

Governing the Low-Income Self in Colorado's Front Range

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Abstract:

This paper focuses on the underbelly of “work” in America, unemployment, or lack of “work,” and its hidden transcript for some of the 39 million Americans experiencing poverty in America at the turn of the twenty-first century. Using Foucault’s concept of “governmentality” (1991) and Cruikshank’s notion of “technologies of citizenship” (1993), this paper examines “welfare reform” discourses promoted by the U.S. government that stress “self-sufficiency”; such discourses reconfigure low-income citizens’ relationship to the state, aligning individuals with federal interests via the endorsement of self-governance. Legislated changes in federally funded entitlements promoted by welfare reform in 1996 have implications which extend beyond the “roll-back” of the provisions themselves. They mark a critical juncture in which neo-conservative and neo-liberal thought have merged in the call for individual citizens to produce social reform through virtuous personal conduct that models a state-defined normative order.

*Democratic government is one that relies upon citizens to voluntarily subject themselves to power.
– Alexis de Toqueville (1835)*

Introduction

This paper examines how the U.S. government’s welfare reform era promotion of discourses centering on self-sufficiency reconfigures low-income citizens’ relationship to the state, confirming the alignment of individuals with its interests via the endorsement of self-governance. Since the advent of welfare reform in 1996 the provision of social services to low-income families has devolved from being the responsibility of the federal government to individual states and local communities (DeParle 1996). President William J. Clinton promised to end “welfare as we know it” (HUD 1994, 29) when he signed the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRORWA) of 1996 (P.L. 1-4193) into law on August 22, 1996.¹ This legislated change in federally funded entitlements holds implications that extend beyond the “roll-back” of provisions themselves. It marks a critical juncture in which neo-conservative and neo-liberal thought has merged² in the call for individual citizens to produce social reform through virtuous personal conduct which models a state-defined normative order (Baistow 1995; Burchell et al. 1991; Cruikshank 1993, 1994; deRoche and deRoche 1999; Foucault 1991[1979]; Fraser 1993; Goldstein 2000; Hopton 1995; Hyatt 1997; Lippert 1998; Miller and Rose 1990; O’Malley 1999; O’Malley et al. 1997; O’Malley and Palmer 1996; Rose 1993; Rose and Miller 1992; Valverde 1996).

Using Foucault’s concept of governmentality,³ an analysis of “how we think about governing others and ourselves in a wide variety of contexts” (Dean 1999, 208), I examine the methods of population control or

technologies of citizenship⁴ (Cruikshank 1993, 1994; Ewick 1993; Greco 1993) embedded in the administration of Project Self-Sufficiency (PSS) in Boulder, Colorado.⁵ This local, affordable housing, education, and training program⁶ for low-income families is sponsored by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and is directed by the local Housing Authority.⁷ Boulder’s program was considered a successful pilot in the mid-1980s and continues to be heralded as an exemplary program (Wolfe 2000); it is a reasonable lens through which to view how the state encourages individuals to “self-regulate” their conduct in order to ensure the security of our communities (Miller and Rose 1990).⁸ Examining three aspects of Boulder’s PSS: 1) the structuring of a discourse of poverty centering on “choice”; 2) psychology as a disciplinary tool; and 3) an architecture of surveillance, I argue that in their attempt to convince under-employed parents that both the source and panacea of their financial predicaments is their “self,” welfare reform era social programs perpetuate the notion of a “culture of poverty” (Lewis 1966).⁹

The Anthropology of Poverty

My research diverges from the anthropological works cited above by shifting the anthropological gaze from low-income individuals themselves to their providers, a program’s administration, and the federal mandate that engendered this new mode of coping with poverty.¹⁰ The works cited above document the deleterious social controls affected by social service agents who are devoted to combating the effects of poverty itself. Within the complex of poverty issues this

is one area that anthropologists have not yet fully documented in order for any well-informed “fight” against it to be mobilized. The aforementioned dichotomy (agency versus suffering/subjection) conveniently masks the complexity and extent of state governance in what Rose (1993) terms a period of advanced liberalism, in which governing systems of rule “do not find their principle of coherence in a State” (as they might have in a unitary “welfare state”). Anthropological analyses must, therefore, be sophisticated and flexible enough to capture the character of a system in which state governance is elaborated through recourse to neither subjection nor subjectivity, but in their confluence.¹¹ Population management is extended beyond the state (Lippert 1999). The divide between subjection and subjectivity has been purposely narrowed by the government’s neo-liberal proclivity for, using Latour’s words, “action at distance” (Latour 1987). Governance from the periphery operates by the ascription of expertise to agents who guide the local production of truths through an institutionally sanctioned vocabulary of choice and regime of practices (Bainstow 1995).¹²

Rather than add to the literature on rural and urban poverty (Susser 1996), I move anthropological focus to a segment of low-income individuals in the affluent community of Boulder, Colorado, who access PSS services. With an unemployment rate of 3.8 percent and an estimated median family income in 1999 of \$68,700, the 14,393 individuals recorded at below the poverty level in 1999 (Boulder Chamber of Commerce 2000) go virtually unnoticed. In fact, *Outdoor Magazine* (1998) named Boulder one of the 10 most appealing locales in the United States. Situating my work in this town yields an unfamiliar context from which to discuss issues of post-welfare reform poverty. Unlike much of the academic writing (Glasgow 1981; Massey and Eggers 1990; Mead 1989; Mincy et al. 1990; Murray 1984, 1985; Myrdall 1962; Ricketts and Sawhill 1998; Wilson 1980, 1987, 1999) and journalism regarding poverty (Auletta 1982; Leman 1986), the intent of this study is not to answer questions of “who are ‘the poor?’” and “how do they persist?” While it is important to note how PSS’s target population is selected, this study focuses on the government, or “conduct of conduct” (Foucault 1991), which reconstitutes their relationship to the state and to themselves.¹³

Background

Housing reform has not garnered as much national attention as has welfare reform (Crewe 1997). However, the Cranston Gonzalez Affordable Housing

Act of 1990 promoted the integration of public welfare and housing assistance. It established the Family Self-Sufficiency Program (FSS) in which economic independence and self-sufficiency became legislated goals. The FSS program is structured to serve families who voluntarily enroll to end their dependency on housing and welfare assistance through individualized service plans (Crewe 1997, 52). Special features of the plan include its ability to be reshaped to meet the needs of specific clients and an escrow account that permits families to save increases in earned income, thereby creating self-sufficiency through savings. Other recent rule changes in housing legislation, including minimum rents, One Strike and You’re Out, and the elimination of federal preferences for admissions, are “all linked to clients’ achieving greater responsibility” (Crewe 1997). The federal government stripped FSS of its “voluntary” status in 1992, mandating its institution for housing agencies that received additional public housing and Section 8 assistance after October 1982.¹⁴ For recipients the program is still voluntary (Crewe 1997, 52).

