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PANDORA'S BOX:  
THE LIBERATION OF WELFARE MOTHERS

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The non-"misandrist" mainstream of the women's movement has suggested that, more than women being liberated from male oppression, both sexes need to be liberated from the tyranny of culturally determined sex roles, the last bastion of ascribed status. If all social roles were androgynous they could be based on more relevant criteria. For example, children would be encouraged to develop skills and talents without regard for their "appropriateness" to gender, the male-female ratio in the work force and in nearly all specific occupations would be virtually equal, pay would be equal, and the number of female breadwinners would not only equal male breadwinners, but the number of housewives would not greatly exceed the number of househusbands.

It is the contention of this paper that there is no group of women in America more desperately in need of such a sex role revolution than welfare mothers . . . and none less likely to share in one. This is drawn from a review of the literature in answer to these questions: Who are the welfare mothers? How would a sex role revolution affect welfare? Why are welfare mothers especially in need of liberation from sex roles? And what are the factors militating against such liberation?

Who Are They?

The public image of welfare mothers is basically inaccurate because it tends to be stereotypical. Whether welfare mothers are regarded with contempt or pity, with indifference or concern, the fact that they are thought of as a homogeneous group grossly distorts and dangerously oversimplifies both public opinion and public policy

A demographic sketch reveals that one-third of the women receiving Aid to Families with Dependent Children grants are in their early 20's, three-fourths have not finished high school, half are white, and three-fourths are urban. Half have only one or two children; four out

of ten have illegitimate children but three-fourths have had children by only one man. Most AFDC mothers remain on the rolls less than two consecutive years, but four out of ten have done a previous stint on welfare. (Burnside; HEW; Schiller)

Although none of these data accurately reflect the heterogeneity that exists and ever increases among these women, this statistical limning serves to remind us that the academic and/or counter-cultural woman who is a "voluntary single parent" carving out a unique lifestyle in college or commune while receiving AFDC checks -- and currently the focus of some professional journalistic literature -- is far from being representative of today's welfare mothers and unlikely to be prototypical of future welfare mothers.

#### How Would a Sex Role Revolution Affect Welfare?

Mass media have recently alerted us to the fact that an increasing proportion of runaway parents are mothers and that an increasing proportion of divorcing fathers are gaining custody of their children. Nevertheless, such cases are still uncommon enough to be considered newsworthy. Currently over 90% of single parents are women. (Brandwein) A sex role revolution among the general population would reduce this figure to 50%. Mothers would be supporting husbands and children as often as fathers would support families, and fathers would be the parents providing the primary psychic sustenance and physical nurturance of children as often as mothers. If a man and woman severed the relationship with each other, he would be given custody of the children and she the responsibility of child support payments and visiting rights in half the cases. Half the adult recipients of AFDC would be males, many of them making frequent and futile attempts to beguile a woman into marriage and child-rearing, a thought to give one pause.

#### Why Do Welfare Mothers Need a Sex Role Revolution?

In 1911 Mothers' Pensions were devised as a means to save widows with children from resorting to extremely ill-paid labor to keep their families together. These pensions also served, not unwittingly, to keep women out of the labor force, leaving more jobs available for men and the wages higher. By 1935 the Depression had rendered the states unable to bear the cost of these pensions and the New Deal was providing a federal solution to the problem of dependency. Aid to Dependent Children not only relieved the states' financial burden but assured that these women would not take the jobs for which desperate men clamored. (AEI; McKeany; Meyers and McIntyre)

