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**EMPLOYEE EFFICIENCY:  
A CASE STUDY OF FORMER WELFARE MOTHERS**

By  
Julie Kozempel

A Thesis  
Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the  
Masters of Arts Degree in the Graduate Division  
Of Rowan University  
June 1, 2000

Approved by \_\_\_\_\_ Professor  
Date Approved June 1, 2000

## ABSTRACT

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Employee Efficiency: A Case Study of Former  
Welfare Mothers. 2000

Thesis Advisor Dr. Suzanne Sparks-Fitzgerald

Master of Arts, Public Relations

Welfare is a social phenomenon that comes with a variety of stigmas and stereotypes. Recipients are often categorized as lazy, uneducated and socially unacceptable.

Recently, corporations and whole regions are unable to find the qualified labor force they need. This researcher will discover whether ex-welfare recipients make worthy hires, thereby reversing stereotypes and furthering efficiency in the workplace.

A major component of employee relations involves retaining good employees who will extend the company's good image. Image and profits matter to CEO's who worry about the second bottom line. After reading this study, public relations practitioners can approach the CEO and say, "I have found a way to increase productivity while cutting costs."

A survey will evaluate the satisfaction of employers with this type of employee. A content analysis will evaluate the marketing of this type of employee to employers and fellow welfare mothers.

## **Employee Efficiency: A Case Study of Former Welfare Mothers**

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## Chapter 1

### Importance of Problem

Welfare is a social phenomenon that comes with a variety of stigmas and stereotypes. Recipients are often categorized as lazy, uneducated and socially unacceptable. These characteristics are not acceptable to employers, thus making it hard for some ex-welfare recipients to get hired if potential employers know their background.

However, the stereotype may be unfounded for many mothers whose welfare benefits were recently cut. Welfare reform critics Erik Schokkaert and John Sweeney argue against the popular conviction that the situation of the unemployed is their own responsibility, either because they choose to be unemployed, or because they choose to be low skilled. They claim, “This form of social exclusion is also part of the responsibility of private sector firms and, therefore, an integral aspect of business ethics” (Schokkaert 1999). It may be true that mothers who are ex-welfare recipients truly need to have a steady paycheck in order to fee, clothe and provide for their children. Their needs may serve as the impetus for hard work and reliability. Their children rely on them, therefore they rely on keeping their jobs. Employers may pass up these productive employees because of a stereotype.

Hiring reliable workers can be time consuming and stressful for many human resource managers. Applicants may initially appear to fit the job description, but ultimately prove to be unproductive. Recently, corporations and whole regions are unable to find the qualified labor force they need. Darden Restaurant Group’s media relations vice-president, Rick Van Warner claims, “It’s hard to find good people and

we're doing everything we possibly can." Darden Restaurants offer "quality of life" incentives to their employees. The benefits include: four weeks paid vacation, as opposed to the two weeks that were previously offered, and three-day weekends. The company hopes measures such as these will help "with both recruiting and retention," (Klara 1999).

Incentives like those practiced by Darden are not necessary if the pool of ex-welfare recipients is utilized. However, interviewers often look for many of the same generic qualities in a new hire. They want their employees to be trustworthy, punctual, responsible and hard working. In spite of this, they forget a certain major fact: a certain amount of *dedication* is needed on behalf of the employee to ensure job security. Evaluating an employee's worth in relation to his or her dedication to the company is an important part of the hiring process. Typically, employers are trained not to discriminate or stereotype candidates on the basis of their sex, race, age or social status. However, this does happen, to the detriment of the business. When businesses do not open their doors to ex-welfare recipients they may close the door on some of the hardest working, conscientious, dependable employees.

### **Problem Statement**

This researcher will discover whether ex-welfare recipients make worthy hires, thereby reversing stereotypes and furthering efficiency in the workplace. Most businesses are aware that welfare has been removed, but are scared to train ex-welfare mothers because of the stereotype. Training sessions cost money and employers want the training to pay off. People who may not stay at the company for a long time after training are a financial risk.

According to public relations theorist Pat Jackson, when companies act in the public interest they act in their own interest at the same time. This “Double Bottom-Line Theory” posits beneficial relationships with target publics as the first bottom line, and profits as the second bottom line. The second bottom line is financial. Public relations directors maintain the first bottom line so that the company has a healthy second bottom line. Low employee turnover directly relates to the first bottom line of a company. If the business is putting out more money in employee training than it should, then ultimately the second bottom line suffers.

### **Delimitations**

This research will be limited to ex-welfare mothers in a specific Delaware Valley region. The region studied includes the following counties : Philadelphia, Burlington, Camden, Gloucester, Salem/Cumberland. This study concerns only women who have children. This researcher is not concerned with men or women who are childless. For the purpose of this study this researcher will also not include mothers who applied for jobs and were not hired. In order to prove that ex-welfare mothers are worthy employees this researcher can only study those who have been hired and have worked after losing welfare benefits. It would be futile to ask employers who have not hired ex-welfare mothers their views on this type of worker. Therefore, only employers who have hired ex-welfare mothers will be studied.

The study is limited to a specific Delaware Valley region because studying a larger area would result in a large amount of coverage error. This researcher cannot research a larger geographic area due to the expense of obtaining a large enough sample.

Instead of performing a national study, this researcher will conduct a regional study that will be externally valid.

### **Purpose**

The importance of this study resides in what public relations practitioners will learn about employee relations techniques. A major component of employee relations involves retaining good employees who will extend the company's good image. Image and profits matter to CEO's who worry about the second bottom line. After reading this study, public relations practitioners can approach the CEO and say, "I have found a way to increase productivity while cutting costs."

Establishing positive employee relations begins with hiring efficient employees. Ultimately, the people who work for a business are the ones who allow it to continue to function. If employees are not happy then they will either quit, or even worse, portray the business in an unfavorable way. Productive employees are usually satisfied employees. This researcher's rationale is: hiring reliable, dedicated employees will cause management to be pleased with the employees' work. This will create a positive atmosphere in the workplace, thereby decreasing problems with employee relations.

This researcher has three hypotheses:

**HYPOTHESIS 1: It is expected that ex-welfare mothers will make valuable employees despite the stereotype that comes with being on welfare.** The United Parcel Service has hired 20,000 ex-welfare recipients since May 1997. "UPS has shattered the myth that hiring welfare recipients is not a good business decision," says Lea Soupata, senior vice-president of human resources for UPS. "We hope to create new



perceptions about a valuable pool of employees who just need a little extra training and mentoring to be successful in the workplace.”