Governance Enacted: A Review of Project Self-Sufficiency

The Family Self-Sufficiency Act of 1995, a consequence of the juggernaut of welfare reform in the 1980s,¹⁵ promoted flexible responses to poverty issues through the allocation of severely limited block grants to individual states, setting the stage for true welfare reform in 1996. Through its wide-ranging objectives, the federal government planned to “[restore] the American family, reduce illegitimacy, control welfare spending, and reduce welfare dependence . . .” (Family Self-Sufficiency Act of 1995, 104th Congress, 1st Session). Liberal welfare programs were censured for handicapping low-income families by hindering their formation of “values, attitudes and beliefs which are in line with those of society,” an obstacle which “limited their access to the very attitudes required for full participation in the labor force” (Maxwell 1993, 240).

Optimization of the individual poor insists on deployment of choice as the neo-liberal force to shape an under-employed individual’s conduct.¹⁶ Boulder’s PSS was part of the federal government’s mushrooming interest in the 1980s to identify innovative means by which to combat poverty. As part of the “widespread, long-term experiments in welfare policy” (HUD 1985, 1) advocated by the President’s Council, HUD initiated “Partners in Self-Sufficiency” in 72 communities; the demonstration eventually spread to 155 communities in 37 states plus Guam, Puerto Rico, and the District of Columbia (HUD 1985). With the intent of coordinating

existing public and private sector programs into “personal development programs” (HUD 1985), scarce federal resources were to be stretched through the provision of a thin professional support staff who would serve the underclass. Through a series of interviews with the Project Director and staff (i.e., case workers, social workers, and community organizers) of Boulder’s PSS, it is evident that its framework adheres to the principles outlined above.

Boulder’s PSS was created in 1984 as part of a federal HUD program offering eligible low-income families the opportunity to receive a wide array of coordinated services designed to help them gain economic independence. Since 1988 it has been fully funded and locally organized. Participants must meet Housing Authority guidelines which stipulate that: 1) at least half of recipients’ income should be spent on housing; 2) they must have one child under the age of 13; 3) they must be registered on the waitlist for public housing and Section 8 (or holding either);¹⁷ and 4) have fewer than 30 college credits. The program helps low-income families to meet housing and basic needs, set educational and career goals, obtain job training and tuition assistance, and develop personal and professional life skills. It currently works with 140 clients in Boulder County plus an additional 35 who reside in subsidized apartments at its Pine Forest housing site within Boulder city limits. The program originally targeted single women but shifted in 1992 to serving families as well as single men with children.

The Power of Language on the Politics of Poverty

Since Boulder’s PSS Project Director, a regional consultant responsible for helping Western communities implement their own self-sufficiency programs, concedes that “what we are doing is creating the working poor,” it is critical to consider what the program’s value is in terms of governance.¹⁸ Interviews with the PSS staff are examined below to discern the language technologies employed in shaping the conduct of program participants. Essentially, the valence of the programmatic language used in this social-engineering project is not actualized in the rubric of self-sufficiency, which hovers as an intangible, but in the intellectual technology (Cruikshank 1993, 1994) of self-control, on which the program is truly predicated.

In this case, language is construed as a first-order phenomenon that operates in conjunction with a governmental regime of practices to shape the ideal citizen for participation in welfare reform era programs. The assertion that language and politics are mutually

constitutive is not novel (Burchell et al. 1991; Connelly 1987; Miller and Rose 1993; Shapiro 1984; Taylor 1987). From PSS’s initial screening process to the case management (prescribed for all clients) and the counseling services they are strongly urged to access, PSS clients encounter a program that, through discursive practice, systemically reinforces notions of what comprises proper conduct for a moral citizen eligible for post-welfare reform benefits.

Numerous anthropologists have previously commented on the devolution of federal functions to state and local communities (Cheater 1997; Cockburn 1994; Perring 1994; Wright 1994; Filer 1996) which disempowered “bureaucratic service-deliverers and empowered those previously dependent on such bureaucracies” (Cheater 1997, 8). Cheater (1997) notes that states govern their constituents in innovative ways predicated on self-control and participatory citizenship. Welfare reform has, thus, not deviated from a historic, public-housing emphasis on parsing out the “deserving” from the “undeserving” poor (Weldfeld 1988). Boulder’s PSS program preserves the dichotomy of the “truly needy” or “deserving poor,” (Katz 1989) but couches its acceptance or rejection of clients in reference to their degree of “motivation.”¹⁹

The Screening Process

The question of whether or not people are equipped for participation in the program is also a matter of *realpolitik*, as noted by the Boulder Project Director’s admission that “we are scrutinized for success rate.” With these considerations in mind the screening process is rigorous, culling those for whom, as one social worker stated, “it is not the right time,” or “they have too much going on.” The PSS Guidebook (1985) clearly outlines the proper rationale for joining the program, stating that it is important to “Make sure every applicant understands the concept of the program. When selecting participants, insist that applicants define their reasons for wanting to participate. If reasons stated are short-term goals (i.e., to get into housing, to receive training or day care, or even to get a job), this is a good indication that the person’s goals are shortsighted” (HUD 1985, 25). In independent interviews, case workers and social workers echoed the federal sentiment that the program is more about long-term personal transformation demanding a high degree of motivation than it is about short-term economic gain. For example, Sheryl, a single mother in her forties whose personal success story included a transition from work in the computer industry to a satisfying career in social services, states that:

Motivation is a big [criteria when selecting clients]. People with a bit of self-awareness; nothing happens by accident. You didn't choose that relationship by accident; sort of seeing where they are at. Then, you know who is ready to come in . . . *no doubt about it, it is subjective*. . . We have no quota, [selection] depends on appropriateness. *We never turn away appropriate people* (emphasis added).