Throughout history the public has balked at providing aid to substantial numbers of needy people. When that number reaches a certain as yet unexplored point a tipping factor operates and public sympathy becomes hostility. (Huggins; Mohl) In the midst of the Depression 60% of the respondents in a national poll thought that people on relief could get work if they tried. (Schiltz) Today there is a widespread conviction that AFDC has become an anachronism. The widows and orphans for whom it was originally intended now represent less than 3% of the families on AFDC, and the public tends to feel it is not only paying for misfortunes but for mistakes and misbehavior. In hopes of discouraging desertion, AFDC-U was established to aid families in which the father is unemployed or underemployed. In ten of the nineteen states with AFDC-U, desertion rates have decreased, but in the other nine there has been an increase. New York City, which has the least restrictions excluding fathers from welfare, and the highest benefits, all by itself accounted for 63% of the national increase in deserted AFDC women. (Steiner) Researchers have been surprised to learn how many marriages failed after the family went on welfare and how few women say their marriages ended because of the husband's inability to earn enough money for the family. (Podell; Rainwater 1970)

In the 1960's the unemployment rate was halved, AFDC recipients increased by almost two-thirds, and AFDC money payments doubled. As Steiner noted, "Whatever the relationship between workfare and welfare, it is not the simple one of reduced unemployment producing reduced dependency." (p. 33) We might clarify that statement by rephrasing it: "Whatever the relationship between male unemployment and female welfare dependency, it is not the simple one of reduced unemployment producing reduced dependency."

Often overlooked are factors not directly related to male employment that explain much of the increase in the number of families on welfare: (1) the natural increase in enrollment when benefits are broadened and eligibility requirements are made less restrictive (Cloward and Piven); (2) the increase in the 1960's of women of prime child-bearing age (Durbin); and (3) increasing urbanization, which renders children an economic liability, extended families less available for support of needy members, informal social control less effective, and alternative lifestyles both possible and attractive.

Not to be entirely discounted are the efforts of the sorcerer's apprentices, Cloward and Piven, whose avowed purpose has been to break the back of the system by

encouraging reluctant, and presumably expendable, eligibles to go on welfare. How many women have been sacrificed to this ideological juggernaut has yet to be determined.

Since desertion, separation and divorce have all increased among people who never become welfare recipients, it's obvious that the existence of AFDC does not by itself explain the increase of marital breakup among people who do eventually seek welfare. Yet welfare's existence and ubiquity may have some effect on the marginally employed man who wearies of his marriage, who cannot support two households, and who would remain on the scene longer if his departure truly meant absolute destitution for his family. Welfare permits him to leave with an easier conscience.

The increase in illegitimacy probably has more to do with the revolution in sexual mores than anything else but, again, a certain number of illegitimate children on AFDC would never have been born, or would have been supported by their fathers, if welfare did not exist.

An institution which maintains fatherless families inevitably contributes to their creation. The lack of some such institution would, of course, be worse. To Kristol's hinting that we might be better off limiting welfare in order to strengthen the family, Willis has replied, "A woman who must have a husband to survive has neither freedom in choosing a mate nor the power to demand an equal relationship . . . marriage under such conditions is a euphemism for prostitution and domestic slavery."

A sex role revolution would obviate the "male role" the Department of Public Welfare plays. Some of welfare's critics have claimed it plays the role of a jealous husband, zealously seeking to keep all other males away from the welfare mother. (Glassman) Viewed in another light, DPW appears to be an impotent pimp who primarily wants to have her get money from a man and to know how much money she got. The "midnight raids" of a decade ago (and some much more recent) were mainly to ferret out a possible contributor, someone who could be assumed to provide financial support and thus relieve DPW of that onerous chore.

The Supreme Court ruled in 1968 that men visiting or even living with a welfare mother, who have no legal obligation to her or her children, are not to be held responsible for providing any financial support for the family and are to be ignored by DPW. Some states have managed to circumvent this by operating on the principle that the man's income is "presumptively available" to the family and they will ignore his contribution only if

he categorically refuses to provide for children not his own. Relatively few welfare mothers and their male companions are aware that this option even exists. Caseworkers need not and often do not advise them that separate budgets are available for the children, thus the system, attempting to gain maximal reimbursement by pressuring surrogate fathers, tends to lose it all by frightening away those who would provide at least minimally.