**HYPOTHESIS 2: It is expected that ex-welfare mothers will be reliable employees because they cannot financially afford to lose their jobs.** This researcher has spoken with a handful of ex-welfare recipients and has uncovered that missing work is not an option for these women. They claim they cannot afford to lose their jobs because they live from paycheck to paycheck.

**HYPOTHESIS 3: It is expected that advertising of ex-welfare mothers as a workforce will increase the credibility of such employees.** MRO Advertising’s Welfare to Work campaign received many accolades for its success in Philadelphia. According to Philadelphia Mayor, Ed Rendell, MRO Advertising’s campaign made a “profound difference” in the city’s efforts to move nearly 60,000 adults from welfare rolls to meaningful jobs.

### **Assumptions**

For the purpose of this thesis, this researcher will assume that ex-welfare mothers were hired substantially after welfare was abolished. According to a summary published by the General Accounting Office, an overseer reports to Congress, “life after welfare generally seems to involve a job.” The study showed:

“Between 63% and 87% of families surveyed had an adult who had been employed at some point after leaving welfare. Between 61% and 71% had a job at the time they were surveyed. The jobs were generally full-time (the typical adult worked more than 32 hours per week) but low wage (average hourly wages ranged from \$5.67 to \$8.09).”

This researcher will also assume that most mothers who lost welfare do not fit the stereotype of being lazy and uneducated. This thesis is only concerned with mothers who

went back to work. This researcher believes that the initiative to find a job, train for it and keep it deems the ex-recipient not lazy.

For the purpose of this thesis this researcher will assume that other types of employees are less needy, or not equally as needy, versus ex-welfare mothers. The simple fact that they were on welfare makes them needier than those who were not on welfare.

Finally, this researcher will assume that employers want to retain employees for longer periods of time. It seems obvious that employers would not want hire and train new employees when they could retain the ones they have. This fact brings about the assumption that employee relations is an important part of the second bottom line for most employers. This thesis will confirm that if the ultimate bottom line is important for employers, then employee relations must be important as well.

### **Procedure**

This researcher will begin with a search of relevant databases and catalogs for articles, books and speeches that refer to Welfare-to-Work, ex-welfare recipients, internal relations employee efficiency and welfare workers. From reading this material this researcher hopes to learn about welfare reform and the abolishment of welfare programs. Once this researcher understands the laws that relate to welfare, this researcher needs to test how employers feel about hiring ex-welfare recipients in general.

Next, this researcher needs to view the commercials that ran in the Delaware Valley portraying mothers who returned to work after being on welfare. This researcher plans to view these commercials and then conduct a content analysis of them. From the

content analysis, this researcher will create a survey that will be distributed to employers who hired ex-welfare recipients. After this researcher obtains the results of the surveys, she will have the information to answer the original research question.

### **Glossary**

WELFARE-TO-WORK: a program that trains ex-welfare recipients and prepares them for immediate work experience as the first step towards financial self-sufficiency

AID: financial assistance offered by the state

INITIATIVE: an effort to help ex-welfare recipients (usually created by the government)

RETENTION: keeping employees at the same job for long periods of time

DELAWARE VALLEY REGION: Philadelphia, Burlington, Camden, Gloucester and Salem/Cumberland counties.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Internal Communications**

In the year 2000, the United States is experiencing a flourishing economy, swelling mutual funds and rising rates of homeowners, yet regions of the population strive to make an average living, find decent housing, save money, and earn the rewards of a full-time job. Simultaneously, corporations and entire communities cannot find an adequate labor force. In Orlando, one hotel chain offers a \$500 signing bonus for housekeeping staff while another defers the cost of housing for citizens of Puerto Rico who relocate and stay for a year (McMorrow 1999). Conversely, other areas of the United States retain thousands of unemployed residents because companies fear the unskilled, inexperienced workforce of the inner city.

Welfare critic Erik Schokkaert remembers a time when “many large workplaces routinely included people with a wide variety of capabilities and skills, in effect, a basic solidarity was structured between all who were sharing in a collective work project” (1999). This need for all people to feel useful to other people is a driving force in today’s internal communications issues. Employees are held responsible for their own position if they do not advance. However, many employees do not feel needed, therefore they do not seek advancement. If employees felt valued and trusted by their employers, they may choose to take on more responsibility. This theory also explains why many employees choose to remain jobless, and on welfare, rather than working. They feel replaceable at their jobs and find it equally as rewarding to not work and collect benefits. Schokkaert

believes high replacement rates are “an insufficient financial incentive to trade joblessness for job-holding” (1999).

### **Employee Relations**

In the late 1960s, managers, behavioral scientists, financial analysts and accountants developed an increasing interest in the idea of accounting for people as organizational resources. The belief was to “put people on the balance sheet” because of their value as human resources. In recent years there has been a rising trend with respect to developing methods of accounting for human resources as directional tools rather than for the function of financial reporting (Flamholtz 1985). Corporate financial reports are now deemed deficient if they do not reflect the status of human. Human Resource Accounting (HRA) is defined as “the process of identifying and measuring data about human resources and communicating this information to interested parties” (Flamholtz 1985). Literally, this means determining the assets gained by organizations in terms of people, the expense of replacing those people and the value of people to the entire enterprise.

Employee relations researcher Eric Flamholtz claims,

“There is an increasing importance of human capital at the level of the economy as a whole, as well as at the level of the individual firm. A great deal of research has been designed to develop concepts and methods of accounting for people as assets” (Flamholtz 1985).

Flamholtz determined that the economic theory of human capital is based on the skills, experience and knowledge which people possess (Flamholtz 1985). Rensis Likert, author of “The Human Organization: Its Management and Value,” claims, “Every aspect of a firm’s activities is determined by the competence, motivation and general effectiveness of

its human organization. In other words, employee effectiveness is the baseline for determining a company's bottom line, both financially and from a public relations standpoint. Without valuable and effective employees, an organization cannot experience the highest levels of fiscal or reputational success, nor can it expand to its potential.

Flamholtz credits the gaining of human resources to effectively recruiting, selecting and hiring people to meet the organization's present and anticipated personnel needs (Flamholtz 1985). Just as an organization would cut costs in order to stick closer to budget, it must cut out employees who are not valuable to the company's personnel needs. In the same way, companies must create a "personnel acquisition budget" which translates management's employee needs and forecasts personnel requirements (Flamholtz 1985). Measuring the productivity and promotability of people helps managers assess the value of people to the organization. In doing this, the company can cut down on losses that occur when new employees must be scouted, hired and trained.