Nevertheless, good intentions alone are not enough to constitute an "appropriate" candidate for the program. Character deficits must be addressed prior to one's entry into the program. Is it paradoxical for a program, the objective of which is to help clients achieve self-sufficiency, to deter participants whose sole objective for joining might be to get a job, or who are burdened by extenuating personal factors? For example, rather than embrace the structural realities impeding an under-employed individual's advancement, a lack of commitment to mainstream values, such as sexual restraint and a Protestant work ethic, are implicated in pregnant women's inadequacy for government mandated programs (Fraser 1993).

Gendered welfare discourse in the 1980s placed fault for the deterioration of America's communities on "bloated" welfare programs that condoned "such dysfunctional behaviors as 'out of wedlock' childbearing and work avoidance. The remedy was [and still is, evidently] personal responsibility" (Fraser 1993).²⁰ Will there ever be a "good time" to serve the excluded segment of the population, especially if they are truly unprepared to assume the responsibilities conferred by "full" citizenship (Cruikshank 1993)?

Discourse: Production and Affect

The PSS staff instills ideals of self-improvement, moral order, and personal organization in their clients through competing discourses. First, by roughly inscribing their identities with vice and derelict behavior, the Project Director renders subjects amenable to interventions sanctioned by the state. Second, practitioners (e.g., caseworkers and social workers) generally recognize participants as peers, conjoining them to the staff through a heightened degree of empathy. Direct providers recognize that their clients' predicaments (social and financial) stem less from moral failings than from deficits in organizational capacities and malformed habits; discourses in this arena prescribe the inculcation of self-order and regulation. It should be noted that while these discourses are most abundant in the spheres described above, they are not exclusive to either administration or

practitioner and are endorsed by the staff by virtue of their coherent implementation of a standardized program. Moreover, these discourses operate in tandem to translate (Miller and Rose 1990) or link individual actors' peculiar lifeways to a confederation of organizations, techniques, entities, and locales that might otherwise be construed as independent.

O'Malley et al. (1997) are concerned that the governmentality literature may degenerate into "ritualized and repetitive accounts of 'governing' in increasingly diverse contexts" (1997, 514). Their concern is salient, should hunting for the "dark side" of liberal governance (Valverde 1996) preclude researchers' considerations of intra-program contradictions. However, their emphasis on multivocality as a panacea for such an academic proclivity may obscure the fact that multivocality should not be arbitrarily correlated to heterogeneity in practice. For example, the following discursive analysis suggests programmatic rifts in effect; I conclude that discourses which may, initially, contradict each other actually converge in terms of their prescriptive effects as revealed in the PSS program's implementation.²¹

To illuminate the process through which the signature of PSS's social services is manufactured and then imprinted on its subjects, it is useful to review how clients are exposed to both of the aforementioned sensibilities that migrate into practice. In the first orientation meeting, held at a local church, the Project Director delivers an organizational homily in which her authority as moral arbiter is unquestioned. Commencing with, "You have to think about who you want to be when you grow up," the implication is that a lack of self-awareness and personal fortitude is responsible for the participants' presence at an informational meeting on affordable housing and education opportunities. She observes that continued "drugging and drinking" would adversely affect individuals' abilities to lift themselves out of their present condition. In short, the entire group is indicted with moral lapses that reflect poor judgment. While a question period is reserved for the end of the session, there is no opportunity for participants to reply to the problematization of their condition. Instantiating an affinity between herself and the participants the Project Director then reflects on questionable behavior in her past and how, once targeting a goal, she instituted what some people "might . . . call boring . . . it is discipline," leading to her ascension to the position of authority she holds today. When she asks the clients how she mastered difficult academic topics in the past after sitting in the back of the room, a chorus of "you sat in

the front row” affirms the potential clients’ comprehension of her morality tale. As this registers, she suggests that personal habits may be in need of reform as they transcend circumstances that hold others (the undeserving poor?) back. The foil of the “other” actually incites one participant to invoke distance between those in the room and their inferior mirror image: “they’ll be in the same place 10 years down the road,” he says. The Project Director then introduces the modes of intervention which will enable the clients to progress to becoming valued compatriots: organizing their personal lives with the assistance of case managers and social workers; housing; education; and “biting the bullet and getting off welfare.”

She doesn’t mention to them, as she off-handedly mentioned to me, that some of PSS’s present clients lack “middle class niceties,” but she does put them through paces as to how one might suppress anger and aggression in order to negotiate the bureaucratic system of social and educational services they are about to enter; without prior personal contact it is assumed that their sense of diplomacy and mainstream etiquette is shoddy at best. A social worker then steps up to inform the participants just “how much we believe in you.” I’m reminded of my earlier conversation with the Project Director when she observed that, “if the clients are improving themselves, we’ll invest in [them] as [they] invest in [themselves] . . . they stay in touch with us . . . it’s in their interests . . . even in Section 8, they are a captive audience.” Even before they are officially enrolled their identities are subject to a series of governance techniques bent on self-reform.

During my interviews with the caseworkers and counseling interns, a competing discourse surfaced which de-emphasized “the otherness of poor people” (Beresford and Croft 1995, 1985). Its authors, PSS practitioners, grant participants a phenomenological proximity that the Project Director’s assessment of deviant behavior cannot countenance. Their recognition of the heterogeneity of participants (Beresford and Croft 1995), and empathetic identification with them, confers an implicit knowledge of how their needs are best met, including the restructuring of their personal habits and psychological states. Providers defy conventional poverty wisdom that clearly objectifies poor people, “offering both politicians and the non-poor an effective way of managing poverty” (Yellowy, in Beresford and Croft 1995, 86). The primary case manager, in terms of client portfolio, noted that:

Most of our clients go against the stereotype because 99 percent of clients don’t want to be on TANF; they

hate welfare; we’re seeing more people coming in from middle class or upperclass families; they’ve never been on foodstamps; they are just in a tough spot; they don’t even know what TANF is. They don’t know how to access resources because they’ve never seen their parents do it.