The man who forms a liaison with a welfare family has often left another in his wake. In the new set-up his contribution and his performance are not mandatory and anything he does, however desultory or ephemeral, enhances his image. (Rainwater 1970, p. 187)

As Liebow discovered:

The man who lives with his wife and children is under legal and social constraints to provide for them, to be a husband to his wife and a father to his children. The chances are, however, that he is failing to provide for them, and failure in this primary function contaminates his performance as father in other respects as well . . . . But where the man lives with children not his own, every gentleness and show of concern and affection redounds to his public and private credit; everything is profit . . . . It is as if living with your own children is to live with your failure, but to live with another man's children is, so far as children are concerned, to be in a fail-proof situation: you can win a little or a lot but, however small your effort or weak your performance, you can almost never lose. (pp. 86-88)

Even when the father pays some support, the amount he is permitted to earn and keep for himself alone can well exceed the amount his ex-wife gets from welfare to support herself and his children. In addition, he has no one telling him how his money must be spent, no one asks him whether he is obtaining money from or giving money to the women with whom he sleeps, and he has virtually no other obligation to his children. (Glassman)

When society values a man for his monetary worth the role of father is viewed as primarily an economic one. When the state steps in to provide money -- and, in essence, money only -- to a fatherless family it implies this is basically all a father is necessary for and that he can readily be replaced by a bureaucratic mechanism.

Our terminology is revealing: to hear that a man "fathered" a child is to assume he sired it; to hear

that a woman "mothered" a child is to infer that she nurtured and cared for it.

While the welfare mother is unduly burdened -- and privileged -- with parenting, the father is deprived -- and absolved -- of it. While fathers are presumably burdened -- and privileged -- with wage-earning, welfare mothers are often arbitrarily absolved -- and deprived -- of it.

Today there is a steady increase in the number of mothers who are working, and mothers with preschool children are entering the labor force at an even faster rate. (Stein) Few people still regard women as a threat to male employment. For every jeremiad depicting a zero-game economy in which each employed woman represents an unemployed man, there are numerous reminders of the growing predominance of human service occupations and the needs yet unfilled. Yet even those welfare mothers who are highly employable are not as free as married women to work outside the home. For one thing, the married woman's income is an addition to her husband's income, whereas the welfare mother's wages will be deducted, at least in part, from the money she gets from her surrogate husband, DPW. And the married woman may be able to persuade her husband to share in some of the household and child care tasks if she works, but the welfare mother will shoulder these tasks alone whether she works or not. Thus welfare, in spite of its touted workfare proposals, does not offer the mother a real choice but coerces her into the role of full-time mother until the state itself decides to push her off the rolls.

We can thus sum up the reasons welfare mothers need to be liberated from their sex roles as: (1) the institutionalized dual role "public dependent and mother" has fallen into disrepute; (2) state subsidies for unattached motherhood tend to obviate fatherhood and it is actually the ex-father who gains the most from AFDC in terms of financial and emotional freedom; and (3) by arbitrarily limiting her role options, welfare manipulates women.

#### What Factors Militate Against a Sex Role Revolution for Welfare Mothers?

There are at least eight:

- 1 -- Lower-class sex role differentiation
- 2 -- The ethnic mystique
- 3 -- The welfare subcult

- 4 -- The diametrically opposed "allies"
- 5 -- Ambivalent public opinion
- 6 -- The welfare bureaucracy
- 7 -- The lack of day care
- 8 -- The inadequacy of women's wages

1 -- Lower-class sex role differentiation

Most welfare mothers come from the lower, working, or lower-middle classes where sex role differentiation is greatest. (TenHouten) Far from wanting to be liberated from the constraints of this traditional role, many want only to remarry and relive it, thereby proving they are good wives and did not deserve to be abandoned.