Most of the studies conducted by researchers such as Flamholtz were conducted in the 1970s and 1980s. Although this research established the idea of human resources in the heads of managers, it often did not account for one major group of workers, women. Today, women make up 43% of the total workforce, approximately 6 million more than in 1970 (Flamholtz 1985). These women can also be broken down in to various sub groups and studied. For example, some women workers are full-time, college degree-bearing executives, while others are part-time mothers. Still others are single mothers who both full-time and part-time and raise children. About half of these women are living just above the official poverty line (Edin 1997). In the 1970's, few unskilled and semiskilled women who worked full-time earned enough to support a

family (Edin 1997). Three decades of stagnant wages, ineffective child support enforcement and dwindling welfare benefits have made single mothers and their children America's poorest demographic (Edin 1997).

### **Employee Efficiency**

Employee efficiency is often gauged by retention rates. If retention rates are high, then employee efficiency must be high as well. This is a common misconception, based on the assumption that employers do not fire employees who are inefficient. In fact, many employers try to retain employees merely to account for the time it took to train them.

With the job market constricted at all stages, companies are pressed to find semi- and unskilled workers who will remain long enough for their training time to pay off. According to business analyst James Heckman, companies are "looking to fill entry-level marketing positions especially in the customer service and telephone sales departments, are finding former welfare recipients to be excellent recruits" (1998). Employers who have hired welfare-to-work candidates say they stay longer in the job, adjust quickly to the corporate environment and may even become department stars (Heckman 1998).

Richard Greenwald, President of Philadelphia@Work claims ex-welfare recipients "will be an asset to our regional employers' bottom line, as well as a strong return on investment for taxpayers" ([www.pic-phila.org](http://www.pic-phila.org)). Employee efficiency is a selling point for this new, untapped workforce. They are marketed by advertising companies as well as government officials, as workers who will ultimately contribute to a healthy bottom line.

Training programs for ex-welfare recipients are beginning to teach how to be an efficient employee. Old-fashioned job training used to teach typing or computers, but now the focus is on “soft skills” (Cohen 1998). Such skills include showing up on time, dressing appropriately and not fighting with co-workers. Rebecca Breit, a training program instructor, claims some students need to be taught the concept of “boss.” “So many of the students have had 20 or 25 jobs,” said Breit. “You ask them why and they say, ‘He told me to sweep the floor, and I didn’t think it was my job.’” (Cohen 1998).

Most critics agree that while these types of training programs seem silly to the general public, they do work. Graduates of welfare-to-work programs are efficient, dependable employees. Author Margaret Blackburn White claims, “Current economic patterns are creating increasing concerns with finding and retaining competent and loyal employees throughout the organization, including entry level” (1999). White claims welfare to work training programs ultimately graduate efficient employees, find them jobs and increase retention rates (1999).

### **Welfare Workers**

Welfare mothers are often negatively stereotyped as “wastrels who were willing to spend their adult years living off the hard work of others while raising children who were likely to do the same” (Edin 1997). Often, this stereotype keeps welfare moms from obtaining jobs that pay well. Employers may only see the stereotype, which carries the connotation of laziness, and decide not to hire the woman. Researchers Kathryn Edin and Laura Lein interviewed 214 welfare mothers in five major cities across America.



They claim,

Our conversations with these mothers show that low-income single mothers have a much broader view of what constitutes responsible behavior than policy-makers do. Mothers must ensure that their children are sheltered, fed, clothed, supervised, educated, disciplined and loved” (Edin 1997).

However, these goals often conflict with perfect work attendance. Many welfare mothers live in the worst of neighborhoods. They are forced to choose between leaving their children alone, if they cannot find a baby-sitter, or they show up late to work because of the unpredictability of public transportation. Mothers interviewed by Edin and Lein had to choose between a welfare system that paid far too little to provide for their basic needs and a labor market that offered them little more than they could have gotten by staying home (Edin 1997).

For many moms who receive welfare, an increase in pay means a decrease in another benefit. Every dollar they earn means a decrease in their food stamps and housing subsidies; wage income also threatened their Medicaid eligibility (Edin 1997). The bind that welfare-reliant mothers face causes the stereotype among people who do not understand the system. However, Edin and Lein found that the mothers they surveyed had expenditures that were less than the expenditures of mothers in the National Consumer Expenditure Survey (Edin 1997).

Low-wage jobs do not offer affordable health insurance or childcare, so mothers end up leaving it to emergency rooms and the streets. According to vice-president Al Gore at a welfare- to-work conference, “Current studies show that 50 percent of welfare recipients entering the workforce for the first time lose their

jobs within the first year (Laabs 1998). However, welfare critic Jennifer Laabs claims, “There are three important keys to employing people on welfare: providing help with childcare, transportation and job-readiness training” (1998). It seems these three issues are what stand in the way of welfare workers success.

This researcher will consider all of the previous research that has been performed when analyzing the data. However, it would not be wise to allude to outside forces such as those mentioned by Laabs when surveying employers. The best way to handle the situation is to compose a survey of multiple choice questions and leave space for commentary. In doing this, this researcher can deduct the level of knowledge of each employer when discussing ex-welfare mothers and their workplace efficiency.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Overview of Methodology**

This researcher performed searches of all relevant databases on all topics related to welfare, ex-welfare mothers, internal communications and employee relations. A review of secondary literature on the topic was also performed. After reading this material this researcher was oriented in the welfare environment.

Two major quantitative methods of research were employed: a content analysis and a mail survey (Appendix 1). This researcher conducted a content analysis of an advertising campaign created by MRO Advertising of Bala Cynwyd, Pennsylvania. This public information campaign consisted of: two 30-second TV advertisements, one 15-second TV advertisement, two 60-second radio advertisements, newspaper advertisements, billboard, transit posters, direct mail, and Spanish language advertisements. A separate content analysis of the TV commercials only was performed and coded by outside coders.

## **Data Collection**

### **Content Analysis**

The information from the code sheets was put into the chi-square formula and tabulated (Appendix 2). Since each commercial was split up into five sections (type of speaker, characters shown, race, audience and message) this researcher performed five different chi squares, one for each section. The researcher did five chi-squares for each commercial. A total of fifteen chi-squares were performed.

