practice of rendering family a taboo

subject for conversation and reflection resulted in a situation where providers resorted to practices consistent with implicit, default understandings of traditional familism (and related gender roles) that systematically privileged and punished clients for demeanors and behaviors that displayed either consistency with or deviance from traditional nuclear family ideals. This created a gap between rhetoric (marked by silence) and practice (which made gender and family ideals very important for client outcomes). As well, providers' gender rhetoric dictated that gender difference shouldn't be important, because single childless men should be resourced just the same as women with children, and men and women have essentially the same needs, despite the implicit assumptions of protectionist social policy. However, gender rhetoric was decoupled from gender practices, in that program requirements were less stringently applied to women (which resulted in more resourcing for women).

Similar to *Graceful Girls*' orientation to participants, *Integrity Intervention*'s individualist understandings of poverty, and binary conceptualizations that contrasted the "deserving" with the "undeserving" poor, were the primary discursive structures that providers used to craft their interpretations of client needs. However, at *Integrity Intervention*, both individualizing and structural/radical critiques were present, though only the individualizing, "culture of poverty" frameworks gained traction in the context of limited access to resources. At *Graceful Girls*, on the other hand, structural critiques arose occasionally in conversations between youth and mentors, but many times, such critiques were quickly shut down through mentor disapproval. Despite *Integrity Intervention*'s leadership's occasional efforts to offer more structural explanations for the behaviors

associated with “generational poverty,” moralizing and individualizing frameworks gained ascendancy.

A significant difference between *Graceful Girls*’ and *Integrity Intervention*’s deployment of moralizing and individualizing frameworks lies in the fact that *Integrity Intervention*’s invocation of the language of “generational poverty” often contained distinctly coded (and occasionally explicit) racial overtones. This finding is perhaps unsurprising, given that “undeservingness” is often racially coded (Katz 1989; Gowan 2010; Passaro 1996). At *Integrity Intervention*, much of the language used to describe the moral failings associated with those from “generational poverty” was also applied to the family circumstances of African-American clients. In other words, the ‘undeserving’ were often people of color whose ‘different’ cultural understandings—given their background in “generational poverty”—resulted in their ‘failure’ to perform traditional gender and family. Therefore, implicitly, such clients were partially to blame for their own deprivation. Such language included references to clients’ welfare dependency, a lack of understanding of the normative conventions governing middle class morality, sexual promiscuity, absentee fathering, disconnection from or fragmented family units, increased levels of substance abuse, and more frequent encounters with the criminal justice system.

Examples from *Mastering Motherhood* and *Parenting Without Partners* are further informative as to the unique ways the needs of clients were framed. Whereas *Parenting Without Partners* defined the needs of single mothers primarily in spiritual terms (or if in material terms, serviceable through spiritual resources), *Mastering Motherhood* displayed

a greater capacity to conceive of the needs of participants in material terms. However, despite a greater recognition of material need, the resources *Mastering Motherhood* offered (mentoring and associated moral modeling) were primarily immaterial and associated with individualistic conceptualizations of the root causes of hardship. As at *Graceful Girls* and *Integrity Intervention*, the offering of immaterial resources to alleviate material deprivation was associated with a dearth of material resources.

At *Mastering Motherhood* and *Parenting Without Partners*, again, as moral resources were the primary available resource, correspondingly, moral reformation was represented as participants' most important need. The echoing of rhetorics on moral reformation at *Integrity Intervention* and *Mastering Motherhood* should be partially attributed to both programs' reliance on Ruby Payne's *Bridges out of Poverty* curriculum in crafting their program and training their volunteers. Also unsurprising is an absence of the application of the *Bridges* curriculum at *Graceful Girls*, a program designed for young women of color, and governed by women of color, given *Bridges*' racial overtones.

It is important to note, however, that while program authorities and volunteers drew on understandings rooted in the discourse of religious neoliberalism in crafting webs of meaning and strategies for action, they did not do so by adopting the contours of elite-level ideology wholesale, mimicking important elements from the mouths of policymakers, pundits, and other national figureheads. Politicians, policy analysts, and academics have very different motivations than do those who work 'on the ground,' engaging the sometimes harsh realities of the lives of the marginalized in their everyday affairs. These differences in agenda are reflected in the unique ways organizational

leaders and volunteers choose to accept, reject, or perhaps most importantly, reformulate aspects of the broad discourse of religious neoliberalism. Program authorities and other ‘front line’ workers seek to achieve very different ends from those who conduct their affairs under the gaze of the national public eye. The individuals at center stage in the project at hand are not seeking electoral favor, expounding on what they do on national television news networks, nor are they regularly called upon to make statements in the halls of Congress (though perhaps they should be). They are leaders in local communities working hard to alleviate some of the suffering they see in the world, and the unique texture of the rhetoric they deploy is imbued with a profound sense of pragmatism, and also reflects their social location in relation to power and resources.

For example, whereas leaders and volunteers at *Integrity Intervention* felt called by their faith to serve the poor in efforts to achieve “personal responsibility,” “accountability,” “self-sufficiency,” and “life transformation,” they did not subscribe to notions that the church should assume the state’s responsibility to provide a social safety net (though they defined themselves in juxtaposition to large, uncaring “bureaucracies”). In addition, they actively rejected “family values” rhetoric, and they saw the “how’s your walk with God?” volunteer approach as highly inappropriate. At *Graceful Girls*, the director and other mentors looked to instill in youth a capacity for “self-regulation” and “personal empowerment,” and viewed biblical values as a central ingredient in the formula for doing so, but rejected the “faith-based” moniker out of disdain for the perceived hypocrisy and judgmentalism of other organizations that instead choose to identify as such. At *Parenting Without Partners*, leaders viewed developing a relationship with God

as a central element in participants' personal growth and efforts to achieve a 'complete' family unit, but single parent arrangements were not demonized as immoral deviations.

At *Mastering Motherhood*, the church was represented as a desirable alternative to state-based social welfare programs, but it was also acknowledged that alongside the offerings of religious institutions, state programs were necessary in temporary, "emergency" situations. In sum, none of the representatives from the organizations profiled for case study reproduced all elements of the discourse of religious neoliberalism wholesale.

Another example of the local reworking of religious neoliberal ideology is the construction and mobilization of the *stretched strict father* model at *Parenting Without Partners*. Worth mention is the fact that the deployment of the *stretched strict father* model represents a local, creative, 'on the ground' iteration of *some* of the tenets of religious neoliberalism's "remoralization" ethic, insofar as program participants were expected to live their family lives in accord with the prescriptions of the model.

'Successful' client status was tied to the adoption of the principles of the *stretched strict father* model.

Parenting Without Partners received state funds under the OFBCI-dictated premise that they would serve to augment existing welfare state structures. In addition, the program's emphasis on developing a *personal* and *transformative* relationship with God speaks to religious neoliberalism's ethic of individualistic resolve of personal problems. However, while program leaders at *Parenting Without Partners* adopted antistatist critiques of public sector welfare state structures, they did not see their programming as having the capacity nor the potential to assume control of the responsibility for operating those

structures. To refer back to the categories delineated in Chapter 4, both Lisa and Mary described their efforts as designed to engage in “partnership” with state structures, and not necessarily “replacement.” ‘Ideal type’ religious neoliberal discourse prescribes that small, generally religious, private sector, organizations receiving state funds for providing social services should entirely supplant government welfare bureaucracies—this particular tenet was rejected at *Parenting Without Partners*. Therefore, while *Parenting Without Partners*’ deployment of the *stretched strict father* model is heavily informed by religious neoliberal overtones, the mobilization of the model does not represent wholesale adoption of the religious neoliberal ideology. Instead, the *stretched strict father* model, developed and implemented at *Parenting Without Partners*, should be understood as a specific, localized, strategic response to the unique texture of defined needs in one organization out of many.

Findings regarding views on devolution from the program director interviews are further instructive in gauging the impact of religious neoliberal elite discourse. Findings regarding devolution should be contextualized in the fact that the religious and community leaders surveyed had already expressed some level of at least *implicit* support for devolution via their decision to participate in the Compassion Capital program. That said, the fact that organizations more commonly saw devolution as a good thing when they also described poverty in individualizing, morally-laden terms demonstrates a measure of consistency with the linkages between devolution and remoralization made at the level of elite discourse. Many program authorities saw houses of worship and other religious organizations as the best candidates for assuming service provision

responsibilities under devolution, as such institutions provide avenues for “personal transformation” through “care and compassion.”

Such findings should be further contextualized in changes in the economic landscape that have made it increasingly difficult for small nonprofits to remain fiscally viable. Less money in the local landscape has meant that funders want “the biggest bang for their buck,” which had aided in fueling organizations’ tendency to frame their goals in individualist terms of “personal transformation,” “life changes,” and “self-sufficiency.” While organizations struggled to find the resources to develop and execute meaningful measurements demonstrating their capacity to affect such change, if leaders demonstrated willingness and capacity to produce “personal transformation” in their clients’ lives, both public and private funders were more likely to disburse. Oftentimes, therefore, such funds were tied to the reproduction of the individualistic rhetoric of remoralization.

Also worthy of additional consideration are the fiscal constraints that serve, at least in part, to dictate the extent to which faith-based social programming can ‘innovate’ to accommodate non-nuclear forms in their formulations of need. The emerging consensus is that the faith-based initiative was underfunded—indeed, so much so that allocated, earmarked revenue (\$8 billion, according to presidential public decree) never materialized. Some of the most scathing criticisms of this reality came from individuals directly involved in the White House’s administration of the program, such as the first (among many) director of the program John DiIulio, and Deputy Director and Special Assistant to the President David Kuo, both of whom have articulated the position that presidential promises for funds deflected attention away from the paucity of the domestic

poverty policy (Kuo 2006). Aside from these failures to disburse, there were also larger consequences for the ecology of local community and faith-based nonprofits, as related to me in my interviews with local Compassion Capital funded small nonprofits (which I detail below). Though indeed, a small amount of money flowed to such organizations through the program, which served to offer crucial support to struggling organizations, the detrimental effects of their participation are noteworthy, as I describe below.

Specifically, the lure of faith-based initiative funds (and assistance with expansion in organizational capacity and structure that the program rhetoric promised) helped organizations begin the first few steps of expanding their infrastructure, by helping them develop databases, secure information technology, build their volunteer networks, streamline their training procedures, learn how to write effective grant proposals to local foundations, and shore up their relationships with other external sources of funding. In so doing, the initiative helped them “dream big.”

However, the fact that this support was only partial, in that future funds promised never materialized, meant that organizations spent time, energy, and their own resources on beginning projects that were never brought to fruition. One such example came from *Integrity Intervention*. They were granted funds to hire a consultant that began the process of database development, but could not finish the project when funds ran out. The organization was left with a partial system, and no staff or time available to complete the undertaking or utilize what had been created—despite investing substantial amounts of their own resources to get the project off the ground, which might have been better spent on other pursuits. In combination with the significant administrative and reporting

requirements associated with the Compassion Capital program, the database project proved a significant source of hindrance for the organization's growth, and even compromised capacity in the maintenance of existing structures. Stories like this were commonplace in interviews with program authorities. In many ways, the faith-based initiative helped organizations learn how to apply for money that simply wasn't there, which again, required a substantial amount of investment of organizations' own existing, meager resources. Ultimately, nonprofit leaders spent a good amount of their precious time readying themselves for a situation that never materialized.