According to her counterpart in case management:

If you’re from poverty, grew up in it, you know how to work the system; if you’ve fallen into poverty, you have no clue how to reach resources . . . [we’re seeing a] new need, it’s people who are divorced [like myself], 50 percent of people are divorced, no money for either side in litigation, two poor families . . . we get a lot of divorced people, mostly moms, we hear it from both sides.

Listening to the other social worker, who said: [clients] are a variety of people. They’re everyday people. I can identify with a lot of them. They’re driving nicer cars than I am, but they have children and I don’t. They’re in a different financial situation. Boulder might make it more unique. . . . A lot of reasons for a few steps forward and ten steps back. . . one woman with parents of doctors or others with no money all the way back . . . what walks in the door ranges,” it is clear that practitioners refuse to pathologize PSS participants; some even prefer not to objectify them by calling them “clients.” They attempt to thwart programmatic demonization of “the poor,” who have become reviled in other sectors of society.

We will see, however, that they do not fully reject the implication of the “underclass in . . . its poverty via the reproduction of maladaptive, subcultural attitudinal and behavioral traits” (Maxwell 1993, 241). The essentializing tropes of poverty employed by the Project Director enable the administration to address the affairs of “the poor” without questioning the appropriateness of the mission, creating an environment in which providers’ empathetic interventions in the name of “the poor” are justified.

Spokespeople for Choice

Untethered from the apparatus of big government, experts such as PSS’s case managers and social workers operate in local cells of power helping individuals to “overcome the problems that they have discovered . . . shaping conduct not through compulsion but through the power of truth, the potency of rationality and the alluring promises of effectivity” (Miller and Rose 1990, 18). The extension of market

forces into personal spheres action (Goldstein 2000) results in the promotion of choice (what I prefer to think of as *prescriptive choice*) as a mitigating affect for the curing of personal failings. Before focusing on the ramifications of systemically produced choices, it is necessary to consider how PSS staff position choice within a matrix of self-empowerment exercises. Staff promote the attainment of self-control as the critical step toward financial security and well-being. Janice, a 28-year-old counselor nearing completion of a Master's degree in Transpersonal Psychology, states:

All the women I'm working with currently, a lot of [their problem] is prioritizing, and being practical. . . it bounces back and forth from being very counseling [oriented] to being very fundamental [or organizational]. . . With some clients, it's not [therapy they need], with others, deeply therapeutic, some much more . . . how to get ducks in a row, and then they're stable.

The frontier of the psychologizing domain oscillates between internal and external. As another counseling intern, Tammy, a former outdoor educator and youth worker states, "I definitely get into body and sexual issues, and that is a comfortable space for me, and [the other social worker] is more into dreamwork."²²

Artificial boundaries between public and private have thus diminished with the validation of experts' roles in shaping the individuals' conduct through provision of choice; the diminution of federal programming and government cannot be equated with the diminution of governance (Dean 1999). For example, low-income parents' mismanagement of their lives is also implicated in the lack of self-control exhibited by their children. The message with which clients are bombarded presupposes that they have not exercised a sufficient amount of restraint in their lives prior to contact with PPS. The domain of governance over the "low-income self" may, in its informal operation, supersede its institutional predecessor under welfare support. For example, should clients' inveterate bad habits inure them to vocal instructions received by case managers and counselors? Reinforcement for guiding their and their families' health and outlook is included in the PSS Newsletter. It circulates to all PSS participants, an emergent support group, and is fostered through community programming at their residential housing lot. The all-encompassing nature of programmatic directives is evident in material addressing stress-reduction, "time outs" for parent and child, resources to quit smoking, instilling a sense of gratitude in children, spontaneous optimism, etiquette

for children, and parenting skills. In addition, a "Life Skills" workshop is mandatory for new recruits:

two weeks, four mornings per week . . . if they can't be there [because of work or extenuating circumstances] they can't . . . but they can't be home watching Oprah. We do everything from budgeting, nutrition, domestic abuse awareness, parental skills, sexual assault prevention, homeowner stuff, just basic life skills, financial aid. We sell it on one level, but they're really bonding.

Proper conduct is systematically enforced by structuring clients' field of relations (Dean 1999) through an assemblage of seminars that attempt to impose structure where it is presumed absent.

Walking the Fine Line: Subjection and Subjectivity

The devolution of state and federal resources means that the poor absolutely must govern themselves, rapidly conforming to the expectations of those administering housing and vocational support. Speaking to this issue, another social worker declares:

Generally, many of the people that come in to the program will succeed no matter what. Maybe not in our time frame, but they'll get there. We tend to work *with* people. I tell them I'm just gonna get out of your way . . . [we're like] water at the side of the race. We just tell them we believe in them. It's so powerful. It brings tears to my eyes that they've never heard that. It's [so] powerful that people believe what you've told them. . . . It becomes their reality; we chip away at it, [and] two master level interns provide free counseling.

While PSS might contribute to altering a client's "reality," it cannot assure livelihood, security, or support commensurate with the level of responsibility exhibited by the participant him or herself. In terms of PSS's community programming, a staff person tells me that the "ultimate" would be if the clients took control of organized activities; essentially, they would usurp the control the state wants them to assume in the first place. The rights of the poor extend only so far as they are able to personally modify their circumstances through prudent governance of their actions.

The blurring of the boundary between subjectivity and subjection is engineered by an administration and staff who have themselves been wholly indoctrinated in the prevailing neo-liberal discourse of choice. Their belief in the efficacy of choice precludes their critical

analysis of the measures of coercion embedded both in the arrival of clients at their door and the smorgasbord of methods intended to help clients “resource.” Again and again staff members extol the virtue of choice as the program’s strength, especially compared to other mandated welfare programs. This emphasis includes, but is not limited to, the fact that clients can access multifarious social service programs in Boulder county²³ and can “port” (move) without losing the ability to apply their Section 8 vouchers to rent.