The formula used was:  $X^2 = E[(O_1 - E_1)^2] / E_1$ . The probability level used was .05 because that is the greatest amount that this researcher would accept for validity reasons. The degrees of freedom ranged from two to four because the minimum amount of categories for a given section was three and the maximum was five. This researcher used the mean of the results from all three coders, for all three commercials. In other words, if the coders each had a different answer for a category, this researcher took the mean of their answers and plugged that number into the chi-square formula. Three coders were used for intercoder reliability. Overall, all of the coder's results were the same. The only category in which they had significantly different answers was the race category. This was expected because race is not a characteristic that is easily identified by merely looking at someone.

The MRO campaign will be a major part of this thesis because the advertising campaign has the same goals as this thesis. MRO Advertising claims employers should understand that "women coming off welfare make highly motivated employees because, for them, succeeding at a job is the difference between providing for their children or life on the streets." This researcher explored MRO's claim by interviewing ex-welfare

mothers who returned to work after welfare ended as well as employers who hired women in this situation.

### **Mail Survey**

A sample of employers from the five counties (Philadelphia, Burlington, Camden, Gloucester and Salem/Cumberland Counties) was chosen. This researcher contacted the social services department for each county and asked for lists of employers who hire ex-welfare recipients. (Note: The social services department has a different name in each county, but the function remains the same.)

A representative from each social services department provided this researcher with a complete list of employers who attended the most recent job fair for their county. This researcher then mailed a survey, complete with return envelope and postage, to the employers for completion. This researcher chose a mail survey rather than a phone survey because it is less expensive. The majority of the counties in the Delaware Valley are considered long-distance to this researcher's telephone company. This researcher offered an incentive to employers for completing the survey. The incentive was a chance to win a \$100 gift certificate to Staples for office supplies.

The survey consisted of six questions about the efficiency, dependability and value of employees who are ex-welfare mothers followed by two demographic questions (Appendix 1). Respondents were asked to comment on a separate page.

**SAMPLE**

The entire universe of employers who hire ex-welfare recipients from job fairs in the designated five counties consists of 300 people. This researcher was able to survey the entire universe. With a sample as small as 300, this researcher felt it was financially possible to survey the entire universe. This leaves a coverage error rate of zero.

**DATA ANALYSIS**

The survey results were analyzed using Microsoft Excel. The data was entered into a spreadsheet and percentages were calculated by the computer program. Then, a chi-square analysis was performed, in Excel, comparing the expected responses to the actual responses. Finally, the data was sourced into chart form.

## Chapter 4

### General Findings

Hypotheses One and Two were tested through a mail survey. This researcher obtained lists from social services offices in Philadelphia, Burlington, Camden, Gloucester and Salem/Cumberland counties, of employers who attend job fairs for ex-welfare recipients. Three hundred surveys were mailed and 112 were returned. Of the 112 returned surveys, 87 were completed. The survey consisted of eight questions. Three questions applied to Hypothesis One and three applied to Hypothesis Two. The remaining two questions were optional and categorized respondents by industry and amount of experience in hiring employees.

Neither hypothesis was supported by the survey results. This researcher obtained the frequency of responses for each answer choice for each question. This researcher then performed a chi-square analysis on the results. The degree of frequency was four for all questions except one. In that case the degree of frequency was one. This researcher chose a probability level of .05 because that is the greatest amount that this researcher would accept for validity reasons. In every case the chi-square result was less than 9.488, the designated value from the chi-square significance table (Wimmer2000). Table 1 compares the calculated chi-square value to the value in the chi-square significance table. This comparison quantifies why Hypotheses One and Two were not supported.

Hypothesis Three was tested by a content analysis. Hypothesis Three was supported by the content analysis results. The messages in the commercials were found to be positive and persuasive. The results of the chi-square analysis and goodness-of-fit test suggest that each commercial targets one of three audiences: ex-welfare mothers,

potential employers or both. This researcher's findings, combined with the success of the campaign in Philadelphia, suggest that advertising of ex-welfare mothers as a workforce increases the credibility of such employees.

**Table 1**

Chi-Square Significance Table Value	Chi-Square Value
9.488	3.049
9.488	4.289
9.488	1.038
2.706	2.227
9.488	1.096
9.488	2.482

### **Hypotheses**

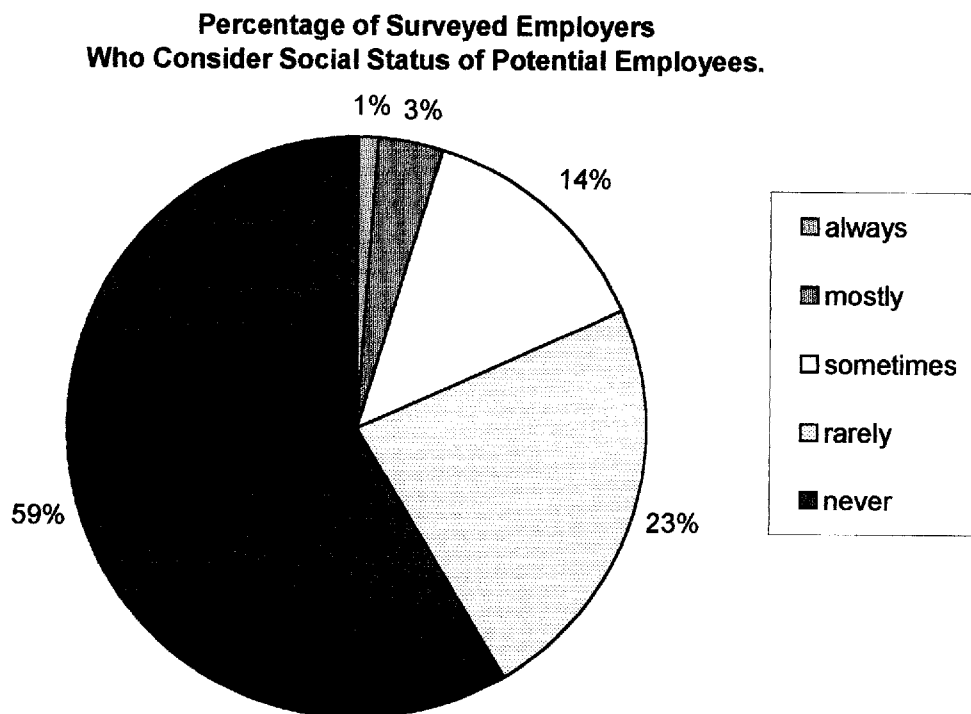
**Hypothesis 1: It is expected that ex-welfare mothers will make valuable employees despite the stereotype that comes with being on welfare.**