Such diversions of time and attention then forced organizations to become increasingly dependent on alternative external funding resources. Program authorities had to seek out new sources of revenue to execute projects begun under the faith-based initiative.

Oftentimes, these new funding sources favored approaches to problems that promised the greatest result for the least investment—an imperative that served to steer organizations in the direction of moral reform, as 'moral resources' came in the form of inexpensive, volunteer labor. However, such volunteers were likely to lack professional training in working with marginalized populations. Taken together, these realities led Compassion Capital awardees to favor more individualistic explanations of social ills, echo religious neoliberalism's disdain for dependence on state resources (both for organizations themselves and for participants), and perhaps most importantly, tied organizations to bottom-line thinking.

Such market-driven imperatives were espoused in many of the Compassion Capital-sponsored seminars, and emphasized nonprofits' need to model their policies, procedures,

and decision-making processes after corporate, profit-maximizing models in order to survive, and indeed thrive, in a funding environment marked by fiscal austerity. Part of this process involved encouraging organizations to develop the means to gather measurable, quantified results—again, in the service of figuring out how to get the greatest measured results for the least expenditure. However, processes associated with securing the human capital necessary for developing measurements, collecting data, and performing subsequent analyses also involved a level of resource outlay, which oftentimes, organizations could not supply without compromising their capacity to remain fiscally viable, and their ability continue to serve the clients they had originally targeted.

Taken together, the aforementioned processes worked to silence more radical voices of critique. Erstwhile advocates for change were asked to couch their critiques/desires in a language that compromised the power, efficacy, and volume of criticisms that posited the causes of social ills with structural problems and subsequent calls for structural change. Ongoing decreases in organizations' access to material resources, driven by economic crash, rendered the maintenance of structural, systemic critique a difficult prospect. In some ways, then, I argue the Compassion Capital Fund served as a silencing mechanism of organizations' otherwise radical, systemic critiques of existing power structures.

Ultimately, one cannot build something out of nothing, and those working in Compassion Capital-funded nonprofits are thusly constrained by the dictates of existing cultural and material resources. Leaders and volunteers lack both the cultural and material resources to do the type of sustained 'culture work' required to displace the primacy of the nuclear

family and associated constructions of gender. This results in a situation where leaders are compelled to draw on existing cultural resources that place the nuclear family at center stage, as well as drawing on physical resources that are tied to cultural understandings which work to reproduce predominant understandings of family and gender. The predefined terms of what family life ‘should’ look like figure prominently in formulas for program participants to achieve goals on the terms under which they are considered successful clients.

As I state elsewhere, another consequence of leaders’ compulsion to draw on existing cultural resources (and the public and private material resources that are tied to them) was that where both individual and structural interpretations of poverty co-existed, individualizing frames gained ascendancy. This was true of both theologically liberal and conservative programming environments, and can be attributed to a number of factors: the availability and prominence of religious neoliberal discourse as a reservoir for potentially resonant structures of meaning, a general lack of material resources, and the historical roots of individualizing moral discourse within U.S. religious institutions (and associated poverty relief efforts) in general.

Again, though welfare state devolution and the remoralization of social services are generally associated with political and fiscal conservatism, and mainline and conservative theology, finding support for both ideologies among both religious conservatives and *progressive* religious liberals (such as those at *Integrity Intervention*) is significant indeed. As I delineate in the organizational profiles in Chapter 3, *Integrity Intervention* belonged to an interfaith network designed to offer an activist response to homelessness,

with distinctively structural critiques of the causes of both homelessness and poverty in general. Nevertheless, they invested heavily in the philosophies of remoralization and welfare state privatization in both word and deed.

Overall, providers' understandings of the causes and consequences of "generational poverty" are associated with broader shifts in the ways small community and faith-based organizations develop strategies for dealing with marginalization and material deprivation, many of which are fueled by changes wrought by elite neoliberal, and religious neoliberal, agendas. Again, however, such impulses are mediated by the unique texture of local needs and other 'on the ground' circumstances. Outcomes are therefore filtered by local circumstances.

Examples from *Integrity Intervention* are instructive. During the time I spent at *Integrity Intervention*, the organization was engaged in changing the direction of the program from direct, emergency service provision to a "full participant client program" designed to help inspire "long-term change and stability." Official program materials and informal, 'backroom' conversations between leaders and volunteers highlighted the details of and motives for this transformation. Changes in the focus of programming involved a movement away from *Integrity Intervention*'s self-definition as a "drop-in" center—primarily, in order to better address the "underlying causes of homelessness." In previous years, the organization was almost exclusively organized around providing for "immediate needs" and offering "fellowship." While these remained important goals, they were no longer central, and were instead seen as secondary, or ancillary, to other objectives. Relatedly, volunteers and leaders talked about their unique responsibility as

people of faith in helping clients achieve necessary “life skills” to aid in participants’ movement towards “self sufficiency,” “accountability,” and “personal responsibility.” Modifying the program was represented as necessary to ensure greater efficacy in social ministry for the poor, in order to discontinue harmful practices that “enable” homelessness, “perpetuate” the consequences of poverty, and stall efforts to move towards “lasting change.”

Under the previous regime, the project of serving clients’ primary needs was interpreted as involving volunteers’ compassionate acceptance and establishing proximity to caring, loving members of the middle class. However, the new program model was articulated such that program authorities emphasized that love and care would no longer be enough, and indeed, in some cases, might prove harmful. The new model was instead inspired out of a desire to avoid “enabling” and “perpetuating” homelessness, as part of an effort to develop a more comprehensive picture of client needs and effective ways to meet them. The requirements of doing so were reconceptualized to involve pushing clients to develop (with the aid of their volunteer advocate) specific strategies for achieving “self-sufficiency” and “stability.” A handout distributed during one volunteer training session, titled, “The Limits of Charity,” reads:

Hidden in every act of compassion toward the poor is the danger that it will perpetuate the underlying causes of poverty. How do we keep our charity from delaying the structural change that justice demands? By [volunteers] putting themselves into face-to-face contact with the poor, they have taken an important first step. We need to encourage them to continue the journey.

At *Integrity Intervention*, “continu[ing] the journey” would come to be defined as engaging in a project where the moral reformation of clients took center stage. Doing so would require that volunteers push beyond the initial model of simply “being with” the

poor, and extend themselves into the new requirements of “relationship building.”

Clients and volunteers would develop healthy relationships to combat clients’ assumed “social isolation” and unlearn behaviors associated with “generational poverty.” Calls for a new form of emotional labor on the part of volunteers would help push clients into “personal transformation” through helping them make the appropriate decisions about “long term courses of action.”

As the above description of the program change implies, the flip side of this program transition also entailed an expectation for reciprocation from clients. Primarily, this was conceived as a need for clients to demonstrate that they were, indeed, “ready for personal change.” Those unwilling to do so would either self-select out of the program, or be referred to more “immediate needs oriented” alternative programs. My observations of client-advocate interviews, and conversations among advocates that I was privy to, involved a number of clients who were perceived as not making sufficient progress on the goals established “in partnership” with their advocates. These clients were therefore “exited” from the program for a minimum period of six months, during which time they were refused resources and other services.

In addition to making and keeping appointments, seeing their advocate on a regular basis, and setting and working towards personal goals, clients were also expected to engage in a reciprocal form of emotional labor and impression management. In this regard, client “progress” was primarily defined through the imperative of their achieving cultural fluency with the norms of middle class life. Behaviors such as keeping appointments, learning to “advocate” for oneself, unlearning a tendency to “live in the moment,”

personal grooming and “hygiene,” and no direct expressions of a “sense of entitlement” were all estimated by volunteers as indicating client “progress.”

Integrity Intervention's impulses towards moral reform point back towards the explanatory power of Hackworth's (2012) “religious neoliberalism” as the “default” discursive resource dominating the faith-based social service landscape. The implications of this argument are that such ideology will achieve resonance in all faith-based organizations seeking to partner with the state, regardless of their theological liberalism or conservatism. Under this framework, “personal responsibility” and “compassion” are important biblical mandates, though reconciling the two is no easy task, as the language of “personal responsibility,” at first glance, seems to violate understandings that it is within the purview of state responsibility to provide a “compassionate” minimum standard of living. However, emphasizing state responsibility, for some (especially libertarians and other subscribers to the reign of the free market), violates a reverence for the volition and “freedom” of the individual. Hackworth writes, “the most common resolution for this ethical quandary is to begrudgingly acknowledge the necessity of the state for funding purposes but to aggressively promote evangelical alternatives to government welfare” (55). Though *Integrity Intervention* hardly provides an “evangelical” alternative, its ideology and mission do fit within the dictates of this philosophy, which has come to inform a considerable amount of thinking on the new, ideal division of labor between the state and the nonprofit sector, and has risen to prominence in the post-welfare era.

Given that *Integrity Intervention* explicitly defines itself against more evangelical approaches to homelessness, religious neoliberalism provides an especially ironic discursive resource at *Integrity Intervention*. Adoption of the language of moral reformation, despite the moralizing roots of religious poverty relief efforts that extend *across* the liberal-conservative theological divide, is simultaneously peculiar and poignant in an organization with a religiously liberal, and explicitly stated *progressive*, and collectively transformative, legacy.

Changing ideas about social responsibility, caregiving, and compassion¹ among people of faith are, in many ways, consistent with (but not entirely predetermined by) policymakers' articulations of the ideology of religious neoliberalism. In addition, *Integrity Intervention*'s emphasis on "relationship building" and "personal transformation," popular among middle class, religiously liberal service organizations in the post-welfare reform era—in some regards—works to preclude more systemic analyses and radical efforts for social, as opposed to personal, change.

Though leadership at *Integrity Intervention*, *Graceful Girls*, and *Mastering Motherhood* would sometimes reference a more structural critique/radical interpretation of needs (such as a lack of affordable housing and logical inconsistencies in state social programming), I argue they often fell back on culture of poverty rhetoric and sometimes, the *Bridges* curriculum, when dealing with clients as doing so provided a more accessible starting point for volunteers. Unfortunately, however, referencing *Bridges* (and similar approaches) often make getting back to more structural models difficult, if not impossible, as the two approaches (individual culture vs. structural deprivation) can be

diametrically opposed to one another, and difficult to reconcile due to the above-described moral quandary. As at *Graceful Girls*, a lack of significant resources at *Integrity Intervention* worked to ensure the attraction and resonance of an approach favoring the moral reformation of the marginalized, as opposed to a meaningful change in the structures that produce the marginalization both organizations are purported to address. Ultimately, this lack of resources, fueled by the slashing of welfare state entitlements and the under-funding of the faith-based initiative itself, serves to turn the lens inward upon those trapped in poverty, rendering truly transformative efforts difficult.

Rios (2011) describes a comparable situation in pathologizing discourses regarding marginalized youth in his study of low-income Black and Latino young men and the community organizations that sought to serve them. A lack of alternative frameworks for understanding youth deviance resulted in service professionals' criminalization of the young adults Rios followed. These practices proliferated among otherwise well-meaning professionals and volunteers, as Rios delineates below:

...while most adults in the community might attempt to support young people, they may be limited by inadequate policies, philosophies, programming, or financial resources to provide deviant youths with successful alternatives that might allow them to reform. As such, these often well-intended adults often fall back on the dominant resources available to them: zero-tolerance policies, punitive policing, and criminal justice discourses and programs (42).