Psychological Rule

The programming of choice as a prerequisite for self-sufficiency is further linked to all facets of low-income individuals’ beings by the application of psychological practices. Counseling services buttress other modes of programmatic assistance that maximize participants’ potential in terms of human capital. It is important to mention the type of counseling provided in PSS’s conventional and informal settings. Both Master’s level interns (as well as the community organizer) are matriculating in the Naropa Institute’s Transpersonal Counseling Psychology program. The institute is the first fully accredited Buddhist college in the West. Transpersonal Psychology, the department chairperson says:

stands for the study and cultivation of optimal mental health, and it calls for the inclusion of spirituality in psychology as the foundation for full human development. Psychology benefits from a recognition and ability to work with an expanded range of human potentials, providing a fuller and richer understanding of therapy and growth (Carter 2000, 3).

We can assume that PSS counselors apply techniques through which they strive to impact an unusually broad range of clients’ characteristics. During interviews, PSS counselors noted that since the program is heavily influenced by Buddhist principles it differs from conventional psychology because, while intent on building up the self, they also view the objective of counseling (when “working with higher-functioning individuals than enrolled in PSS”) as dissipating the ego or self. Modification of the self is the vector at which psychological practices and programmatic mandate overlap.

My inquiries regarding the emergent association between housing and convenient access to counseling services elicited spirited responses from staff members who vouchsafed that counseling services were

encouraged for those in need but were not compulsory. Case managers who think that clients might benefit from involvement with counseling refer them to gratis in-house counselors; the client can then compare their styles, select the one with whom they are most comfortable, discontinue counseling altogether, or seek outside assistance. Staff consistently praise ready access to counseling services as a primary attribute of PSS. Furthermore, this choice ostensibly conditions both access to counseling and its content as well. Staff distinguish PSS from the other programs that instrumentally compromise subjects’ volition, stating:

We’re different [from other programs targeting low-income populations] because we’re voluntary, not mandatory. We’re not crisis oriented as food bank or emergency assistance. It doesn’t feel free or coercive, but this is a different relationship. That is not to say that people don’t feel pushed. We remind them of goals, acknowledging that there are tons of barriers; we let them know it’s hard . . . we’re not mandatory or coercive, making people do stuff to give a check for \$280 [as other welfare programs].

Should such a testimonial preclude the supposition that, since federal cutbacks led to the institution of PSS programs as a permanent fixture on the social service horizon, clients have been coerced to access any standing services that purport to mitigate their condition? Although staff members may not consciously grapple with this issue in particular, both administrators and case management staff recognize that clients are provided with differential degrees of programmatic support, including the leveraging of available counseling services, based on their expenditure of effort. A PSS administrator states that:

[Clients] meet with their case manager, especially at the front. We have extra money for car repair. . . . We have our own emergency funds in house, which is wonderful, because if we’ve tapped everything, we’ll write a check. If the client is improving themselves, we’ll invest in you as much as you invest in yourself. . . . They stay in touch with us . . . it’s in their interest [for things like special scholarships] . . . even in Section 8 [for which we improve their chances], they are a captive audience.

In a closed-door meeting a case manager concurred that staff investments in clients were correlated to clients following the guidance that was offered. According to my informants, if clients want to deviate from the course of action, in terms of counseling services recommended by the staff, they may not receive the

level of programmatic support available to counterparts who are faithful to staff directives. This strategic melding of constraints and independence represents how “the self-regulating capacities of subjects, shaped and normalized in large part through the powers of expertise have become key resources for modern forms of government and have established some crucial conditions for governing in a liberal democratic way” (Miller and Rose 1990, 2). Such “freedom of choice” ensures that clients’ subjection is near complete.

The Personal Audit as Governance

The coordination of the PSS “progress” toward self-improvement rests on assessment and recording methods that enable case managers to convert the essential matters behind human capital into measurable statistics. These facts and figures come to represent the local low-income population’s foibles and advancements toward self-realization to the community at-large, themselves, and their service providers. The economy of personal improvement, psychological and otherwise, must be fleshed out through attention to the “microphysics of power” (Miller and Rose 1990, 7), including the timetables, charts, notations, and reports that document clients as subjects amenable to intervention. For example, a staff member reports:

People come in with a lot of different educational levels, GED levels, little school, not much, no clue . . . [and we say] go take an assessment for skills level, what your personality type matches and then make *choices*. [If they say] I want to be an RN . . . great, but take that test and see if that’s what really fits your personality . . . sometimes, as they take classes, they decide they don’t want to do that . . . by assessment testing . . . we try to have them see some of the options.

In a paradoxical gesture, the client is extended the opportunity to choose from a statistical profile of themselves and their aptitude. Denied the same degree of agency afforded citizens who have not been pathologized through unemployment, the agency service providers profess to expand their clients’ knowledge of vocational options in a manner which negates the possibility that the source of their financial predicament is not a lack of cognizance of the world around them – including professional worlds – but the result of structural impediments.

Gauging the civil and professional fitness of clients begins at the onset of their involvement in PSS. In the aforementioned “Life Skills” program, “Asset Based”

measurement elaborates family governance to include child management practices. In short, because clients are plagued by financial difficulties, their ability to nurture and raise children is subject to scrutiny by PSS. Swept up in the fervor of calculation, a staff case manager says:

[Asset Based measurement entails] forty measurable things you do with kids. . . . I’m amazed you haven’t heard of that. . . . They’ve done research . . . forty assets named, forty things that directly correlate with kids who do drugs, pre-teen sex, pregnancies . . . if they don’t have these assets they get in trouble . . . if they do have these assets, they grow up well . . . it’s coming in different ways . . . an asset community, *seeping everywhere* [emphasis added].

The ability to format our community’s children along prescribed guidelines comforts those professionals charged with ensuring that families burdened with low-incomes are also not deficient in their child-rearing capacities (Foucault 1991).