Hypothesis One was tested by three questions. The first question determined how many of the surveyed employers considered the social status of their employees before hiring. Respondents were informed that social status referred to the welfare status of the potential employees. Over half of the respondents answered "Never" when asked how

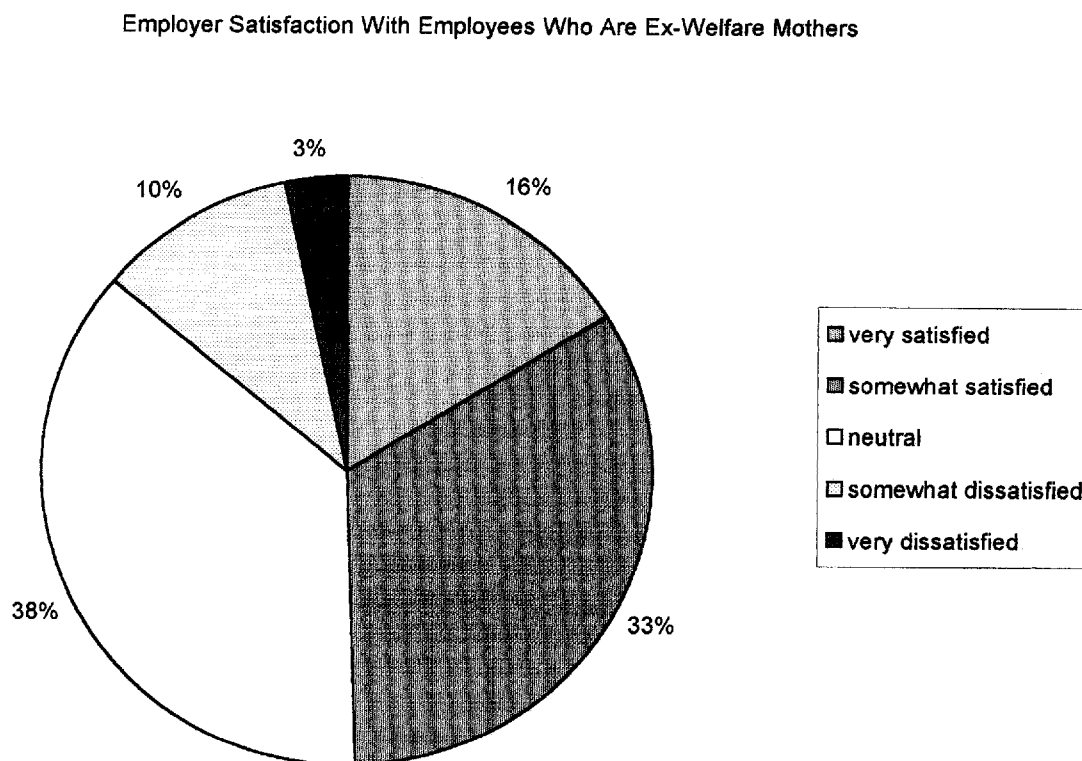


often they consider the social status of potential employees. One percent of the respondents answered “Always” (See Figure 1).

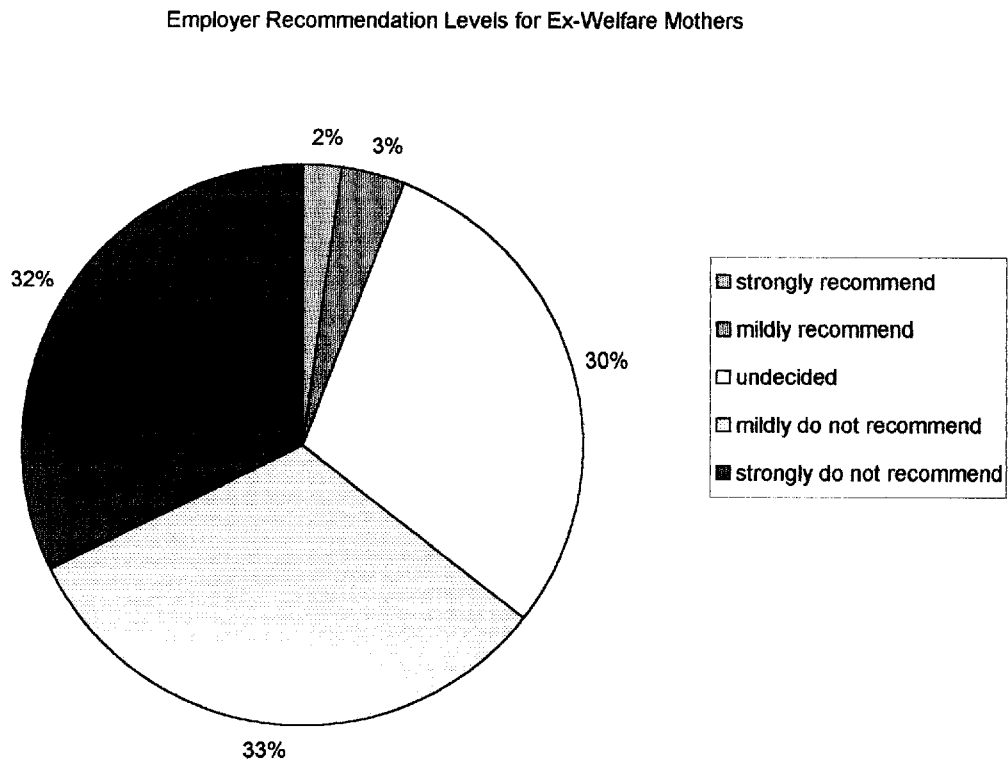
**Figure 1**



The second question asked respondents to rate their satisfaction with employees who are ex-welfare mothers. Almost half of the respondents remained neutral, while one-third answered “Somewhat Satisfied” (See Figure 2). It was expected that over half or approximately 70 respondents, would answer very satisfied or somewhat satisfied.

**Figure 2**

The third question related to Hypothesis One asked respondents how much they recommended ex-welfare mothers to future employers. One-third of the respondents remained neutral, while the other two-thirds strongly did not or mildly did not recommend such employees (See Figure 3). It was expected that approximately 60 percent of respondents would strongly or mildly recommend such employees.