Rios' work provides a powerful framework for understanding how otherwise well-meaning service and volunteer workers end up reproducing the same talk and practices that marginalize the very populations they seek to serve.

Ultimately, the dictates of religious neoliberalism are useful in understanding the emergence and persistence of faith-based social service policies at the elite level, but do

not necessarily provide nearly as explicit a roadmap for understanding providers' 'on-the-ground' rhetoric and practices. The broader discourse of religious neoliberalism and associated practices establish structural and discursive conditions that render it difficult for service providers to bridge divisions of class and race and render the texture of their client's lives comprehensible. Ultimately, the gap between clients' lives and services providers' rhetorical expressions, or frames of reference, is a largely discursive one. The structural and cultural incentives tied to the discourse of religious neoliberalism results in a lack of available alternative discourses that might otherwise render clients' worlds and identities "sensible" to service providers, despite volunteers' genuine efforts to empathize with and process their clients' experiences through the lenses provided by their own repertoires of personal expertise.

Worth mention, again, however, is that although the representatives of theological liberalism in my program director interviews and at my field site reproduced many elements of religious neoliberal discourse, they did not adopt all tenets wholesale. At *Integrity Intervention*, the practice of using "family values" as a basis for evaluating moral worth was actively critiqued—despite the fact that the organizational silence surrounding faith operated to create a space where alternatives could not be articulated. Therefore, although the dictates of religious neoliberalism were not reproduced in rhetoric, much of their ideological underpinnings were reproduced in practice. In my program director interviews, many providers viewed state-religious partnerships with a critical eye, yet they participated nonetheless. However, they also actively rejected elements of the religious neoliberal discourse—namely, that churches should replace the

state because the state has failed to initiate lasting change. While leaders acknowledged that most state-sponsored poverty alleviation programs had thus far been unsuccessful, they did not necessarily attribute this to the absence of moral expectations for behavior. Instead, they cited the decline of universal entitlement—a doctrine actively rejected by the religious neoliberal agenda. Therefore, while religious neoliberalism is reproduced in unlikely places, it is not reproduced in a fashion entirely consistent with the expectations of elites. Indeed, it sometimes actively works to mitigate, reject, and transform such imperatives.

*Organizational Self-Definitions Among Faith-Based and Community Organizations:
Abandoning the 'Continuum Model'*

The third and final important insight that springs from my research is that organizational self-definition should be viewed as a process that shifts over time, in contrast with more static conceptualizations that take self-definition at face value. By including self-identified community-based organizations in my comparison, I demonstrate that organizations' self-definition as either community-based or faith-based does not indicate "more" or "less" religion.

As well, conceptualizations of the religious identity of organizations that measure religious content on a scale, or on a continuum, fail to capture the ways in which some elements of programming or identity may exhibit high levels of religious symbolism and content, whereas other elements may exhibit a complete absence of religion. For example, while a particular organization may express vehement opposition to the display of religious symbols, or openly discussing religious principles with clients, they may

simultaneously base a good amount of their decision-making on biblical precepts, or rely on houses of worship as a significant source of funding. Such an organization would complicate attempts to describe their character along such a continuum.

Therefore, not only do boundaries between self-identified faith-based and community-based organizations shift over time, they are also more multidimensional and porous than existing research depicts. The bulk of the literature on faith-based initiatives fails to capture these processes. My interviews with program authorities demonstrate that organizations become more explicitly expressive of their religious character or choose to consciously abandon elements of their religious identity as time passes and their structure develops.

Many leaders related that while their organization had “strong, faith-based roots,” such elements of their identity had been “diluted,” deemphasized, or outright abandoned over time. Reasons cited for such changes were usually associated with growth, and included elements such as organizations’ desire to appeal to a broader client base (which might include participants who would otherwise be uncomfortable with religious symbolism or principles), to submit requests for funding to foundations known to “discriminate” against faith-based organizations, or to avoid negative connotations associated with the “faith-based” label (and the faith-based initiative itself, given association with the Bush administration) as part of public relations efforts. As well, one organization cited their decision to adopt the “faith-based” descriptor after financial struggle necessitated a merger with a coalition of local houses of worship operating similar programming. Change over time, therefore, offers another reason for reconceptualizing the boundary

between faith-based and community-based organizations, as well as representing the self-identification of such organizations as fluid and changeable.

Relatedly, leaders choose to represent the religious foundations and character of their programs in different ways, in different contexts. For example, some organizations chose to emphasize their status as faith-based for some audiences (for example, to houses of worship approached for donations), and community-based for others (perhaps for potential clients or to secular grant-making foundations). A number of organizations engaged in this type of selective omission of religious elements in programming.

Although I do not provide a detailed account of the specific causal mechanisms by which these processes occur, my findings indicate that self-representation is an important part of the story of the faith-based initiative, and point to fruitful avenues for future research on small nonprofit organizations.

For example, leaders at *Graceful Girls* expressed reservations about self-identifying as a “faith-based” organization, despite the central import of faith and religious symbolism in their formal curriculum and informal interactions during weekly sessions. The moniker “faith-based” was eschewed because of skepticism about the “hypocritical” motives of other organizations that identify as such, and the exclusionary potential of such language. Many other leaders at self-identified community-based organizations expressed similar sentiments.

A sizable number of other community-based organizations included in the study also indicated notable levels of religious content and identity—an observation that points to a

need to examine the ‘ground level’ practices of organizations in determining their religious character, as opposed to taking their self-identification at face value. A good amount of the literature on the faith-based and community initiative operates under the premise that those organizations choosing to identify as “community-based” as opposed to “faith-based” do so as a reflection of the absence, or comparatively lower levels, of religious content, values, or symbolism. However, many of the community-based organizations included in the study noted religion was important to their organization in myriad ways, such as considering faith an important element of their programming, involving religious authorities in their leadership and governing bodies, noting that many of their organizational representatives and volunteers felt “called” to serve on the basis of their personal religious beliefs, relying on faith-associated funding sources, displaying religious symbolism, or otherwise expressing their religious character.

Nevertheless, leaders chose not to associate with the term “faith-based” for a number of reasons: Concern that potential participants might be excluded through client self-selection, worry about potential funders’ aversion to open religious expression, apprehensions about the broader public’s negative associations with the term “faith-based,” or (as at *Graceful Girls*) perceptions of “hypocrisy” whereby openly identified faith-based organizations claim non-judgmentalism based on biblical precepts, but engage in practices that demonstrate otherwise. Significantly, such concerns were also present in the talk of authorities at self-identified faith-based organizations. Though they did so less often than religiously liberal leaders, some religious conservatives cited similar reservations as well.

Contributions and Avenues for Future Research

As delineated in Chapter 1, my research makes a contribution to a number of lines of inquiry in many different subfields in the discipline of sociology, as well as offering contributions spanning across disciplines. For those working on questions that arise in the gender, family, and religion literature, I offer insight into the ways in which more flexible models of family life may *not* necessarily lead to more flexible constructions of gender. This generalization applies to both religiously liberal and conservative environments alike.

The interventions I offer in social welfare policy scholarship speak to the ways small religious and community non-profits' interpretations of the needs of the clients are intersected with and influenced by family ideals, associated gender constructions, racial stereotypes, and religious ideology. The unique texture of need interpretation in each of my case studies had important consequences for the ways clients were perceived and subsequently resourced. As well, my findings point to the merits of examining the discursive, as well as the material, components and consequences of policy outcomes. Taking an interpretive approach in analyzing a particular policy initiative (the Compassion Capital Fund, established by the Bush Administration's Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives) allows for a view into the 'gaps' that emerge between policy and implementation. I also contribute to interdisciplinary scholarship on the faith-based initiative through my observations about the shifting, and multidimensional nature of organizations' self-representation.

Lastly, my findings engage scholars of culture, given the conclusions I draw regarding the ways in which seemingly contradictory ideological elements are embedded and enacted in institutions and individual actors' 'roadmaps' for social life. Furthermore, my results speak to the ways ideological structures developed at the level of elite discourse are rearticulated, rejected, or transformed at the level of daily praxis.

Overall, data from my case studies suggests that gaps between ideology and practice are the rule and not the exception. While leaders and volunteers often expressed a commitment to egalitarianism, and official program curricula often explicitly reinforced an ethic of equality between the sexes (and sometimes, stated parity between the traditional family and alternative family forms), practices told a different story—one in which the nuclear family was elevated to a position of privilege and prestige, and associated gender roles reinforced male privilege. Such gaps work to further reinforce my overall observation that innovation in family and gender was uneven and incomplete.

Notably, my expectations for the impact of theological orientation and religious self-identification on gender and family rhetoric and practice did not bear themselves out in the data. I expected *Integrity Intervention*, given their theologically and politically liberal legacy, would exhibit considerable departure from gender and family traditionalism.

While this was true of rhetoric, it was not necessarily true of practice, as differences in client outcomes and expectations for behavior dictated implicit support for gender essentialism and complementarity and support for roles consistent with nuclear family ideology. In addition, while religious conviction traditionally provides a lexicon for articulating family-associated concerns, *Integrity Intervention's* practice of removing

matters of family from community dialogue worked to inhibit broader public engagement with matters of faith and family. Similar findings regarding silences in family rhetoric emerged from another case study of a religiously liberal house of worship receiving funds associated with the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives (Edgell & Docka 2007). Additional research is needed to determine the extent to which such patterns are isolated to findings from my case studies, or are instead associated with broader trends in religiously liberal service-oriented organizations and houses of worship.

Another disconnect between my expectations and my findings occurred at *Parenting Without Partners*. I presumed that broader tendencies within theological conservatism regarding the expression of aversion to non-nuclear family arrangements would result in considerable stigma for single mother families. However, instead of facilitating criticism of single mother family formations, the practice of drawing on scripture instead created a space where mothers could reference the presence of “Father God” as completing their ‘incomplete’ families. Therefore, while such family arrangements were indeed viewed as ultimately less-than-ideal (and at *Mastering Motherhood*, associated with a host of other social ills), individuals living in such family structures did not face directly articulated stigma or *explicit* judgmentalism, and were deemed ‘deserving’ of compassionate care and acceptance. However, again, the vehicle for such care and acceptance was clients’ adoption of the mantle of “good Christian.” The extent to which social welfare programming in additional theologically conservative settings of service provision has similar requisites may prove to be an additional avenue for future productive inquiry when seeking to answer similar questions to the ones posed in the study.

Findings regarding the relative ‘openness’ of the theologically conservative environments profiled in the study are inconsistent with data gathered at another theologically conservative house of worship participating in the Compassion Capital grant program (Edgell & Docka 2007), where single mothers encountered considerable amounts of stigma. As the church profiled in Edgell & Docka (2007) was a worship community in the Black church tradition, the question of how race operates in such circumstances (given the ways race intersects with need interpretation processes) is important, and should be explored further. In general, the stigmatization of non-nuclear family arrangements in service-oriented, conservative houses of worship presents another avenue for worthwhile future inquiry.