2 -- The ethnic mystique

Secondly, there is the new pluralism, which might more accurately be called the "ethnic mystique". Heredity becomes destiny as the coagulation of the "unmeltable ethnics" now provides new justification for segregation, for the derogation of education and social mobility, for self-restriction and stasis, and for dreaming only the probable dream.

If her cultural heritage happens to include a tradition whereby women devote themselves to enhancing male machismo or female fecundity, the welfare mother's liberation will not be facilitated by the celebration of these sex roles. Gwendolyn Brooks epitomizes this neo-romanticism in a classic put-down of those of her sisters who have struggled to yank themselves up by their bra-straps:

Maude went to college.  
 Sadie stayed at home.  
 Sadie scraped life  
 With a fine-tooth comb.

She didn't leave a tangle in.  
 Her comb found every strand.  
 Sadie was one of the livingest chits  
 In all the land.

Sadie bore two babies  
 Under her maiden name.  
 Maude and Ma and Papa  
 Nearly died of shame.

When Sadie said her last so-long  
 Her girls struck out from home.  
 (Sadie had left as heritage  
 Her fine-tooth comb.)



Maude, who went to college,  
Is a thin brown mouse.  
She is living all alone  
In this old house.

This brings us to the supposed antipathy or indifference of black women to feminism. The myth of the lower-class black woman's liberation from or domination of the lower-class black male deserves a detailed exploration since nearly half the welfare mothers -- and more than half of those publicized in the mass media -- are black, and because there is a "kind of paternalism among some naive idealists . . . who romanticize the black [welfare] mother . . . ." (Graham, p. 4)

In the 1972 American Women's Opinion Poll 60% of black women and only 30% of white felt they never really had a chance to do the things they would like to do and probably never will. (Harris)

Lower-class black families even more than lower-class whites adhere to a male dominance ideology. (TenHouten) Negro men are in a wider range of jobs at higher levels and higher salaries than Negro women. (Harwood and Hodge) The "free man" and "home-committed woman" pattern predominates in the ghetto and it is not uncommon to find families in which wives are expected to use all their earnings for the family so the husband can keep more of his for himself. (Rainwater 1970, pp. 158, 165)

Where the black family is matrifocal it is by default. Far from having been subservient to his wife, it is the man who feels the least constraint who roams free. "If one listens to low-income Negro females and observes their behavior at close range, it becomes apparent that somehow the news of their victory over the male hasn't come through to them . . . ." (Herzog, p. 12)

Some of these women are like neglected children who welcome abuse if it's the only way they can get attention:

Shirley . . . took pleasure in boasting to . . . other women that Richard pushed her around, insisted she stay off the street, and enforced the rule that she be up early every morning, dress the children and clean the house. For evidence of this kind of concern, Charlene would gladly pay the price of a slap in the face or a pushing around. (Liebow, p. 135)

The argument that birth control programs are genocidal has been made by a few militant black males who, like Cloward and Piven, are ideologically committed to a cause

that necessitates the writing off of individual adherents as expendable. The notable lack of support this stance has received from black women, militant or otherwise, and the fact that the birth rate among U.S. blacks still slightly exceeds that of whites tend to weaken that argument.

### 3 -- The welfare subcult

The third debilitating factor is the culture of welfare itself. There is a "welfare subcult". Those of us who were a part of it, not dabbling as participant observers, but mired in as full-fledged participants, know that it exists. Certainly not every welfare mother is a part of it, perhaps most are not, but it is pervasive and pernicious.

There are, of course, the devastating effects of a substandard income, and in many states AFDC payments remain well below the poverty level. In some cases the economic destitution is so great all else palls beside it. But for others the AFDC payment is minimally adequate, in some cases is not much less than the income to which the recipient was previously accustomed, and at least arrives regularly.