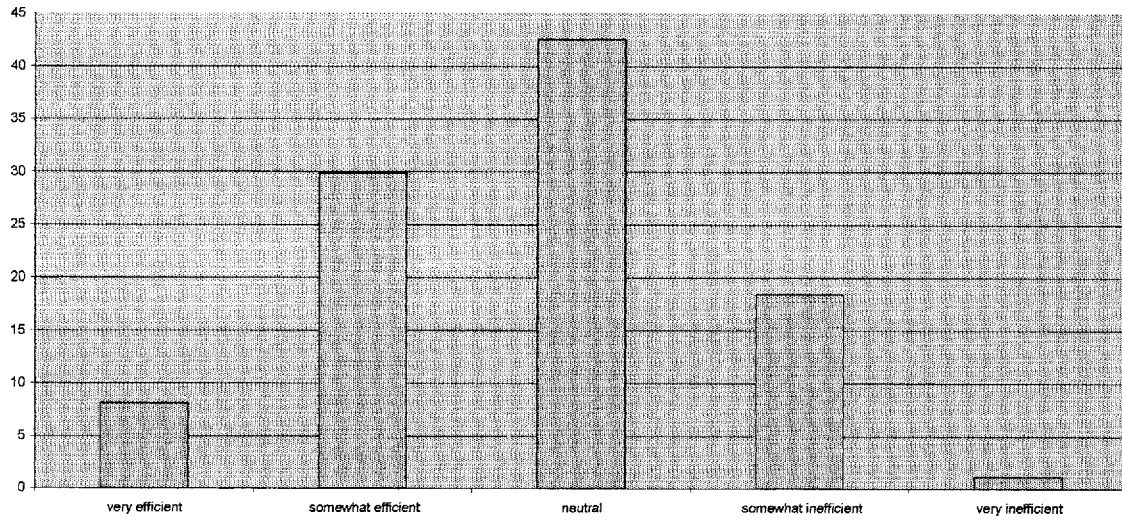
**Figure 3**

**Hypothesis 2: It is expected that ex-welfare mothers will be reliable employees because they cannot financially afford to lose their jobs.**

The first two questions that pertain to Hypothesis Two rate the efficiency and dependability of employment ex-welfare mothers. Most respondents remained neutral on both issues. Figure 4 indicates the varying opinions of the respondents. Figure 5 illustrates the respondents' views on employee dependability.

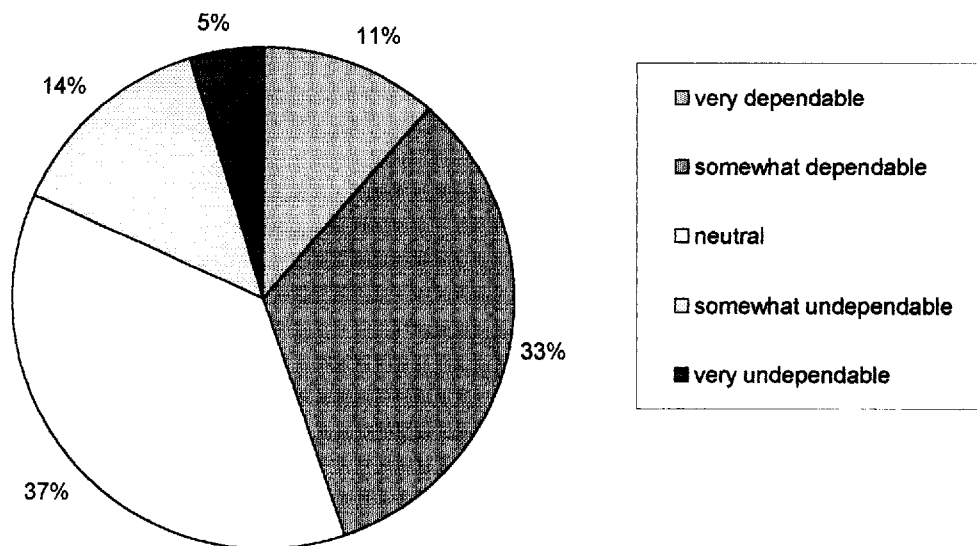
**Figure 4**

**Efficiency Rating of Employees Who Are Ex-Welfare Mothers**



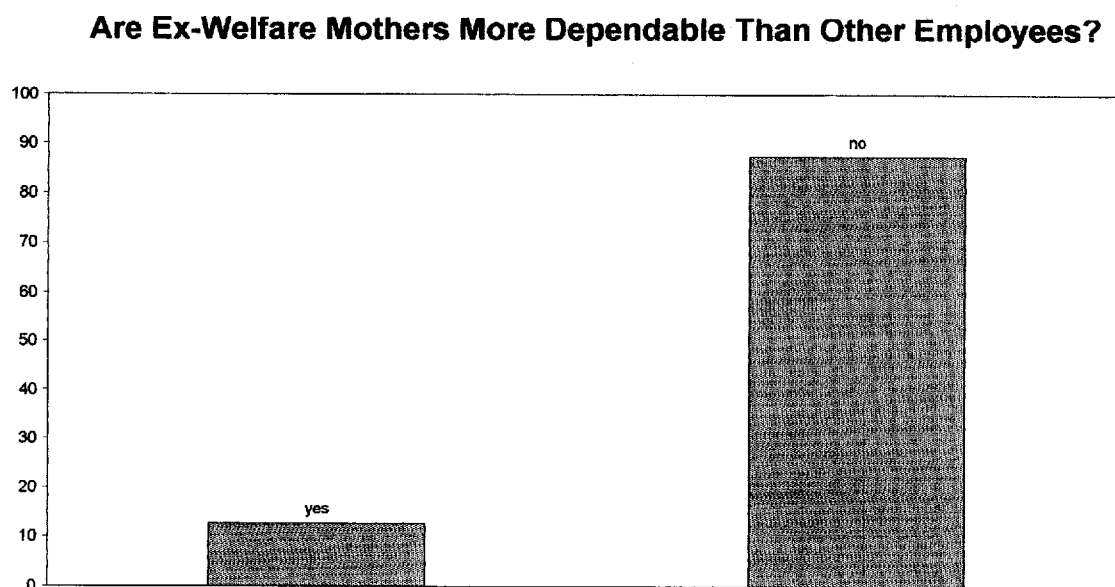
**Figure 5**

**Rates of Dependability for Ex-Welfare Mothers**



Finally, the last quantitative question asked respondents to compare ex-welfare mothers dependability as employees, to other employees (See Figure 6). The question did not specify what type of other employee, but rather other employees in general. Respondents were required to chose either “Yes” or “No” to the question, “Do you consider ex-welfare mothers to be more dependable employees that other employees?”