Dollar and Centers: The Market is More than a Sensibility

Programs such as PSS not only embrace the market economy via its precipitate, choice; their very existence is contingent on the federal government’s imperative that local communities find creative ways in which to articulate with private industry (HUD 1994). Reinventing government in this format is about making it and its subjects an ‘entrepreneurial’ institution (Goldstein 2000; Osborne and Gaebler 1993). It is, thus, useful to situate PSS’s affiliation with local private industry in the wider context of the federal government’s explicit endorsement of community and private industry links as the proper substitute for “big government.” Psychic conditioning is conjoined to notions of fiscal and social responsibility by connecting low-income people to the high-tech marketplace and its representatives. In Boulder, PSS attempts to tailor vocational and educational training to the needs of local companies such as Celestial Seasoning, MDI, and Exabyte. PSS will not officially withdraw support from clients with aspirations outside of technological niches, but total support is reserved for those clients who fully subscribe to the administrated program. In the words of one staff member, as far as lucrative and sensible job tracks for a low-income person go:

social work ain’t it . . . information technology, or computer fields: you can get hired at a click of the mouse . . . [We] counsel them to go into computer

science, engineering, telecommunication . . . Star [former clients] does outreach with us . . . speaking at our luncheons. . . . We're trying to help them make *choices*. . . . Twenty-year-olds are not making different choices, but some women are making technology *choices*. . . . We don't want to turn everyone into technotrons . . . but for our group we need real career counseling . . . to get a job and stick with it. . . UPS and Sun Microsystems. . . . A good match for some people [emphasis added].

Without downplaying the obvious financial rewards of such employment opportunities, it is important to note that programming, which purports to expand individual clients' education and training options, actually narrows their field of choice to the selection of a particular industrial park. Furthermore, staff recognize that should single-parent clients actually earn a wage nearing self-sufficiency in Boulder, they would be disqualified from receipt of TANF, food stamps, housing, or childcare assistance. Some even hide these statistics from clients early in the program so they are not intimidated from losing what security they have to a market that has previously been inhospitable to them.

Other established networks in which low-income clients can be socialized into the conventions of the technologically advanced middle-class include the corporate mentoring program in which clients are coupled with established members of their prospective field and coordinated meetings with members of Boulder's Professional Women's Association. Because of the limited support that can be extended toward education, two-year education/training programs are recommended to clients over pursuit of baccalaureate degrees. PSS thus conditions low-income individuals' professional background to meet the immediate needs of industry and, indirectly, the State (Beresford and Croft 1995). State and local programs have thus chosen to consider a limited fiscal feature of human capital. The coupling of individual and State interests force service providers to construe the maximization of personal happiness as bound to the prevailing marketplace. PSS exercises a "totalizing" effect (Dean 1999) on their clients by their insinuation into a professional sector affirmed by State needs.

The Spatial Construction of Poverty

The following example demonstrates the restrictive nature of the "post-welfare reform" environment in which those lacking alternative support for housing and education must enroll in a program like Boulder's PSS. Its residential site, Pine Forest, affirms Susser's (1996)

argument that the spatial construction of poverty is manifest in the division of communities, especially as minorities migrate into better-off suburbs. Residents of Pine Forest, although they may not be PSS clients, uniformly apply Section 8 certificates. Some 40 PSS clients, plus 60 of their children, reside in the Pine Forest facility. This site also houses PSS offices for case managers, social workers, the community organizer, and the rental agency's landlord. Prior to consideration of how the physical space invites surveillance of the low-income community's happenings and its coordination by PSS staff, it is worth reviewing why this site was selected.

According to PSS's administrative staff, the site was selected for the housing project because it faced less resistance than alternative proposals that would have garnered the ire of wealthier residents of Boulder:

Nobody wanted this site because it borders on a commercial zone, powerlines are going down this year, bad access, a distressed property. . . . You have to have political will behind you [even to get this]. . . . Shelter and housing development in [wealthier] North Boulder, people in this town particularly, they don't want any of it. . . . [This area] has mobile parks and [the eastern end of] Mapleton Street, but the resistance is nothing like, I want to say this graciously, but some places, the rich wives have nothing to do but fight it all day long. People get so vehement about [separating themselves from the poor], they take it on as a full-time job. We have two single dads . . . probably higher hispanic and black population than city shows . . . women-headed households mostly.

It thus appears that while the local community did not want to invite this sector of the population into their midst, strong objections were not voiced to its present location where low-income families could be adequately contained and policed. The power differential evident in the community's decision to block the possibility of a public housing project being established elsewhere in the town is duplicated for Pine Forest's residents on a daily basis.

Jeremy Bentham's design of the Panopticon, analyzed by Foucault (1979), serves as a metaphor for the Pine Forest site – what at least one informant referred to as "a fishbowl" that "some of [the clients] would prefer to get out of." According to Foucault, "the major effect of the Panopticon: to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power" (1979,

200) is achieved via the construction of a building with the following personnel and physical features:

All that is needed, then, is to place a supervisor in a central tower and to shut up in each cell a madman, a patient, a condemned man, a worker or a schoolboy. By the effect of backlighting one can observe from the tower, standing out precisely against the light, the small captive shadows in the cells of the periphery. They are like so many cages, so many small theatres, in which each actor is alone, perfectly individualized and constantly visible. The panoptic mechanism arranges spatial unities that make it possible to see constantly and to recognize immediately.

Although Pine Forest's "cages" are more of a duplex, cottage style, with an appealing dark-blue color scheme, their contiguous wrap forms a horseshoe, with the PSS staff and real estate agency representative esconced at one hoof point. Residents' physical entry into their living space must cross the vector of their governors. For the most part, PSS staff attempt to stay within the interior of their wing of the building, so it is at least partially at the initiative of the resident that they would encounter each other. Still, clients have mentioned that they might prefer not to see their social workers and/or case managers on the regular basis that a common driveway/public space provides. By signing a lease for Pine Forest, residents are not forced to surrender the autonomy that non-poor residents enjoy across the county, but it is seriously compromised by their proximity to the management, especially the real estate agent, who fills the role of Foucault's warden.²⁴

Governmentality is effected through association with other disciplinary means including surveillance and policing (Dean 1999). For example, several of the PSS staff spoke of conflicts between the residents and the real estate agency representative who resides in a small tower above the PSS office. From her crow's nest she can view the residents' activities regardless of their position in the courtyard. Some of the PSS staff also share such vantage points but try to use them judiciously. Staff themselves construe this architectural design as a source of governance over residents, stating:

Sometimes I tell my clients I wish I didn't have windows. They can have boyfriends or whatever, but they can't live here; they need to be on the lease, so if I see something, I say, this is what it looks like to me, so it looks like that to the landlord, too, so it's a warning. This is a housing program with a lot of strings attached, and its voluntary, so if it doesn't

work for you, go somewhere else. And that sounds really harsh, but like I said you have to remind people what kind of an opportunity it is . . . we're not gods who they should be thankful to be around . . . but they have 5 years to make the most of this resource.²⁵ . . . Privacy has been a problem with housing. They feel like they're being watched like a hawk . . . kids playing, cars parked, or lovers at night, the housing piece is a point of tension.