An interesting phenomenon overlooked by those who believe larger grants would be a panacea for all welfare's ills is the fact that a larger percentage of the recipients in high-grant states than in low-grant states consider being on welfare part of the "worst possible life", and it is in the high-grant states that recipients feel most stigmatized by being on welfare, indicating that the welfare stigma is not one of poverty so much as relative deprivation and dependency and the awareness of social censure. (Meyers and McIntyre)

The process of subcult socialization entails something similar to what Rodman calls the "value stretch" or the Van Tils have termed "adaptive drift". Old sailors say that on their first trip to the Orient they walked away ill when they saw a roach run across their rice; the second trip they watched the roach run across then continued eating; and the third trip they caught the roach after it ran across, put it back in the rice . . . and ate it. There is a roach-in-the-rice syndrome in the welfare subcult.

Demoralizing apathy and fatalism lead to that one more baby that seems not to make any difference except to provide a symbolic link with a man and to give some

new purpose to life. Lower-class married women, both black and white, are inclined to use contraception casually and to interrupt its use more often without explicit fertility objectives. (Rainwater 1960; Westoff and Ryder) This pattern continues even after a marital breakup. In New York City half the welfare mothers had their first pregnancy before they were 19, 70% said they want no more children, 70% know where to get contraceptives, yet nearly half expect to have more children and an equal number think getting pregnant is a matter of luck. (Podell)

It is not an illegitimate pregnancy so much as an adolescent pregnancy that predisposes young women to poverty. (Johnson) Even more than race or social class, pregnancy itself is the strongest predictor of future reproductive behavior among juvenile girls. (Keeve) Early, repeated childbearing substantially hinders economic mobility. (Freedman and Coombs) If a husband-less woman has only one or two children the chances are two out of three that she can stay above the poverty line; as the family increases those chances decrease sharply. (Stein)

Dependency in any guise is enervating; institutionalized dependency is immobilizing. Women who have been trained since birth to be dependent on a man are at least made to feel they are adequately productive by keeping house and raising children for him. It is difficult for them to convince themselves they are adequately productive in keeping house and raising children for the Department of Public Welfare. They know they are not paid for services rendered to the state but are subsidized merely because no one is supposed to starve.

Welfare mothers tend to be geographically concentrated and isolated from the rest of society, usually in slums or housing projects (or both), which greatly facilitate the growth of a subcult. Those who live away from other women in similar straits experience a certain sense of isolation and may feel the need to communicate with other welfare mothers, but their chances of maintaining or establishing contact with non-welfare friends and relatives and, thus, with the larger society, are much greater. Those who live among concentrations of people like themselves tend to lose touch with people "on the outside", and it becomes much more difficult to avoid or to extricate oneself from the welfare subcult.

In the mid-1960's Jeffers, living in a black housing project on the East Coast found that

there is a pattern of social differentiation among the poor in public housing that is based more on differences in the extent to which families think they have the power or potential to change status -- to escape public housing -- than it is on lifestyles, education and income level . . . .

An initial and continuing reaction of families living in this housing project was that of being inside a reservation or compound, literally and figuratively separated from others who are outside. Particularly telling of the sense of separation from outside, and at the same time suggesting some of the cleavages inside, was the remark of one mother who retained live hopes of "getting out": "I have been here two years, but I don't have anything to do with my neighbors. All my friends are on the outside, and that is the way I want it." (Lewis, pp. iii-iv)

Five years earlier and 3,000 miles away I had observed exactly the same phenomenon in an all-white housing project. It is this process of coming to regard oneself as a pariah that often welds the final link in the chain that binds one to the welfare subcult.

#### 4 -- The diametrically opposed "allies"

The fourth impediment standing squarely between welfare mothers and their liberation is two sets of formidable "allies": those who don't want welfare mothers to work at all and those who want them to work under any circumstances.

Goodwin's Do the Poor Want to Work? substantiated the fact that, mostly, they do. Among New York City's welfare mothers 60% of those who had preschool children preferred to work. (Podell) In a poll of 3,500 welfare mothers in ten cities, one-third were found to have been working most of the time and 55% said they would prefer working to staying at home. (Solarz) Virtually every study posing the question found a substantial number of welfare mothers eager to work. (Meyers and McIntyre; Schiller; Sterne et al.)