**Figure 6**



**Hypothesis 3: It is expected that advertising of ex-welfare mothers as a workforce will increase the credibility of such employees.**

This content analysis includes three commercials from a public information campaign created by MRO Advertising of Bala Cynwyd, Pennsylvania. The campaign consisted of: two 30-second TV spots, one 15-second TV spot, two 60-second radio spots, newspaper advertisements, billboards, transit posters, direct mail, and Spanish language advertisements. This researcher's content analysis concentrated on the two 30-second TV spots and the one 15-second TV spot. MRO Advertising claims employers should understand that "women coming off welfare make highly motivated employees because, for them, succeeding at a job is the difference between providing for their children or life on the streets."

In performing the content analysis this researcher wanted to uncover what made the commercials of a welfare-to-work campaign so successful. Philadelphia Mayor, Ed Rendell, claims that after the first two weeks of this campaign the Greater Philadelphia Works hotline "logged more than 2,500 inquiries from employers and welfare clients alike." Rendell also said the advertisements continue to log more than 800 calls per week to the hotline and "made a profound difference in [Philadelphia's] efforts to move nearly 60,000 adults from the Welfare rolls into meaningful jobs" (Rendell letter). The commercials appear to be effective because they position ex-welfare mothers as a workforce. Typically, informational commercials are spoken from the point of view of adults. Often the adults are experts or people who have experience in the subject matter. In this set of welfare-to-work commercials the advertising company decided to inform

viewers by using children. They encourage their mothers to return to the general workforce.

Hypothesis 3 is supported. The advertising campaign positioned ex-welfare mothers as a viable workforce. Employers hired this type of employee because of the public information campaign. However, when comparing Hypothesis 3 with Hypotheses 1 and 2, this researcher finds advertising to be persuasive, but ultimately ineffective. When looking at the situation in the short run it appears to have worked. When observing long-term retention rates, the advertising did not work.

## Chapter 5

### Survey Results

Although Hypotheses One and Two were not supported by survey results, both make important discoveries about employees and employers. This first question on the survey was, “When hiring a new employee how often do you consider the potential employee’s social status?” Surprisingly, 59 percent of respondents answered “Never.” This researcher expected almost all of the respondents to answer “Always” or even “Sometimes” because the employers’ names were taken directly from a public list. The list was made from a sign-in sheet that the surveyed employers voluntarily filled out when they signed up to attend job fairs for ex-welfare recipients.

Although this particular question was a major reason why Hypothesis One was not supported, it speaks volumes about the stereotypes that follow welfare. This researcher concluded that most employers did not want to say that they considered social status when hiring new employees simply because that would make them seem discriminatory. The surveyed employers were not told how this researcher obtained their names and addresses, therefore they had no proof that the survey was truly what this research said it was.

If further study were to be conducted on this topic, researchers should inform potential respondents why they were chosen. In doing this, they would prevent the inaccuracy in survey results that occurred in this research. This researcher believes that the questions following number one were answered truthfully. The first question asked about general hiring practices, while the following questions asked about specific



experiences with a specific type of employee. This fact supports this researcher's claim that the remaining questions were answered truthfully.

This claim is also supported by those respondents who refused to complete the survey. A few wrote notes on the incomplete survey explaining why they could not participate. Thirteen respondents refused to answer, thereby causing this researcher to conclude that those who did answer felt the questions were acceptable.

For example, Question Two asked employers to rate their satisfaction with employees who are ex-welfare mothers. Approximately 70 percent of respondents said they were very or somewhat dissatisfied. This question was straightforward, almost the same as asking, "Were you pleased, or not?" As an employer, the respondents can give a truthful answer without seeming biased toward a particular type of person.

Question three divided respondents into three categories. One-third remained neutral, while the other two-thirds mildly or strongly did not recommend ex-welfare mothers to future employers. Again, the results illustrate the sensitivity of the issue. Although most respondents were on the negative end of the scale, the remaining respondents were neutral. This researcher found that a significant number of neutral answers indicates a sensitive question. The neutral responses cannot be ignored, but rather noted as important results.

A significant neutral result was also found in questions four and five. When employers were asked to rate the efficiency and dependability of workers, one-third of respondents remained neutral. However, the majority of respondents for both questions answered toward the positive (somewhat efficient and somewhat dependable). This researcher found the results to conflict with those of earlier questions. While most

respondents were satisfied with this type of employee, they would not recommend them to other employers, yet found them somewhat efficient and somewhat dependable. With this conflict in mind, this researcher found further confusion with the final question's results. An overwhelming 90 percent of respondents found this type of employee to be less dependable than other employees. Therefore, this researcher asked the question, "Why are unsatisfied employers calling this type of employee efficient and dependable?"

The answer was found in memos and extra information provided by respondents. A large number of respondents wrote extensive messages in the area provided for comments. In fact, a few respondents included business cards or typed letters on official letterhead. Respondents cited lack of transportation and lack of child care as the largest barriers for ex-welfare mothers. Although the women were good employees when they did come to work, they were often unable to arrive on time and oftentimes had to call out of their shift. Respondents claimed these two excuses were heard daily from ex-welfare mothers.

However, most respondents did not blame the mothers for the situations. Many employers' comments laid the blame on a government that cannot prepare ex-welfare recipients for the workforce. They claimed the mothers were able to work but physically could not get to the job site, or were unable to leave their children without babysitters for an eight-hour shift. The ultimate consensus was: while the jobs are available, the workers are not.

The comments section also allowed respondents to explain why they would not complete the survey. Many blank surveys were returned with full comments pages. One respondent, a human resource manager for a visiting nurse agency, offered a personal

note on letterhead. She apologized for being unable to answer my request due to company policy. However, she did leave her direct phone number for further questions. Another respondent wrote a message across her survey. She apologized for not being able to help, but claimed she had no experience with ex-welfare recipients. She went on to explain that she has “no idea of the status of the employees” she hires.