Furthermore, at *Graceful Girls*, I expected to find their community-based self-identification would lead to the de-emphasizing, or at least a lesser role for, religious commitments. Assumptions in the existing literature contributed to my aforementioned expectation. In particular, documents such as the OFBCI’s 2006 report on federal spending allocated to faith-based organizations includes *only* data from explicitly identified “faith-based” organizations, compiled for the purpose of demonstrating the level of ‘discrimination’ faced by organizations with explicit religious content. Such framings contribute to the misconceptualization of “faith-based” organizations as exhibiting higher levels of religious symbolism, and “community-based” organizations as being more secular in orientation. Indeed, compiled data on federal monies distributed to self-identified “community-based” organizations explicitly refers to such organizations as “secular.”

Instead, I found significant levels of religious expression in self-identified “community-based” organizations, which was vital in organizations’ definition of their mission, in other elements of organizational structure, and central to the texture of the social construction of gender at *Graceful Girls*. As I demonstrate in the chapter on *Graceful Girls*, race and “Black flight” critiques played an important role in the leadership’s decision to self-identify as “community-based,” despite a sizeable level of religious expression in the official, and unofficial, curriculum. Additional research is needed to determine the extent to which race is a central explanatory factor in community-based organizations’ self-identification, despite significant levels of religious expression.

Ultimately, the informal standards by which client privileges and punishments were distributed at *Integrity Intervention*, implicit and explicit assumptions regarding “good womanhood” at *Graceful Girls*, and the moral modeling mentors engaged in at *Mastering Motherhood* serve to further highlight the fact that “personal transformation” is often inflected with cultural schemas that reference gender, family, and race. Individualistic conceptualizations of marginalization relate to cultural schemas of gender and family in that deviations from traditional models for gender and family are seen as individual or “cultural” failures, as in the rhetoric surrounding the “culture of poverty.” Like poverty, gender identity and family structures are seen as self-perpetuating choices that need to be reformed. The implicit victim-blaming inherent in binary conceptualizations of poverty that juxtapose the “deserving” against the “undeserving” poor also reference gender and family ‘failures’ through the representation of the root causes of defined social problems. Such ‘failures’ include the ‘deterioration’ of families due to absentee fathering, cultural

permissiveness about out-of-wedlock births, sexual promiscuity, and children who repeat the mistakes of their parents in the absence of gender-specific role models (as in “babies having babies”).

Ongoing inquiry that explores the connections between cultural schemas of poverty, gender, race, and family will serve to further articulate the contours of such relationships in ongoing social service provision. Given accelerating trends towards devolution, privatization, and remoralization in the context of the ever-changing landscape of the US welfare state, future analysts would do well to direct their attention to the ways ideology and practice regarding race, family, and gender will inform the texture of need and presumptions about the best ways to address such needs.

Worth emphasis is the fact that my conclusions have import and application beyond questions that specifically apply to the faith-based initiative for two main reasons. First, my examination of self-identified “community-based” organizations demonstrates that such groups often contain religious elements and references. It is highly likely that other local, small social service non-profits draw on religious discursive structures, given the long history of religious groups’ involvement in poverty relief efforts (some of which involve partnerships with the state) in the US. Therefore, to the extent that they do, conclusions drawn and generalizations made about the consequences of relying on religious frames of reference in programs’ modeling of gender and family to establish local rhetorics of need interpretation will likely extend to other organizations beyond those associated with the OFBCI (and subsequent, similar iterations of the initiative). Second, practices associated with the OFBCI represent the culmination of the religious

neoliberal agenda, which has been ‘building steam’ since the 1980s, and arguably, since the War on Poverty’s practice of funding small community and religious organizations.

To the extent that such trends continue, my findings will remain relevant and informative.

ENDNOTES

Chapter 1

1. For a discussion of the centrality of the redefinition of the keyword “compassion” in the policy debate surrounding the enactment of the PRWORA, see Wald & Stryker (2009).
2. Directly after taking office in 2000, Bush expanded Charitable Choice to include matters of education, health care, and economic development. In addition, Bush issued four executive orders which created the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives; established faith-based and community initiatives centers in the Departments of Justice, Education, Labor, Health and Human Services, Housing and Urban Development, Agriculture, and the Agency for International Development; amended existing civil rights policy so as to allow religious corporations and educational institutions receiving federal contracts to practice preferential hiring; and allowed programs indirectly funded by the federal government (as through vouchers) to engage in religious indoctrination and instruction.
3. The Bush Administration exerted considerable pressure on Congress to pass legislation that would increase spending and ease restrictions on the use of federal funds for religious organizations. The Community Solutions Act (H.R. 7) passed the House in July of 2001 (Cnaan & Boddie 2002). The original version of the bill included “equal treatment” language that would have prohibited the government from requiring that faith-based organizations remove religious art, icons, or scripture, alter their charters, and/or alter religious qualifications for board membership in order to receive federal funds. In addition, this legislation included provisions exempting all faith-based organizations receiving federal funds from anti-discrimination hiring laws. However, in hopes of passing the Senate, this controversial language was dropped from the text of the bill. After the failure of a series of similar bills, the Charity Aid, Recovery, and Empowerment (CARE) Act was passed by the Senate in April 2003 (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights 2004). The CARE Act, after shedding its most controversial elements, was largely a tax bill that called for \$12.7 billion in new tax breaks seeking to encourage charitable donations, though it also included a provision for a \$150 million (“Compassion Capital”) fund to provide technical assistance to small religious organizations competing for federal funds and additional new money for the Social Services Block Grant (SSBG) (National Association of Social Workers’ website: <http://www.socialworkers.org/advocacy/updates/2003/041103.asp>). The House

passed a companion bill, the Charitable Giving Act of 2003 (H.R. 7), later that same year, but reconciling differences between the two bills proved difficult (Baker 2006). Many of these matters of religious identity and expression remain highly contentious to the present moment, as they have not been revisited by Congress in any systematic fashion since Bush's bid for reelection began in earnest. Because the House and Senate have not yet proceeded with comprehensive legislation, Congress has included faith-based provisions in a series of program-specific proposals and bills, potentially creating a tangle of conflicting laws and rules.

4. Bush's proposed budget for 2002 allocated nearly \$90 million to organizations that expanded or were modeled after existing faith-based social service programs (De Vita & Wilson 2001). In fiscal year 2005, faith-based groups were allocated over \$2.1 billion dollars in funding from budgets for Housing and Urban Development, Health and Human Services, the Department of Labor, the Department of Justice, the Education Department, the Department of Agriculture, and the Agency for International Development. Taken together, this represented an average of 10.9% of the total budgets of the aforementioned agencies. Those agencies funneling the highest concentration of funds to faith-based organizations were HUD (24.0%), USAID (14.2%), DOJ (11.0%), and DOL (10.7%). Grants to faith-based organizations increased 22% from FY 2004 to FY 2005, representing a 38% overall increase from FY 2003 to FY 2005. Despite efforts to close the perceived gap, the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives estimated that secular non-profits receive up to six times more funding than faith-based organizations (Grants to Faith-Based Organizations Fiscal Year 2005, 2006).
5. A 2006 White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives Report titled "Grants to Faith-Based Organizations: Fiscal Year 2005," describes the fiscal structuring of the "faith-based initiative" as follows: "The White House does not distribute any federal social service dollars. Instead, federal agencies distribute social service dollars through both formula grants to State and local governments and their own competitive processes. ...No federal program limits funds only to faith-based organizations (FBOs). FBCOs [faith-based and community organizations] compete for these funds along with all other applicants, such as educational institutions, for-profit entities, and State or local governments" (10).

6. According to a document produced by the National Endowment for the Arts, intended to assist organizations in understanding the requirements of the 2006 Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act (FFATA): “OMB [Federal Office of Management and Budget] guidance defines a sub-award as a monetary award made as a result of a Federal award to a grant recipient (i.e., the NEA award to a State Arts Agency, Local Arts Agency, or Regional Arts Organization) that is then disbursed to a sub-recipient” (<http://www.nea.gov/manageaward/FFATA-FAQs.pdf>). Generally, the term “sub-awardee” was employed by intermediary organization representatives associated with the Compassion Capital Fund, in favor of the term “sub-recipient.”
7. On the issue of religious preference in employment, President Obama and others have acknowledged a lack of legal clarity and a need to review programs on a case-by-case basis (Zeleny & Goodstein 2009). During a 2009 National Prayer Breakfast, Obama reassured his audience that certain faiths would not be privileged over others, and that religious organizations would not be favored over the secular—two criticisms prominent in the critique of the Bush Administration’s early execution of the program (Sullivan 2009).
8. In 1996, Catholic Charities USA received \$1.3 billion (64%) of its income from the state, the Salvation Army received \$245 million (16%) of its funding from the state, and the YMCA was granted \$203 million from various state sources (8%; Black 2004).
9. My use of the term “religious neoliberalism” borrows from elements of Hackworth’s (2012) writings on welfare state politics, in which he coins the term, and Biebricher’s (2011) analysis of the logics of mentoring in the faith-based initiative—though Biebricher does not specifically deploy the terminology.
10. Groups associated with the Christian Right include Falwell’s “Moral Majority,” LaHaye’s “Concerned Women for America,” Perkins’ “Family Research Council,” Phyllis Schlafly’s “Eagle Forum,” McAteer’s “Religious Roundtable Council,” James Dobson’s “Focus on the Family,” Pat Robertson’s “Christian Broadcasting Network, and Reed and Robertson’s joint venture, “Christian Coalition of America.” This collection of individuals and organizations engaged debate on matters such as school prayer, stem cell research, homosexuality, contraception, abortion, pornography, abortion, the content of textbooks, and sexual education.

11. Hochschild's "time bind" (1997) refers to a condition where many adults in dual-earner families (especially women, given their greater domestic demands) begin to feel the home is an increasingly stressful place with too many demands and too little time to fulfill them, whereas work environments begin to feel like more inclusive spaces, offering a sense of belonging where one's labors and 'extra' efforts are especially valued. Hence the text's subtitle, "*When Work Becomes Home and Home Becomes Work.*"

12. My use of the umbrella term "faith-based initiative" is consistent with the way such terminology is used in existing literature on the subject, in that it has a dual meaning. First, it refers to elites' references to and efforts to promote partnerships between small social service programs and government bodies, either in the form of social ministry offerings in worship communities, or small 'grassroots' non-profits. Among those elites supporting such partnerships were the president himself (George W. Bush, and later, Obama), other presidential and cabinet-level administrators, lawmakers, policy researchers and 'think tankers,' and national religious leaders. Second, "faith-based initiative" refers to the network of programs resourced as a result of the aforementioned advocacy efforts. Such programs were and are tied to specific policies and programs such as Charitable Choice, Bush's White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives, the Compassion Capital Fund (established by Bush's White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives, Obama's White House Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships, and related legislation designed to encourage charitable giving. Although many "community-based" organizations were also funded by the above programs, many of the organizations included religious elements in one form or another, and all programs were also promoted as such by supporters of the White House Offices and their associated policy initiatives. I have made distinctions between the two elements (elite references/support and the policies themselves) included under the "faith-based initiative" blanket term where appropriate. Unless otherwise noted, uses of the term "faith-based initiative" refer to advocacy and programs tied to Bush Administration efforts, as all organizations profiled in the study were resourced through the Compassion Capital Fund.