Levinson's study of AFDC women found that 87% of the school dropouts -- half of whom had never been in high school -- had had work experience. Even having preschool children did not deter the majority of welfare mothers from working at least part of the time. (Meyers and McIntyre) Black women invariably have more work

experience and are more eager to work than their white counterparts, even though they have had less education and earned less money. (Meyers and McIntyre; Shea; Waldman)

Studies consistently find that it is the mothers with the greatest employment potential who have the lowest self-esteem when they are reduced to taking welfare. There is a positive relationship between self-esteem and number of months of employment, and this relationship holds in every state, for both races, and in all education groups. (Goodwin; Levinson; Meyers and McIntyre)

Yet every year there is a new crop of pundits who are determined to convince both the public and the policy-makers that welfare mothers shouldn't work, can't work, don't work and/or won't work.

Steiner feels that a program designed to train welfare mothers for a GS-2 position in the federal government is "optimistic" since "most trainees have ninth to eleventh grade educations while a GS-2 needs a high school diploma or equivalency or six months' experience and the ability to pass a typing test." (pp. 69-70) One wonders whom he thought the high school equivalency tests were designed for if not high school dropouts. Possibly he had in mind only male dropouts.

The National Welfare Rights Organization has many important goals and worthy achievements to its credit, but getting people off welfare isn't among them. It functions very much like a trade union, seeks to increase its membership, strengthen its bargaining power, and gain benefits for its members while protecting their rights. Although low-wage earners can be welfare recipients, ordinarily NWRO is as eager to encourage its members to go to work as a labor union to put its members in an unemployment line.

On the other hand, some "workfare" plans are strongly coercive and punitive. The "Talmadge Amendments" which were passed without debate, and very little publicity, on the final day of the last session of Congress 1971, required all welfare mothers with schoolage children not only to register for work but to accept any job the government gave them and any arrangement the state chose to make for the care of their children. The states' compliance was assured by a provision that each state must enroll 15% of its eligible recipients in WIN (the Work Incentive Program) or lose 1% in federal funds for every percentage point below that figure.

Klausner's study of WIN found that the most fruitful dichotomization of welfare mothers would result in subsidizing the "traditionalists" who are committed to a housewife-mother role (encouraging some of them to care for the children of working mothers), while assisting the work-oriented "modernizing" mothers to obtain employment. But it seems doubtful that such a distinction will be employed by administrators who can more readily determine who has schoolage children and who has not than who is traditional and who modern.

Coercive and indiscriminate workfare proposals may well have exacerbated the tendency of NWRO to react with knee-jerk negativism, and the latter has resulted in dubious stances on specific issues. When in 1967 HEW sponsored neighborhood day care demonstration projects using welfare mothers to care for the children of other welfare mothers, one of the major snags was that the health requirements of a federal day care center automatically disqualified much of the substandard housing that welfare recipients are forced to rent. This would seem to give NWRO an opportunity to push for the upgrading of welfare housing. Instead, an NWRO spokesman warned:

Do not force mothers to take care of other children. You do not know what kind of problem that parent might have. You do not know whether she gets tired of her own children or not but you are trying to force her to take care of other people's children and forcing the parents to go out in the field and work when you know there is no job. (Steiner, p. 72)

Apparently it did not occur to the speaker that perhaps a mother "tired of her own children" should not be coerced into staying home on welfare when she would prefer to work; nor that one cannot be forced to work at a non-existent job.