The housing structure suggests that this population is unable to comport itself in a respectable manner, which would alleviate the real estate agency's need to post a "warden" who, herself, objects to the situation. At the same time, it duplicates Bentham's plan by inserting the "automatic functioning of power" (1979, 200) into the quotidian reality of public housing. Clients' "freedom" to fully self-regulate is the only means available to them to escape surveillance. Clients' admission of need ensures that subjectivity and subjection accrue into State governance. In the example mentioned above, a defacto system of panoptic rule has been instituted, which despite denials of accountability by the PSS staff, acts to reinforce the structure of governance that is our latest substitute for public welfare programs.

Conclusion

The assorted means of control used to shape low-income individuals' conduct by federally mandated and locally managed Project Self-Sufficiency in Boulder, Colorado, operate according to a policy that acts, in Mauss' words, as a "total social phenomena" (1954). Welfare reform not only denies critical entitlements to low-income peoples, it results in social policies that regulate low-income citizens to a degree not tolerated by citizens in other socioeconomic strata. The invocation of choice by agencies providing social services to this population masks the degree of capitulation required by participants who now lack recourse to on-going federal support.

In the pervasive nature of PSS's bureaucratic gaze structural inequity goes unmentioned as individual shortcomings in organizational abilities or emotional stability are assailed through a consortium of technologies that, in their application, perpetuate the myth of the "culture of poverty," the pathologization of low-income selves which bridges generations. PSS policies sponsoring "self-sufficiency," "self-esteem," and "empowerment" elaborate a complex form of governance in which clients are instructed to modify and regulate their behavior according to dictates of the state and the marketplace. This community program

structure casts low-income peoples' duress as a matter of self, rather than of State. The involved *regime of practices* may delimit government bodies' consideration of alternative solutions for welfare issues for it is far too easy to implicate a body of low-income workers as dependent "poor."²⁶

Notes

1. The Personal Responsibility and Work Reconciliation Act of 1996 replaced the former Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) with Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), a block grant program that ends entitlement and establishes work requirements and time limits. This act mandated that an increasing portion of the public assistance population engage in "work related activities." As predicted, welfare use was restricted to 5 years in a lifetime. As a compromise, Medicaid was maintained intact and separate from the block grant system. Schneider (1999) observes that "welfare reform" came out of "academic arguments that poor people simply lacked work experience and the work ethic (Mead 1993). It also relied on policy and academic perceptions that working people do not want to support the non-working poor (Churchill 1995; Gordon 1994; Katz 1989)."

2. Constance deRoche and John deRoche (1999) observe that the cornerstones of neo-liberalism are: 1) government has become too big and inefficient; and 2) the marketplace must be freed to exert its discipline in order to realize efficiencies and, thus, correct problems which were created by misguided, politically motivated economic strategies. Although Nancy Fraser (1993) concurs with the novelty of the articulation between neo-conservatism and neo-liberalism, she incisively draws a distinction between the "anti-social wage" endorsed by the Reagan-Bush administrations and Clinton's proposition of a "quasi-social wage . . . in which provision is stratified by class" (1993, 14). This is important to keep in mind in terms of the paper's later discussion of choice. Fraser argues that the Clinton administration constructs choice by "playing a line between commodities and public goods" (1993, 14).

3. Foucault defines governmentality as "The ensemble formed by the institutions, procedures, analyses and reflections, the calculations and tactics that allow the exercise of this very specific albeit complex form of power, which has its target population, as its principle form of knowledge, political economy, and as its essential technical means, apparatuses of security" (1991, 102).

4. Cruikshank (1993) defines "technologies of citizenship" as "practical techniques of empowerment that have been developed to create and transform the political subjectivities of certain citizens in programs and movements for social reform. What must specifically be explored is the degree to which these technologies of citizenship, methods for constituting active and participatory citizens, such as those aimed at empowering the poor – link the subjectivity of citizens, and link activism to discipline" (Cruikshank 1994, 29). In my reformulation of Cruikshank's work, the latter link would articulate agency to self-discipline, rather than activism, which connotes mobilization of an entire population, rather than the "self" on which my work focuses. For a thorough, up-to-date review of the politics of self-governance, see Rose's *Governing the Soul: The Shaping of the Private Self* (1999) and *Powers of Freedom: Reframing Political Self* (1999).

5. Hopton (1995) echoes Cruikshank (1993), noting that "Taking control of one's life, or particular aspects of it, is not only seen as being intimately connected with the formation or reformation of the self as empowered, it is *increasingly becoming an ethical obligation of the new citizenry*. Not being in control of everyday living arrangements, your time, your diet, your body, your health, your children, and the satisfaction of your needs suggests that there is something seriously wrong with your ethical constitution" (1995, 37).

6. Job-retraining is not peculiar to this kind of program; it has been termed the "*neo-liberal* solution to what it conceives as a temporary crisis of employment" (deRoche and deRoche 1999, 42).

7. I presume to undertake criticism in the mode of Foucault's analytics of government. He suggests that this is not a politically neutral affair (Dean 1999), but is careful to enunciate that governmentality is not the proper foundation for an evaluation or assessment. In this vein I employ his work not to criticize the noble intentions or actions of program staff interviewed, although it is inevitable that their actions are implicated in a system that – to some degree – subjugates its 'targets' while claiming to liberate them. According to Beresford and Croft (1995), it was Dean (1992) who first asked, "Are those who campaign against poverty simply tilting at windmills or, worse still, are they perpetuating a discourse which disempowers those who they seek to defend?" Answering this question in terms of the practitioners involved in my research is beyond the scope of this paper.

8. For a fuller discussion of policy debates leading to welfare reform, see Sawhill (1995). A wide body of literature also exists on the “currently prominent” (O’Malley 1999) ‘risk society’ thesis which elaborates the technologies deployed to mitigate threats to our way of life. O’Malley (1999) favorably reviews Ericson’s and Haggerty’s (1997) *Policing the Risk Society*.