13. See the body of writings produced by Charles Murray, Marvin Olasky, William Bennett, and Dinesh D'Souza.

14. Mohr's (1994) coding scheme includes what he refers to as "text recognition strings for moral terms," which essentially amounted to keyword searches in his review of New York City charity directories from the year 1907. "Good moral qualities" included recipient descriptors such as "who attend church," "purity," "reverence," and "virtuous" (352). The "good" were contrasted with mention of "bad moral qualities" such as "sin," "fallen," "unfaithful," and "temptation," further demonstrating the import of religious symbolism in establishing entitlement (352). Additional codes such as "innocent," "industrious," "tempted married women," and "feeling the need of reformation and protection" are haunted by constructions of gender (352).
15. See Glazer (2001) for an overview of objections to the faith-based initiative raised on the grounds of government abdication of a responsibility to provide.
16. This respondent had been charged with the responsibility of disbursing funds to small organizations in his surrounding community. He related that mid-way through the life of his organizations' participation in doing so, he received a call from a White House official expressing concern that public criticism had been raised about the majority of funds in early years going largely to white, middle class, and conservative Protestant groups. My respondent attributed this pattern mainly to other intermediaries' interpretation of the desires of the White House, as much of the rhetoric coming from the OFBCI was consistent with conservative Protestant theology, and such groups had been targeted in the distribution of information about the faith-based initiative. However, as the organization he represented had been conscientious about being inclusive from inception, the "rattled" official from the President's office was looking to profile his organization's efforts as an exemplar of "diversity" within the faith-based initiative.
17. Many analysts studying faith-based organizations rely on a 2006 White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives Report (*Grants to Faith-Based Organizations: Fiscal Year 2005*) to draw conclusions on government expenditures flowing to "faith-based" organizations from figures included therein. As well, many studies conducted following the report replicate the organizational identification methods detailed in the report. However, there are a number of flaws associated with the ways the report distinguishes "faith-based" from "community-based" organizations. The report details their identification strategy as follows: "In compiling this data, the Federal agencies made good-faith efforts to identify FBOs based on information gathered from a variety of sources,

including an optional survey distributed with Federal grant applications. These surveys allowed applicants to identify themselves as faith-based. While the self-identification method was the preferred approach to identifying FBOs, it was not the only method used. In cases in which applicants did not fill out the survey, agencies relied on other methods of identification, such as administrative reports, web sites, and phone inquiries. Some groups have religious names, and may be affiliated with a place of worship or certain religion, and yet do not consider themselves ‘faith-based.’ When this was brought to our attention, we did not designate such groups as FBOs in our data” (10). Among the flaws with the above-described approach is a failure to specify completion rates for the aforementioned surveys. As well, organizations with very obviously explicit religious orientations were likely excluded, given the identification methods listed. As former Deputy Director of the OFBCI David Kuo (2006) relates, officials asked to draw up the report were handed down directives to compile information that would demonstrate the ongoing ‘discrimination’ faith-based organizations face, while simultaneously illustrating a rise in funding over time—presumably to provide support for the argument that the efforts of the OFBCI had increased faith-based organizations’ access to government funds. Such back-story renders the reports’ simultaneous claims that “religious charities fared poorly” in competing for public funds, despite the inclusion of tables of data intended to demonstrate that “funding to faith-based organizations continues to increase,” comprehensible (8; 4).

18. In my review of existing literature on faith-based organizations, the 2006 White House Report (*Grants to Faith-Based Organizations: Fiscal Year 2005*) was the most commonly cited source for quantitative data on government expenditures. However, such data makes false comparisons between “secular” non-profits and “faith-based” organizations, as demonstrated in tables with titles such as “Secular Non-Profits Receive Nearly Six Times More Than Faith-Based” (6). A number of passages from the report make such conflation, and the underestimations that result, evident: “Federal application and granting procedures vary based on statute and governing regulations. For example, in the Continuum of Care program at HUD, local governments may apply on behalf of the organization that administers the funds and provides the service. Such awards are included as a grant to a FBO if it administers the funds and provides the service. Many FBOs receive Federal dollars indirectly, as sub-grantees—that is, they were not awarded the grant dollars by the Federal government but by intermediate entities. These sub-grants are not included as grants to FBOs in this data.” Two organizational types, therefore, are not captured: faith-based organizations receiving funds from local

government who provide services, yet do not administer funds themselves, and faith-based organizations receiving funds as “sub-grantees” from “intermediate entities” who may fail to self-identify as “faith-based.” As I argue throughout the dissertation, relying on data such as that produced in the above-referenced 2006 OFBCI report (and other data generated using similar methods) leads to a tendency to underestimate expenditures (and therefore, the scope, breadth, and impact of OFBCI efforts and related initiatives), as well as a lack of capacity to capture processes of change over time. Such data should therefore be read with a critical eye, coupling the insight it provides with additional knowledge gleaned from interpretive or ethnographic research.

Chapter 2

1. The “keyword” concept is generally attributed to Raymond Williams (1976), and incorporates the understanding that the terms used to describe social life also actively shape the social construction of reality. Central to this paradigm in the understanding that a crucial element of politics is the struggle to define social reality and frame people’s tentative aspirations and needs. Particular words and expressions become focal points, or “keywords,” in such struggles, whereby their meaning is contested and negotiated.
2. “The good family” is a term borrowed from Edgell (2006), and refers to social actors’ moral, idealized visions of what constitutes ideal family life. Edgell & Docka (2007) deploy and further explore the concept in the context of worship communities.
3. Indeed, Kuo (2006) alleges that some of the programming rolled out by the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives (WHOFBCI) were funded with monies *already earmarked* for existing WHOFBCI programs, leading him to argue that the initiative engaged in a process of “cannibalizing” itself.
4. Stritt’s (2008) figure of \$138 billion represents total expenditures for the Departments of Health and Human Services, Labor, Housing and Urban Development, and Agriculture (the latter of which provides emergency food assistance).
5. Again, however, these estimates exclude cash assistance. Stritt’s decision to do so is somewhat confusing, as many congregations offer emergency cash relief in addition to programming and in-kind resources.

6. A personal communication with a Department of Justice official charged with implementing and overseeing DOJ programming related to the faith-based initiative stated that while data on the disbursement of funds to “faith-based organizations” had been compiled in the year prior, the White House office, upon reviewing the results of the study, ordered DOJ officials to keep such documentation for private, internal use, and not release the information in public outlets.
7. On Jan. 11, 2012, the Supreme Court issued a ruling on the matter of church employment, giving religious organizations wide latitude in hiring and firing clergy and other employees who perform religious duties under the legal doctrine known as the “ministerial exception.” The case, *Hosanna-Tabor Evangelical Lutheran Church and School v. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission*, involved the firing of a teacher at a Lutheran school who performed both secular and religious duties. The teacher argued that she had been dismissed as retaliation against her for asserting her rights under the Americans with Disabilities Act. The high court unanimously ruled that the ministerial exception trumps anti-discrimination laws (<http://www.pewforum.org/Church-State-Law/The-Supreme-Court-Takes-Up-Church-Employment-Disputes-and-the-%E2%80%9CMinisterial-Exception%E2%80%9D.aspx>).
8. “Replacement,” “partnership,” and “resistance” are two of the three categories of analysis I use to describe my respondents’ orientation to the element of religious neoliberal discourse that revolve around devolution—a term that refers to the transfer of duties and responsibilities associated with providing a social safety net from the public to the private sector through the decentralization of the welfare state.
9. My understanding and use of the terms “discourse” and “rhetoric” are taken from Edgell’s (2006) work. This segment of the analysis highlights the differences and interrelationship between the two terms especially well.
10. Claims that congregations are especially well-positioned to offer comprehensive, long-term, profound, and life-changing emotional connections between provider and client, as opposed to more fleeting and sporadic forms of needs provision, are contextualized by Chaves’ (2004) findings on the relative lack of congregational programming designed to address longer-term needs or create enduring relationships: Only 4% of congregations facilitate domestic violence programming, 2% administer prison-related programs, another 2% engage in

substance abuse assistance, 1% offer some form of tutoring or mentoring, and less than 1% supply job training services.

11. An additional factor may stand to explain the disconnect noted in this section: Although admittedly, the pool of organizations from which I sampled my program director respondents was largely confined to a single metropolitan area, given that the disbursing intermediary organization that had selected them was known for inclusiveness, the fact that roughly half were liberal or mainline and half were conservative (of those with easily discernible theological orientations), speaks volumes.
12. Partisan politics are an important part of the story behind public support for faith-based initiatives, as there have been moderate shifts along party lines. Republican support for the programs shifted from 81% in 2001 to 66% in 2008, whereas Democratic support moved from 77% to 70% during the same time period. Notably, however, support remains strong among both parties (http://www.pewforum.org/uploadedfiles/Topics/Issues/Church-State_Law/faithbased09.pdf).
13. Although faith-based social service programming has experienced a decrease in public visibility, such programs continue to enjoy widespread (and increasing, in some specific substantive areas of service) support from the general population, (http://www.pewforum.org/uploadedfiles/Topics/Issues/Church-State_Law/faithbased09.pdf). Overall, 69% of Americans are supportive of faith-based organizations working in partnership with government entities to deliver social services, with only 25% opposing the practice. The report states that: "... The need for a range of service options and the potential that the people providing the services would be more caring and compassionate are cited most often as important reasons for favoring such programs (78% and 68%, respectively). ... there has been a sharp increase since 2001 in the proportion saying that religious organizations could do the best job in feeding the homeless. Currently, 52% say religious organizations could do the best job in feeding the homeless, compared with 21% who say a non-religious group and the same percentage who say a federal or state government agency" (<http://www.pewforum.org/Social-Welfare/Faith-Based-Programs-Still-Popular-Less-Visible.aspx>). Despite this broad support, enduring problems remain—minority and low-income families are nearly three times more likely to approach faith-based groups in times of need than are white or middle-income families.

Chapter 3

1. The typology deployed in Table 3.1 is drawn from the categories deployed in Unruh & Sider (2005). Like any typology, there is a good amount of detail and context that the associated categories do not represent. The text included in the “Field Site Overviews” subsection best represents the unique texture of religious expression and symbolism in each site. Nevertheless, categories in the table have been provided for ease of reference in contextualizing information presented in upcoming chapters, and providing a quick basis of site comparison. While Unruh & Sider (2005) provide six categories, in which associated organizations range from exhibiting profuse presence of religious values, symbolism, and expression (“faith-permeated”), to a total absence of religion (“secular”), only three of the six applied to my case studies (109-114). Unruh & Sider delineate each of the relevant categories in their typology as follows: “In *faith-permeated* organizations, the connection with religious faith is evident at all levels of mission, staffing, governance, and support. Faith-permeated programs extensively integrate explicitly religious content. The religious dimension is part of the program’s methodology and believed to be essential to the program’s effectiveness. Therefore, participation in religious elements or a religious affiliation is often a prerequisite for access to benefits. *Faith-centered* organizations were founded for a religious purpose, remain strongly connected with the religious community through funding sources and affiliation, and require most of the governing board and key staff to share the organization’s faith commitments. Faith-centered programs incorporate explicitly religious elements but are designed so that participants can readily opt out of religious activities and still benefit from the program. *Faith-affiliated* organizations retain some of the influence of their religious founders (such as in their mission statement), but typically look beyond the faith community for staffing and support. They do not require personnel to affirm religious beliefs or practices, with the possible exception of some board and executive leaders. While faith-affiliated programs incorporate little or no explicitly religious content, they may affirm faith in a general way, make spiritual resources available to participants, and encourage spiritual nurture through nonverbal acts of compassion and care” (109).