Although the preponderance of its members and officers are welfare mothers, NWRO does not view itself as a woman's organization and it is not solely concerned with AFDC. It is, however, very much aware of "Women's Lib" and perceives the movement as a threat. At a "work and welfare" conference in 1972 one NWRO representative said:

I'm not at all opposed to Women's Lib, but when you examine Women's Lib in terms of what it has done to the welfare movement, it's astounding, because you had welfare recipients crying, "Foul play! The government supports a double standard: it tells middle-class people they can stay at home and

forces welfare recipients to work." Then you have Women's Lib coming around and saying, "We want to go to work, we want to put our children in day care." That took some of the fire out of your argument because they're asking for things that you said they weren't.

In terms of sex role liberation, it's clear that what NWRO offers welfare mothers is equivalent to NOW (the National Organization for Women) offering suburban housewives another credit card and biweekly bridge games.

#### 5 -- Ambivalent public opinion

A fifth factor inhibiting welfare mothers is the ambivalence of public opinion regarding a sex role revolution. A 1971 Roper poll found that 65% of the American public thinks free or low-cost day care centers should be available to those who want them, but 76% disapproved of a woman supporting her husband while he stayed home with the children, even if she could earn a better living than he. (Interestingly, only 10% of the women, but 22% of the men were open to this role reversal.) (Society)

Steiner notes that

professionals, laymen, and politicians have abandoned the dogmatic idea that all mothers belong at home. What they are still groping for is an alternative philosophy and alternative arrangements -- the ground rules that determine when working mothers should be tolerated, when encouraged, and when insisted upon. (p. 55)

Would it be presumptuous to suggest they grope for ground rules that determine when child-rearing fathers should be tolerated, when encouraged, and when insisted upon?

#### 6 -- The welfare bureaucracy

The sixth obstacle is the welfare bureaucracy itself. A 1967 amendment to the Social Security Act provided an earning exemption known as "30 and one-third". Under this law the first \$30 and one-third of the remainder of a welfare recipient's monthly earnings are exempted in the determination of eligibility and payments. In addition, most work-related expenses, including child care, are also exempted (i.e., subtracted from earnings

before the computation of eligibility). Three years after this law was passed 83% of welfare mothers still had not been told about it. (Solarz)

Whatever HEW has in mind when it sets policy, it is less in control of the programs than the states are, and the states tend to be indifferent to most aspects of AFDC except its cost. (Steiner, p. 31)

The failure of the Work Incentive Program is illustrative of ponderous bureaucratic ineptitude in action (or, more accurately, "inaction"). Levitan et al. have graphically depicted what they aptly term "the WIN funnel" (p. 100):

Of the 2 1/2 million eligible recipients screened through fiscal 1971

only 24% were found "appropriate for referral";  
of the "appropriate", only 79% were actually referred;  
of those referred, only 58% were actually enrolled;  
and of those enrolled, only 13% were actually employed.

Schiller found at least three studies indicating WIN's dropouts may be the most able and motivated enrollees, since many leave the program to take jobs on their own. Critics claim that there is a lack of cooperation between the Labor Department and the welfare agencies, that local administrators have dragged their feet, and that inadequate supportive services were offered. (AEI) Although a tax credit is available to employers of WIN graduates, there is evidence that few employers know about it and few hire enough graduates to justify the cost of the paper work. There are, in addition, great variations between states in determining who is "appropriate", in procedures for referral, and in program availability. At any given moment there are as many recipients "holding", i.e., between referral and enrollment, as there are enrolled. This "holding" can go on for months. Forty percent of those "holding" do not hold, that is, they drop out.

Eighteen months after enactment of the 1967 legislation [the Department of Labor and HEW] were unable to meet more than 60 percent of their modest work and training goals or more than 50 percent of their even more modest day care goals. (Steiner, p. 73)



Pennsylvania's DPW devised an ingenious strategy for coping with the Talmadge dictum: since they would have to treble their current WIN enrollment in order to meet the mandatory 15% minimum, they planned to lop off two-thirds of the training period, running three sets of enrollees through in the time allotted for one.