9. According to Goldstein (2000), Lewis’s thesis was that “a culture of poverty differed from generic poverty in that it was ‘a way of life handed down from generation to generation along family lines’ and could be characterized by a series of behavioral and psychological aspects” (Goldstein 2000, 11).

10. Analyzing the racialization of poverty is beyond the scope of the paper. For an analysis of White privilege and racial disparities of wealth and poverty, see Gordon 1994; Gregory 1994; Harrison 1995; Massey and Denton 1993; Moynihan 1965; Schneider 1999; Susser 1982, 1997; and Williams 1994.

11. According to O’Malley et al. (1997), the governmentality literature is, in its entirety, a positive response to Michel Foucault’s publication of “On Governmentality” (1979), which thought about government as a decentered process likely to occur in microsettings and ‘within’ the subject.

12. Using discourses on “the self,” self-esteem, self-improvement, and empowerment are endemic to recent welfare reform legislation. Government publications, including *Empowerment: A New Covenant with America’s Communities: President Clinton’s National Urban Policy Report* (1995a), *Beyond Shelter: Building Communities of Opportunity: The States Report for Habitat II* (1996), and *HUD Reinvention: From Blueprint to Action* (1995b) reflect the state’s interest in promoting governance through self-regulation and discipline. Robert Adams observed that this movement toward empowerment in public policy and social life came of age in the “late 1980s” (Bainstow 1995, 34).

13. See Hyatt (1997) and Bainstow (1995) for discussions of how the low-income individual is transformed into an object and a practitioner of policy.

14. Section 8 is the largest rental assistance administered by HUD. Established in 1974 by the Housing and Community Development Act, it was created in response to the movement toward spatial deconcentration and expanded housing opportunities for lower-income households (Leigh, in Crewe 1997). In the Section 8 program, HUD pays landlords the

difference between the rent and 30 percent of the household’s income, for which the client is responsible.

15. The 1988 Family Support Act’s anchoring principle, that public assistance should be coupled with encouragement, supports requirements to help move clients from welfare to work (Gueron and Pauly 1991) and initiated a tide of federal governance stipulating that the individuals in the underclass were responsible for ameliorating their hardship and fulfilling an “ethical” obligation to the state.

16. Regarding the import of market rationality, Foucault (1991) states that “it can be extended to all sorts of areas that are neither exclusively, nor even primarily, concerned with economics, such as the family, the birth rate, delinquency and crime. Economic rationality then can be used to analyse all aspects of human behavior and provide guidelines for policy,” (1991, 55), as it has in Boulder’s PSS.

17. Enrollment in PSS helps clients procure Section 8 Existing Housing Certificates through the State where they live. According to the PSS Interim Report (1997), “[Section 8 certificates] are valued because both because it is available to only limited number of families and because those who receive it generally experience a significant improvement in their housing situation or rent burden. This is intended to allow to allow recipients to focus their energies on long-term self-improvement by investing in the education and training that provides the means to employment and economic self-sufficiency” (1987, 1988).

18. Although O’Malley et al. (1997) and Miller and Rose (1990) point out that too often a governmentality approach distorts multivocal and “internally contested” government programs as unitary, or as coherent “perfect knowledges” (Miller and Rose 1990), my inquiry into Boulder PSS staff’s discourse regarding their implementation of the federally mandated program demonstrates that the implementation of this local program clearly parallels federal government discourse and practices surrounding welfare reform. However, discrepancies between administrative and staff discourses demonstrate that while representation may be considered ideal in some sense, it is not at the cost of articulating the “messy” (O’Malley et al. 1997) nature of its local interpretation. Even so, institutional discourses surrounding PSS’s clients and their needs do not obstruct well-coordinated implementation of the program; thus, discourse as embedded in practice is, in this example, a unitary phenomena.

19. The Housing Opportunity and Responsibility Act of 1997 (H.R. 2) signals federal support for just such a screening process: "The Housing Opportunity and Responsibility Act declares that it is the policy of the federal government to, among other things, promote the general welfare of the nation by helping families who seek affordable homes that are safe, clean, and health, and in particular, assisting *responsible* citizens who cannot provide fully for themselves because of temporary circumstances or factors beyond their control" (H.R. 2, 1997) (emphasis added).

20. Further discussion of the State's exercise of power over women's bodies is beyond the scope of this paper, although the topic merits further discussion. Because of PSS's original focus on single women, the degree of 'feminization of poverty' which has resulted in the punitive nature of programmatic disavowal of responsibility for this population should be noted: "Single mothers are the most impoverished demographic group in our society and with their children they constitute 82 percent of the poverty population" (Ward and Mathias 2000, 10). It would seem that disqualifying pregnant women from programs geared toward single mothers and families would undermine a program's good intentions.

21. While my paper focuses on discourse as an "intellectual technology" (in Foucault's terms) that shapes social action, it is necessary to remember that even programmatically embedded discourses may not be entirely correlated to programmatic action.

22. Hacking (1995) states that psychology is the discipline aiming for knowledge of the soul.

23. An example of the myriad programs include: Domestic Abuse Prevention Project, Community Action Programs, Employment and Training Center, Head Start, the Housing Authority, Boulder County Prevention Connection, Veterans Service Office, and Front Range Community College. As there is no coordinating body for all of these services, PSS staff operates as clients' resource agents.

24. The absurdity of such literal panopticism did not escape several of my colleagues who suggested that perhaps I present a more subtle argument. The evidence dictates otherwise.

25. PSS cuts individuals off after 4 years of Temporary Assistance to Needy Families "as opposed to the slightly more generous federal limit of five years" (Wolfe 2000, 4).

26. For a review of governmentality's unrealized potential for contribution to critical politics, see O'Malley et al. (1997). Barry et al. (1993) comment that the governmentality literature's contribution is in its documenting the "varied forms of rationality that govern our present" (1993, 260). Likewise, this paper builds on what David Owen terms *exemplary criticism*, an analysis of government that reveals a "commitment to self-rule by practicing a type of criticism that demonstrates the contingency of regimes of practices and government, identifies states of domination within such regimes, and allows us to experience a state of domination as a state of domination. It does not tell us how we should practice our freedom" (in Dean 1999).

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