Chapter 4

1. It should be noted that it became clear that not all programs surveyed chose to deliver services in houses of worship out of an explicit desire to convey religious symbolism and/or principles to recipients of services. Instead, this decision was sometimes made out of financial expediency, as houses of worship were likely to

donate building space for such activities. I include location in houses of worship with symbolic religious display because the end result is the same, regardless of intent: religious imagery is present, and therefore communicates a message to clients about the potential for religious values in service provision.

Chapter 5

1. For a discussion of “compassion” as a keyword during this ideological transition in welfare state politics, and an overview of the concrete history behind this ‘happy marriage’ between fiscal and moral conservatives, see Wald & Stryker (2009).
2. See Katz (1989) for a discussion of the distinction between the “deserving” and “undeserving” poor in policy and practice. Subsequent mentions of the “deserving” and “undeserving” poor in the text of the chapter are placed in quotations to acknowledge Katz’ contribution of this specific terminology, and not necessarily to indicate that providers and respondents made use of this exact language in their descriptions of clients.
3. Congregations that apply the term “reconciling” in their self-description signal that they are open to, welcoming of, and inclusive for LGBT membership.
4. At *Integrity Intervention*, 72% of clients were male, as compared to 28% female. Of the remaining homeless adults in the state, 23% were female, whereas 30% were male. On a national level, 21.8% of the homeless are under age 18, 23.5% are 18-30, 37% are 31 to 50, 14.9% are 51 to 61, and 2.8% are 62 or older (http://homeless.samhsa.gov/ResourceFiles/hrc_factsheet.pdf). However, at *Integrity Intervention*, (where those under the age of 18 are served via their parents/primary caregivers), 8% are age 30 or under, 16% are age 31-39, 35% are age 40-49, 36% are age 50-59, and 5% are age 60 or over. Whereas 94% of *Integrity Intervention* clients were unmarried (single, divorced, and widowed—no data was compiled for domestic partnerships, though this language appears on the intake forms), 85% of the nation’s homeless are single (http://homeless.samhsa.gov/ResourceFiles/hrc_factsheet.pdf). *Integrity Intervention* does not aggregate information on the percentage of their client base living with dependent children—though this information is collected on intake forms as well. Conversations with *Integrity Intervention*’s volunteer advocates and members of the leadership team revealed providers’ general impression that while some clients were parents, most did not have custody of their children, nor

were they perceived as having direct financial responsibility for them. Gender and family disparities between men and women living in homelessness are highlighted by empirical data on the differences between these two subgroups of the homeless (Smith & North 1993): Most homeless women surveyed had young children in their custody, were more likely to be “dependent on welfare,” were less likely to have histories of incarceration/felony conviction, and spent shorter periods of time in “unsheltered locations” (and in homelessness in general). Such descriptive statistics on the overrepresentation of men and minorities among the homeless should be contextualized by arguments about the effects of considerable measurement problems associated with homelessness and family structure, as many homeless individuals are “doubled up” with family members (Kisor & Kendal-Wilson 2002).

5. Indeed, policies that privilege married families, and families with children, have been noted by other researchers, as women experience heightened vulnerability to potential homelessness when beyond child-bearing/rearing age, or living outside the bonds of marriage (either due to separation, divorce, or widowhood; Butler & Weatherley 1995; Kisor & Kendal-Wilson 2002).

Chapter 6

1. It should be noted that whereas Sullivan’s respondents were “low income,” again, all mentors at *Graceful Girls* were either middle class or lower middle class.
2. See Bem (1993) for an explication of the ways the three “lenses” of gender (androcentrism, polarization, and essentialism) work to institutionalize and reproduce sexism.
3. According to Hill (2009), the “strength mandate” refers to the idea that Black women must be, above all else, *strong*—and strength is defined through referencing wider cultural discourses that connect Black womanhood to paid work, reproductive labor, and the survival of hardship and exploitation. Notions of Black women’s strength are tied to depictions of the “emasculatation” of the Black male, and the dissolution of the Black family. The “motherhood mandate” refers to the idea that negative connotations associated with “the Black matriarch” were redefined to emphasize the strength and fertility of Black women as a positive part of the survival of the African American family tradition, as opposed to a marker of pathology. The “motherhood mandate” highlights the strong and capable nature of Black women, their social activism, and ability to combine paid and domestic work, and romanticizes Black marriages as egalitarian. The “beauty

mandate” refers to efforts within the African American community to rewrite dominant cultural scripts associating beauty with light skin, straight hair, and thin bodies to instill pride in dark skin, fuller bodies, and naturally textured hair.

4. Historically, the social construction of Black womanhood has exhibited significant distance from the ideals shaping cultural norms for white femininity. For example, labor market participation has been normative for Black women for some time, and working class, Black, and immigrant women have long been excluded from the “cult of domesticity”—the prevailing value system in the 19th century US and UK that associated ‘proper’ femininity with four predominant values: piety, purity, domesticity, and submissiveness (Yee 1992).
5. Scholars have generally attributed representations of marriage as “optional” for African American women to the historical and contemporary ‘costs’ associated with the institution (Hill 2006). More specifically, cementing heterosexual relationships through formal marriage carries the potential to place additional strains on household resources, compromise status, and challenge women’s central role in decision-making in female-centered households. Ultimately, and perhaps unsurprisingly, this was a compromise some women were unwilling to make.
6. The “Black Matriarch” was established as a cultural icon in the now-notorious 1965 “Moynihan Report.” The official title of the report was *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action*, and it was written by then-Assistant Secretary of Labor Daniel Patrick Moynihan, a sociologist who would later go on to serve as a U.S. Senator. Essentially, the report sought to identify the causes of Black poverty in America, and argued that the lesser number of Black children raised in nuclear family structures was the root of racial inequality. Furthermore, one could trace the perceived lack of nuclear families in the Black community to the domineering and controlling nature of most Black mothers—women who either rendered their male counterparts irrelevant, or drove them from the home. Scholars trace the perpetuation, and indeed in some instances, the origination, of many negative stereotypes surrounding Black womanhood and Black families to the notoriety of this report. The firestorm it generated in academic circles, policy-making arenas, and even, within the popular culture, should not be underestimated. As Gowan (2010) argues, few scholarly reports have garnered so much attention or been so broad in their reach and influence.

7. The premium placed on maternalism and associated connotations of traditional gender at *Graceful Girls* are perhaps unsurprising, given stereotypes surrounding Black women's childbearing as pathological. Women of color have been historically excluded from the benefits, however meager or problematic, associated with conforming to traditional norms of female domesticity, chastity, and passivity—especially amplified for Black women in the context of controlling images such as the “Mammy” (Black women are well-suited to care for white children, but neglect their own), the “Welfare Mother” (Black women choose to bear excessive amounts of children in exchange for problematic dependence on state resources), the “Black Matriarch” (Black women assume control of their household through becoming the domineering, primary wage earner to the exclusion, irrelevance, and emasculation of Black men), and the “Jezebel” (Black women's essential nature is characterized by their unbridled sexual appetite; Hill-Collins 2009).

Chapter 8

1. Church members make contributions to lessen the cost of participation for single mothers, and beneficiaries at *Mastering Motherhood* participate as well. During the time of fieldwork, a 4-night, 3-day stay cost mothers \$80, which included the costs of food, activities, accommodations (cabins), and the use of all church-owned water, sport, and outdoor activity equipment.
2. Reasons cited for low church attendance and membership were consistent with Sullivan's (2011) findings that low-income and single mothers face barriers to formal religious participation due to both logistical (child care, transportation, and lack of time) challenges and the social stigma surrounding poverty and single motherhood in churches.
3. There is one mentor at *Mastering Motherhood* who proved an exception to this rule. After becoming a mentor, she divorced and later remarried, and subsequently scaled back her involvement with the group.
4. Existing research suggests that unwed adolescent mothers attending churches with conservative views on marriage experience higher levels of difficulty in navigating the circumstances of their lives than do non-attenders (Sorenson, Grindstaff, & Turner 1995). The finding that cohabiters “have less motivation to attend services” is also telling (Thornton, Axinn, & Hill 1992:632). One study of an evangelical church in Boston found that cohabiters with children were barred

from membership until they married (Coffin 2005). Likewise, cohabiting single parents were subject to considerable pressure to marry at the conservative Catholic parish and African Methodist Episcopal congregation profiled in Edgell & Docka (2007).

5. However, although conservative churches extol more traditional gender and family ideologies, many affirm the reality of working mothers in their practices (Edgell 2006; Edgell & Docka 2007; Bartkowski 2001). Furthermore, whereas individual adherents subscribe to notions of “male headship,” in practice, this ideology refers more to spiritual guidance and general notions of protection than it does outright male domination and the imposition of the will of husbands over and above that of their wives (Gallagher & Smith 1999). In these ways, ideological commitments are negotiated with the changing realities of American family life.
6. Again, such observations are consistent with Sullivan’s (2011) findings about the unique barriers to religious participation faced by single mothers.
7. Tina’s framework for understanding her identity as a single mother is consistent with the self-descriptions of the low-income single mothers in Sullivan’s (2001) study, many of whom saw their condition as markers of their personal sinfulness. Tina’s perspective should be contextualized in the context of the finding that the poor are most likely to pray for forgiveness of their sins than those in the general population of religious believers (Baker 2008).
8. I define “traditional gender” through reference to Bem’s (1993) three “lenses:” androcentrism, gender polarization, and biological essentialism.
9. While Lakoff (1996) generally conflates political conservatism/liberalism with religious conservatism/liberalism, there are important distinctions to be made between the two. Moreover, some analysts argue that the division between conservatism and liberalism are more ‘hard and fast,’ or clear-cut, at the level of elite discourse, and become more porous (and some argue, dissolve) at the level of everyday adherents and individual citizens. See Wolfe’s (1999) *One Nation After All* as an exemplar of this argument.
10. Again, this was consistent with Gallagher & Smith’s (1999) findings that “male headship” more often entailed symbolic references to the provision of protection

and spiritual guidance, and did not necessarily always imply concrete provision for material needs.

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APPENDIX A: BACKGROUND FORM FOR PROGRAM DIRECTORS

Name: _____ Organization: _____ Date: _____

1. How long have you worked with this organization?
2. What is your position at this organization?
3. What duties/responsibilities does your position entail?
4. What degrees, training and/or life experience do you have that prepares you for your work with this organization?
5. About how many people does this program serve?
6. About how many staff members do you have? Volunteers?
7. What is your organization's yearly operating budget?
8. What are the age ranges of the clients you serve? Is there a dominant age group?
9. What are the racial/ethnic backgrounds of the clients you serve?
10. Where do most of the clients you serve reside?
11. Do the clients your program serve tend to be in the workforce? Unemployed? Looking for work? Disabled? Retired? Homemakers?
12. How are your organization and its various programs funded?
13. What is your program's funding ratio between government, individual donor, and private foundation funding?
14. For how long has this organization received funding from the government, and which branches of government?

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR PROGRAM DIRECTORS

Interview Questions for Program Directors**Organizational Background & Compassion Capital Participation:**

1. When was this program founded? Could you tell me a bit about the history of the organization and its programs? [*Note: Begin by asking for confirmation of information already gathered.*]
2. How and when did you get involved with the organization? Do you like working here? Why?
3. Does your organization have a mission statement and/or a set of guiding principles? What are the program's priorities, and why?
4. [*Confirm dollar amount & timing of involvement with CCF here*] What did your organization accomplish with the money associated with the Compassion Capital Fund?