#### 7 -- The lack of day care

The seventh obstacle is day care. That lack of child care is one of welfare mothers' chief handicaps is a truism. (Levinson; Meyers and McIntyre; Sterne et al.; Warren and Berkowitz) Yet in 1969 the federal government appropriated \$25 million for child care and only \$4 million was used. In 1970, \$52 million was appropriated and only \$18 million was used. Some of the explanations that have been offered for this lapse are (1) the reluctance of the states to put up the 25% matching funds (AEI); (2) the social workers who consider day care appropriate only as "a remedy for parental failure or inadequacy" (Steiner, p. 57); and (3) the confusing welter of federal-state-local licensing requirements (Steiner).

Although several studies indicate mothers prefer home care for their children, rather than institutional care, the reasons for this preference have not been well explored. Researchers in this area tend to make tacit assumptions that fit their ideological biases regarding nurturance, gemeinschaft, etc. although there is some indication mothers are concerned about more practical matters, such as the fact that many of the existing day care facilities in this country are often not convenient to either home or workplace, operate for too few hours, and provide no care for children who have even minor symptoms of a cold.

#### 8 -- The inadequacy of women's wages

The eighth and most crucial hindrance to the liberation of welfare mothers is the inadequacy of women's wages. (Carter; Dixon; Glassman; Hausman; Meyers and McIntyre; Rein and Wishnov; Stein; Stevenson) Thirty percent of all working women are service workers or semi-skilled operatives who are paid an average of \$1900 per year less than men doing the same work. Over two million women, predominantly black, are household workers earning barely \$1000 per year. (Dixon) Sex discrimination accounts for more income differences than does race discrimination. (Almquist; Sawhill)

If all women heading poor families were to become employed at jobs with weekly earnings commensurate with their education levels, and assuming that they would be subject to prevailing practices of racial and sex discrimination in hiring and pay scales, they would earn an average of about \$74 per week (as of the spring of 1969). (Stein, p. 8)

At that rate, two-thirds of all welfare mothers could not have earned enough to support their families. (Hausman) Yet they try, because, as one caseworker put it, "It's better any day to be Sisyphus than the rock." (Gell, p. 148)

One of the most interesting facts only recently being brought to light is the extent to which AFDC supplements the low wages of working women. In 1971, 9% of the women eligible for and receiving AFDC grants were employed full time. And the tax bite implicit in the \$30-and-one-third disregard of their earnings is the same rate applicable to persons earning more than \$140,000 annually. (Levitan et al.; Schiller)

Even when they succeed in becoming independent, the fact that their wages are low and that they have no insurance, no sick leave, no union -- and no male partner sharing their responsibilities -- tends to make even minor financial crises loom so large they are forced back on welfare. As Durbin noted, "two-fifths of the mothers coming into ADC are dropping out of the labor force, both voluntarily and involuntarily." (pp. 119-121) Yet Durbin herself (in a study funded by New York City's Human Resources Administration and Economic Development Administration and the Ford Foundation -- aegis that presages policy) argues that

at best, any effective employment program for ADC mothers runs the risk of being just as expensive as supporting mothers at home; at worst, the improvement in the total income available to a female-headed family may well add to the disincentives for fathers to support their families, the only long-run solution to dependency on ADC. (p. 124)

It's Kristol-clear where that leaves the sex role revolution for welfare mothers.

## Conclusion

We are led inexorably to the conclusion that welfare mothers are most in need of and least likely to share in a sex role revolution. There is also another inescapable conclusion: to explore the sexism inherent in the welfare system is to ask some provocative questions. Is it possible that the sex role liberation in recent years has occurred not among women liberated from motherhood but among men who have been liberated from fatherhood? Are programs ostensibly designed to aid mothers and children really benefitting them or someone else? To what extent is welfare indirectly subsidizing sexism in business and industry? And how much economic exploitation is facilitated by sex role socialization? In short, to liberate welfare mothers is to pry open Pandora's Box.

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