Serving the Family: (*Who approaches the organization and why?; How are needs conceptualized and serviced?; How is programming developed?;*)

5. What attracts families/individuals to your program?
6. What types of families does your organization serve most often? [*Probe only if necessary: Single-parent, blended, extended, divorced, widowed, empty-nesters, GLBT, etc.*]
7. Do clients with different family arrangements come in with different needs? Does your organization specially plan for clients in specific family arrangements?
8. Does your organization perceive different needs for clients on the basis of gender, sexual orientation, income, race or individual religious beliefs? How do you plan for them?
9. Where do you get ideas for developing new aspects of the program, or changing things? What are the most significant ways things have changed over time?
10. Could you give me an example of a "success story" from your program? Ideally, what should families/individuals have accomplished when finished accessing services?

11. Does your organization engage in “outcome-based programming?” Has your organization established any “measurable outcomes?” What is your opinion of this model of organizational management?
12. How will the program likely think about/accommodate families in the future? Where would you like to go from here?

Need Interpretation and Marriage/Family Ideology: *(How is generalized need interpreted?; What are viable solutions to these needs?; How are family/marriage/gender conceptualized and idealized?)*

13. Does your programming offer support to people trying to exit poverty? What kinds of services are these, and how do they work?
14. What do you suppose people need most to exit/rise above poverty?
15. When people have trouble getting out of poverty, what do you think usually holds them back?
16. Should God or faith play a role in people’s efforts to exit poverty?
17. What do you feel are the greatest problems facing families in general—rich and poor—in the U.S. today? What resources do they need?
18. Does your programming help people with their family lives? How?
19. When you think of a good, strong, healthy or ideal family, what does that mean to you? What kinds of family environments do you think are ideal for your clients?
20. Should God or faith play a role in a strong, healthy family? [If yes, then: What role?]
21. Are children best served when they live in a home with two parents? Must those two parents be male and female? [*Probe:* To what extent do you agree with the following statement: “An ideal marriage is between a man and a woman?]
22. Should mothers and fathers be responsible for different things (or have different roles) in the family and household?
23. Does your programming help people with their marriages?

24. When you think of a good, strong, healthy or ideal marriage, what do you think of? What kinds of marriages are ideal for your clients? [*Probe: What is the purpose of a marriage? Should men/husbands serve as providers/heads of household?*]
25. Should God or faith play a role in a strong, healthy marriage? [If yes, then: What role?]
26. Does insight from the feminist/women's movement have any place in your organization?
27. Does insight from the movement for gay and lesbian equality have any place in your organization?
28. Would you say that your organization abides by or is guided by any particular set of "family values?"

Privatization & Institutional Trust: (*Are privatization/public—private partnerships viable solutions to our nation's social problems?; Degree of trust in existing institutions?; Opinions on the faith-based initiative?*)

29. Do you feel like existing government institutions do a good job in caring for our nation's poor/at risk people? [*Probe: Do you trust them to do their job?*]
30. Should the nonprofit sector and government bodies partner up to provide social services for needy and at-risk populations? What kind of help do you think the government can and should provide the nonprofit sector?
31. What is your opinion on faith-based service organizations contracting with the government to provide social services? What are some of the potential issues involved in that relationship?
32. What do you suppose distinguishes "faith-based" organizations from more secular organizations? What's the difference?
33. Do you feel there are any advantages secular organizations enjoy over faith-based ones?

Controversy and Faith-Based Initiatives: (*What type of language/rhetoric is used to describe politically controversial elements?; Resources used to navigate contentious issues?*)

34. Some have argued that faith-based organizations make more profound and meaningful connections to those they serve because they are religious organizations. Do you agree?
35. Some have argued that faith-based organizations can serve a greater segment of our nation's most needy as they are easier for those in the most dire need to access and are more in touch with/informed about the specific needs of communities in crisis. Do you agree?
36. Some have argued that government funding of small non-profits is part of a larger trend whereby the government is abdicating responsibility for caring for vulnerable populations. Do you find this to be true?
37. What is your overall impression/assessment of the impact of the faith-based initiative—both locally and nationwide? What do you feel are the strengths and weaknesses of the program?

Organizational Religious Character: *(What does “faith-based” mean to this particular provider—nature of their religious character?)*

38. Does your organization make any effort to meet the spiritual needs of clients, in addition to their physical needs? [*Probe: What kinds of spiritual goals would you like to see clients achieve? How do you help them achieve these goals?*]
39. Do biblical, Christian, or any other kind of religious values inform this organization in any way? Are the religious convictions of staff, volunteers or clients important here?
40. To what extent does this organization consider itself a “faith-based” social service provider?

For faith-based providers only:

41. What about the organization makes it “faith-based?” How would an “outsider” know this is a religious organization? To what extent are faith and spirituality part of the daily environment here?
42. Is this organization currently, or has it ever been, affiliated with either a house of worship or another larger faith-based organization?
43. Has this organization's religious identity changed over time? [*Probe: What did that process look like, who was involved, and why were these decisions made?*]

Closing Questions:

44. Is there anything you'd like to tell me about your organization that I haven't asked about, or we haven't had the time to talk about?

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR STAFF/VOLUNTEERS

Interview Questions for Program Directors**Organizational Background & Compassion Capital Participation:**

1. Are you an employee or a volunteer with this organization? Do you work elsewhere, aside from the work you do here?
2. What kind of training did you receive to do the work you do with this organization? Do you have additional training that's prepared you for this work?
3. How and when did you get involved with the organization? Do you like working here? Why?

Serving the Family: (*Who approaches the organization and why?; How are needs conceptualized and serviced?; How is programming developed?;*)

4. What attracts families/individuals to the program?
5. What types of families does the organization serve most often? [*Probe only if necessary: Single-parent, blended, extended, divorced, widowed, empty-nesters, GLBT, etc.*]
6. Do clients with different family arrangements come in with different needs? Does your organization specially plan for clients in specific family arrangements?
7. Does the program perceive different needs for clients on the basis of gender, sexual orientation, income, race or individual religious beliefs? How do you plan for them?
8. Could you give me an example of a "success story" from your program? Ideally, what should families/individuals have accomplished when finished accessing services?
9. Do you think the program will change the way it thinks about/accommodates families in the future? Where would you like to see it go from here?

Need Interpretation and Marriage/Family Ideology: (*How is generalized need interpreted?; What are viable solutions to these needs?; How are family/marriage/gender conceptualized and idealized?;*)

10. Does the program offer support to people trying to exit poverty? What kinds of services are these, and how do they work?
11. What do you suppose people need most to exit/rise above poverty?
12. When people have trouble getting out of poverty, what do you think usually holds them back?
13. Should God or faith play a role in people's efforts to exit poverty?
14. What do you feel are the greatest problems facing families in general—rich and poor—in the U.S. today? What resources do they need?
15. Does your programming help people with their family lives? How?
16. When you think of a good, strong, healthy or ideal family, what does that mean to you? What kinds of family environments do you think are ideal for your clients?
17. Should God or faith play a role in a strong, healthy family? [If yes, then: What role?]
18. Are children best served when they live in a home with two parents? Must those two parents be male and female? [*Probe*: To what extent do you agree with the following statement: "An ideal marriage is between a man and a woman?]
19. Should mothers and fathers be responsible for different things (or have different roles) in the family and household?
20. Does your programming help people with their marriages?
45. When you think of a good, strong, healthy or ideal marriage, what do you think of? What kinds of marriages are ideal for your clients? [*Probe*: What is the *purpose* of a marriage? Should men/husbands serve as providers/heads of household?]
21. Should God or faith play a role in a strong, healthy marriage? [If yes, then: What role?]
22. Does insight from the feminist/women's movement have any place in your organization?

23. Does insight from the movement for gay and lesbian equality have any place in your organization?
24. Would you say that your organization abides by or is guided by any particular set of “family values?”

Privatization & Institutional Trust: *(Are privatization/public—private partnerships viable solutions to our nation’s social problems?; Degree of trust in existing institutions?; Opinions on the faith-based initiative?)*

25. Do you feel like existing government institutions do a good job in caring for our nation’s poor/at at-risk people? *[Probe: Do you trust them to do their job?]*
26. Should the nonprofit sector and government bodies partner up to provide social services for needy and at-risk populations? What kind of help do you think the government can and should provide the nonprofit sector?
27. What is your opinion on faith-based service organizations contracting with the government to provide social services? What are some of the potential issues involved in that relationship?
28. What do you suppose distinguishes “faith-based” organizations from more secular organizations? What’s the difference?
29. Do you feel there are any advantages secular organizations enjoy over faith-based ones?

Controversy and Faith-Based Initiatives: *(What type of language/rhetoric is used to describe politically controversial elements?; Resources used to navigate contentious issues?)*

30. Some have argued that faith-based organizations make more profound and meaningful connections to those they serve because they are religious organizations. Do you agree?
31. Some have argued that faith-based organizations can serve a greater segment of our nation’s most needy as they are easier for those in the most dire need to access and are more in touch with/informed about the specific needs of communities in crisis. Do you agree?

32. Some have argued that government funding of small non-profits is part of a larger trend whereby the government is abdicating responsibility for caring for vulnerable populations. Do you find this to be true?
33. What is your overall impression/assessment of the impact of the faith-based initiative—both locally and nationwide? What do you feel are the strengths and weaknesses of the program?

Organizational Religious Character: *(What does “faith-based” mean to this particular provider—nature of their religious character?)*

34. Does this organization make any effort to meet the spiritual needs of clients, in addition to their physical needs? [*Probe:* What kinds of spiritual goals would you like to see clients achieve? How do you help them achieve these goals?]
35. Do biblical, Christian, or any other kind of religious values inform this organization in any way? Are the religious convictions of staff, volunteers or clients important here?
36. To what extent does this organization consider itself a “faith-based” social service provider?

For faith-based providers only:

37. What about the organization makes it “faith-based?” How would an “outsider” know this is a religious organization? To what extent are faith and spirituality part of the daily environment here?
38. Is this organization currently, or has it ever been, affiliated with either a house of worship or another larger faith-based organization?
Has this organization’s religious identity changed over time? [*Probe:* What did that process look like, who was involved, and why were these decisions made?]

Closing Questions:

39. Is there anything you’d like to tell me about the program that I haven’t asked about, or we haven’t had the time to talk about?

APPENDIX D: FOCUS GROUP FORM & QUESTIONS FOR *INTEGRITY INTERVENTION*

Background Information Form for *Integrity Intervention*

Name: _____ **Date:** _____

How often do you come to *Integrity Intervention*?

How long have you been participating in/coming to *Integrity Intervention*?

How old are you?

Are you employed, looking for work, taking care of the home, or disabled? If employed, where do you work?

Do you have a high school diploma?

Have you attended college? If so, did you complete a degree (please list degree below)?

Are you trained in a trade or profession?

Are you currently homeless? If so, how long have you been homeless? If not, have you been homeless before?

Are you single, married, divorced, widowed, or in a domestic partnership?

Do you have any sons or daughters? If so, how many, how old, and do they live at home with you?

Are there other adults living in your household? If so, who (ex: husband/wife, sons/daughters, brothers/sisters, grandparents, aunt/uncles, cousins, friends, roommates, etc.)?

Focus Group Questions for *Integrity Intervention* Clientele

Program Experiences:

Why did you decide to come to *Integrity Intervention*?

What other programs are you currently participating in? Have you participated in any other programs similar to *Integrity Intervention*?

Did you hear anything about *Integrity Intervention* from anyone before you came?

What do you feel are the program's goals and priorities for those who participate?

[Probe: What do you think the *Integrity Intervention* staff would like to see people get out of their experience here? If you were telling a friend about the *Integrity Intervention*, what would you say?]

What do you like the most about *Integrity Intervention*?

What is the most helpful thing *Integrity Intervention* does? What services and resources offered here are most helpful to you?

Does your life currently feel stable? [Probe: If not, what keeps you from feeling stable?]

Have the people and services at *Integrity Intervention* helped you make positive changes in your life? How? [Probe: If you got a bus card to get to a new job, do you still have the job? If you got help with housing, are you still in that residence?]

Is there anything you don't like about *Integrity Intervention*?

If you could change anything about *Integrity Intervention*, what would it be? Are there any services or resources not offered that you would find helpful?

Would you come to evening hours at *Integrity Intervention* if they were offered?

Do you feel like *Integrity Intervention* supports your spiritual life? [Probe: If so, how? If not, what could *Integrity Intervention* do to help your spiritual growth?]

What kinds of people do you think *Integrity Intervention* helps the most?

Are there any kinds of people that might feel uncomfortable at *Integrity Intervention*, or might not benefit from the program? [Probe: What kinds of clients do you think can't be helped by/don't work out at the *Integrity Intervention*?]

Serving the Family:

Do you have contact with your extended family? If so, would you say you have good family relationships?

Are there things in your life that keep you from having good relationships with your family members?

What are the greatest challenges facing your family today?

When you think of a “good” or “strong” family, what do you picture?

Does *Integrity Intervention* help you with family concerns? Does your participation at *Integrity Intervention* have any effect on how your family gets along, or how you relate to one another?

If you have children, what do you feel like they need most from you as a parent? What do your children need most from you as a father/mother? [*Probe: What kinds of things are most important for a good parent to provide? What should a good parent do?*]

What kinds of family situations does *Integrity Intervention* help the most? Why is that? [*Probe: Who does or “fits” best at *Integrity Intervention*—married or single people, people with or without children, older people/younger people, extended families versus people living only with their spouse and kids, etc?*]

Do you think that there are people who might not feel comfortable at *Integrity Intervention* because of their family situation [Ex: unmarried couples, single parents, same sex couples, etc.]?

Social Capital and Social Networks:

What kind of relationship do you have with your advocate? [*Probe: What does your advocate do/say that helps you the most? Is there anything your advocate does/says that you don’t like, or isn’t helpful?*]

Have you developed relationships/made connections with anyone other than your advocate at *Integrity Intervention*? [Ex: other clients, other volunteers/staff, etc].

Do you feel as though you have made connections with people unlike yourself, or people you wouldn’t otherwise know, at *Integrity Intervention*? Could you tell me more about that?

Has your participation at *Integrity Intervention* changed the way you see the world around you? The way you view life in general?

Closing Questions:

Is there anything you'd like to tell me about your experiences in the program that we haven't had the time to talk about?

Do you have any questions for me?

APPENDIX E: FOCUS GROUP FORM & QUESTIONS FOR *GRACEFUL GIRLS***Background Information Form for *Graceful Girls* Program Participants**

Name: _____ **Date:** _____

How many years have you participated in this program?

How did you find out about this program?

How often would you estimate you attend sessions with this program?

Do you participate in any other youth programs? What are they, and where do you attend them?

How old are you?

Do you live with your mother, father, grandparents or aunts/uncles? Which adult family members live in your household?

Do you have any brothers or sisters? Do they live at home with you?

Are there any other adults living in your household? If so, who (family friends, roommates, etc.)?

Do you go to church? If so, where?

Do you participate in activities at church, aside from Sunday worship? If so, which activities, and where?

Does your life currently feel stable? If not, what keeps you from feeling stable?

Focus Group Questions for *Graceful Girls* Participants

Graceful Girls Experiences:

Why did you decide to participate in this program?

Did you hear anything about this program from anyone before you came? What did you hear?

What do you feel are the program's goals and priorities for those participate? [*Probe:* What do you think the staff and volunteers would like to see kids get out of their experience here? If you were telling a friend about the program, what would you say?]

What do you like the most about this program?

What is the most helpful thing that happens at this program? What activities and/or resources offered here are most helpful to you?

Does coming to this program help you with family issues? Does coming to this program have any effect on how your family gets along, or how you relate to one another?

Have the people or experiences at this program helped you make positive changes in your life? How?

If you could change anything about this program, what would it be? Is there anything not offered (activities, resources, etc.) that you would find helpful?

Is there anything you didn't like about your experience at this program?

Do you feel like the people and experiences at this program support your spiritual life/spiritual growth? [*Probe:* If so, how? Are there additional ways staff and volunteers could help your spiritual growth?]

What kind of children do you think the experience at this program helps the most? Who gets the most out of coming here?

Are there any kinds of people/families that might not benefit from the programming at this program? Are there any kinds of people/families that might feel uncomfortable at this program?

Serving the Family:

Do you have contact with your extended family (ex: aunts/uncles, grandparents, or cousins)? If so, would you say you have good family relationships?

Are there things in your life that keep you from having good relationships with your family members?

What are the greatest challenges facing your family today?

When you think of a “good” or “strong” family, what do you picture?

When you think of a “good” mother, what do you picture? When you think of a “good” father, what do you picture? [*Probe: What kinds of things are most important for a good parent to provide? What should a good parent do?*]

Social Capital and Social Networks:

Have you developed relationships/made lasting connections with other kids, staff or volunteers at this program?

Do you feel as though you have made connections with people unlike yourself, or people you wouldn't otherwise know, at this program? Could you tell me more about that?

Has your participation at this program changed the way you see the world around you? The way you view life in general?

Closing Questions:

Is there anything you'd like to tell me about your experiences in the program that we haven't had the time to talk about?

Do you have any questions for me?

APPENDIX F: FOCUS GROUP FORM & QUESTIONS FOR *PARENTING WITHOUT PARTNERS*

***Parenting Without Partners* Focus Group: Background Information Form**

Name: _____ **Date:** _____

How many years have you/your family participated in the Single Mother's Family Camp?

How did you find out about the Single Mother's Family Camp?

How often do you attend the *Parenting Without Partners* sessions offered at the church? If so, how many of the 12 sessions would you estimate you attended?

Do you participate in any of the other programs for single mothers the church? If so, which ones?

Have you participated in any other programming for single mothers? Where and when?

How old are you?

Are you employed, looking for work, taking care of the home, or disabled? If employed, where do you work?

Do you have a high school diploma?

Have you attended college? If so, did you complete a degree (please list degree below)?

Are you trained in a trade or profession?

How many children do you have, and how old are they? Boys/girls?

Are there other adults living in your household? If so, who (parents, siblings, friends, roommates, etc.)?

Do you participate in activities at any other churches or faith communities in the area? If so, which activities, and where?

Do you attend worship at a church or faith community in the area? If so, where?

Does your life currently feel stable? If not, what keeps you from feeling stable?

Focus Group Questions for *Parenting Without Partners*/Single Moms Family Camp Participants

Single Moms Family Camp Experiences:

Why did you decide to come to the Single Moms Family Camp?

Did you hear anything about the Single Moms Family Camp from anyone before you came? What did you hear?

What do you feel are the program's goals and priorities for those who come to camp? [Probe: What do you think the Single Moms Family Camp staff would like to see mothers & their children get out of their experience here? If you were telling a friend about the Single Moms Family Camp, what would you say?]

What do you like the most about the Single Moms Family Camp?

What is the most helpful thing that happens at the Single Moms Family Camp? What activities and/or resources offered here are most helpful to you?

Does coming to the Single Moms Family Camp help you with family concerns?

Does coming to the Single Moms Family Camp have any effect on how your family gets along, or how you relate to one another?

Have the people or experiences at the Single Moms Family Camp helped you make positive changes in your life? How?

If you could change anything about the Single Moms Family Camp, what would it be? Is there anything not offered (activities, resources, etc.) that you would find helpful?

Is there anything you didn't like about your experience at the Single Moms Family Camp?

Do you feel like the people and experiences at the Single Moms Family Camp support you and your children's spiritual life/spiritual growth? [Probe: If so, how? Are there additional ways staff and volunteers could help your spiritual growth?]

What kind of families/mothers/children do you think the experience at The Single Moms Family Camp helps the most? Who gets the most out of coming to the Single Moms Family Camp?

Are there any kinds of people/families that might not benefit from the programming at the Single Moms Family Camp? Are there any kinds of people/families that might feel uncomfortable at the Single Moms Family Camp?

Parenting Without Partners Experiences:

Why did you decide to come to the *Parenting Without Partners* classes?

Did you hear anything about *Parenting Without Partners* from anyone before you came? What did you hear?

What do you feel are the program's goals and priorities for those who come to sessions? [Probe: What do you think the leadership would like to see mothers get out of their experience here? If you were telling a friend about *Parenting Without Partners*, what would you say?]

What do you like the most about *Parenting Without Partners*?

What is the most helpful thing that happens at *Parenting Without Partners*? What activities, resources or services offered are most helpful to you?

Does *Parenting Without Partners* help you with family concerns? Does your participation at *Parenting Without Partners* have any effect on how your family gets along, or how you relate to one another?

Would you be likely to attend *Parenting Without Partners* again for classes you missed or to review specific topics? Do you feel it would be helpful for others to attend more than once?

Have the people or experiences at *Parenting Without Partners* helped you make positive changes in your life? How?

If you could change anything about *Parenting Without Partners*, what would it be? Are there any services or resources not offered that you would find helpful?

Is there anything you didn't like about *Parenting Without Partners*?

Do you feel like the people and experiences at *Parenting Without Partners* support you and your children's spiritual life/spiritual growth? [Probe: If so, how? Are there additional ways staff and volunteers could help your spiritual growth?]

What kind of families/mothers/children do you think *Parenting Without Partners* helps the most? Who gets the most out of *Parenting Without Partners*?

Are there any kinds of people/families that might not benefit from *Parenting Without Partners*? Are there any kinds of people/families that might feel uncomfortable at *Parenting Without Partners*?

Serving the Family:

Do you have contact with your extended family? If so, would you say you have good family relationships?

Are there things in your life that keep you from having good relationships with your family members?

What are the greatest challenges facing your family today?

When you think of a “good” or “strong” family, what do you picture?

When you think of a “good” mother, what do you picture? What do your children need most from you as a mother? [*Probe: What kinds of things are most important for a good parent to provide? What should a good parent do?*]

Social Capital and Social Networks:

Have you developed relationships/made lasting connections with other mothers, staff or volunteers at *Parenting Without Partners*/the Single Moms Family Camp?

Do you feel as though you have made connections with people unlike yourself, or people you wouldn't otherwise know, at *Parenting Without Partners*/the Single Moms Family Camp? Could you tell me more about that?

Has your participation at *Parenting Without Partners*/the Single Moms Family Camp changed the way you see the world around you? The way you view life in general?

Closing Questions:

Is there anything you'd like to tell me about your experiences in the program that we haven't had the time to talk about?

Do you have any questions for me?