A human resources manager for a governmental agency typed an official response on letterhead as well. He wrote:

“I attempted to complete your survey, however I don’t believe that I can contribute very much for the following reasons:

1. I do not know which employees, if any, formerly received welfare
2. When I interview to fill a position I very rarely know whether the candidate has been on welfare.

Based on my experience, welfare mothers have a wide range of qualifications, barriers to overcome, and levels of motivation. Therefore, it is my opinion that there would be a wide range of employer levels of satisfaction dependent on these attributes as they are manifested in the specific individuals hired.”

This respondent chose not to answer the survey, yet he did offer his experience as food for thought. I found his prediction, although it was not the outcome, to be helpful in gauging the views of this particular employer.

### **Content Analysis Results**

There are very unique aspects of the Welfare-to-Work commercials. For example, the cinematography is black and white or dulled color, the setting is always urban, the characters are usually playing in the streets and the music is a “down-home” type of quirky beat. All of these characteristics directly relate to the overall feeling of the

commercials, however, it is the characters and their message that is what this researcher focused on. This single unit of analysis, character, is the most significant aspect of the commercial's design for this researcher.

After performing the content analysis this researcher found that most of the speakers were children of a racial minority. Also, they are not just speaking to their mothers, but to potential employers as well. It seems that the goal of the advertising company was to create one commercial directed to employers, one directed to mothers and one directed at both. The commercials use children to praise the mothers' qualities and actions, say words of encouragement, display happy and hopeful emotion and inform the viewer. By having children as the focal point, the commercials "sell" the mothers to potential employers through association. Children, innately innocent and dependent upon their parents, need employers' help. Viewers of the commercials see children and are reminded of the "other type" of welfare recipient, the single mother. Ultimately, the commercials break the stereotype and affect employers by not changing, but expanding, their perception of welfare.

This conclusion was obtained through a chi-square analysis. The information from the code sheets was put into the chi-square formula and tabulated. Since each commercial was split up into five sections (type of speaker, characters shown, race, audience and message) this researcher performed five different chi squares, one for each section. The researcher did five chi-squares for each commercial. A total of fifteen chi-squares were performed.

The degrees of freedom ranged from three to five. This researcher used the mean of the results from all three coders, for all three commercials. If the coders each had a

different answer for a category, this researcher took the mean of their answers and plugged that number into the chi-square formula. Three coders were used for intercoder reliability. Overall, all of the coder's results were the same.

This researcher found that positing the ex-welfare worker as a workforce, through commercials aimed at employers as well as mother, garnered support for welfare programs. This support led to increased hiring of ex-welfare mothers, and allowed the mothers to believe they were needed workforce. The public information campaign explored the many ways of looking at an issue has been plagued with stereotypes.

## **Discussion**

Ultimately, this researcher found that although ex-welfare mothers have not proven themselves to be efficient and dependable in the eyes of the surveyed employers, the employers are not embittered by this type of worker. The employers cited specific reason why such employees were not efficient and dependable in extensive comments in the Comments section of the survey.

The three biggest problems that respondents cited were: transportation, child care and scheduling around boyfriend/spouses' work schedules. Respondents claimed that although many of these employees were cheerful and hard-working, they were rated inefficient because they had to call-out often. Most employers considered call-outs and no-shows a major part of being a valuable employee. Therefore, employees who had the potential for success were often fired due to outside influences.

## Future Research

This researcher suggests research be conducted to determine how much employers are willing to do to facilitate efficiency in this type of employee. For example, would employers be willing to provide child care, and what kind of child care? Can child care be considered a benefit, like health insurance? Are employers willing to be more lenient with this type of worker in terms of scheduling? Is it possible to provide transportation or vouchers for transportation?

So many aspects of this topic can be researched from many different perspectives. As a public relations student this researcher suggests further study be conducted on employee efficiency and what makes employees happy. Maybe some employees would be willing to give up vacation days in return for child care during the year. Others may value transportation compensation over extended health benefits. Any insight into what can help this type of employee retain a job would be a service to the public relations profession.

A recent article in *Inc.* states the problem best:

People fresh off the welfare rolls sometimes overwhelm bare-bones human resources departments. Difficulty securing transportation and childcare may result in employee tardiness or absenteeism, which can take a big toll on small organizations. Add to the equation a mountain of paperwork imposed on those businesses by government agencies, and its hard to imagine why any employer would choose to wade in these waters (Fenn 2000).

Another problem with our present welfare system is the phenomenon of the “employment center.” The employment center is the former welfare office, except now welfare recipients who visit the center should be ready to get a job, not just a check. Many former recipients receive letters stating, “You are being called in to evaluate your

employability” (DeParle 2000). Instead of getting their usual welfare check, they are placed in jobs that meet suit their lifestyles or physical needs. Many former welfare recipients end up working against their will, and even more try to find ways to declare themselves “unemployable.” Research on this trend would be valuable to the study of employee efficiency.

## Appendix 1

Please circle the **most appropriate** answer:

- 1) When hiring a new employee how often do you consider the potential employee's social status?
  - 1 ALWAYS
  - 2 MOST OF THE TIME
  - 3 SOMETIMES
  - 4 RARELY
  - 5 NEVER
  
- 2) How satisfied are you with employees who are ex-welfare mothers?
  - 1 VERY SATISFIED
  - 2 SOMEWHAT SATISFIED
  - 3 NEUTRAL
  - 4 SOMEWHAT DISSATISFIED
  - 5 VERY DISSATISFIED
  
- 3) How dependable do you consider employees who are ex-welfare mothers to be?
  - 1 VERY DEPENDABLE
  - 2 SOMEWHAT DEPENDABLE
  - 3 NEUTRAL
  - 4 SOMEWHAT UNDEPENDABLE
  - 5 VERY UNDEPENDABLE
  
- 4) Do you consider ex-welfare mothers to be more dependable employees than other types of employees?
  - 1 YES
  - 2 NO
  
- 5) Overall, how do you rate the efficiency of workers who are ex-welfare mothers?
  - 1 VERY EFFICIENT
  - 2 SOMEWHAT EFFICIENT
  - 3 NEUTRAL
  - 4 SOMEWHAT INEFFICIENT
  - 5 VERY INEFFICIENT



6) How much would you recommend that other employers hire ex-welfare mothers?

- 1 STRONGLY RECOMMEND
- 2 MILDLY RECOMMEND
- 3 UNDECIDED
- 4 MILDLY WOULD NOT RECOMMEND
- 5 STRONGLY WOULD NOT RECOMMEND

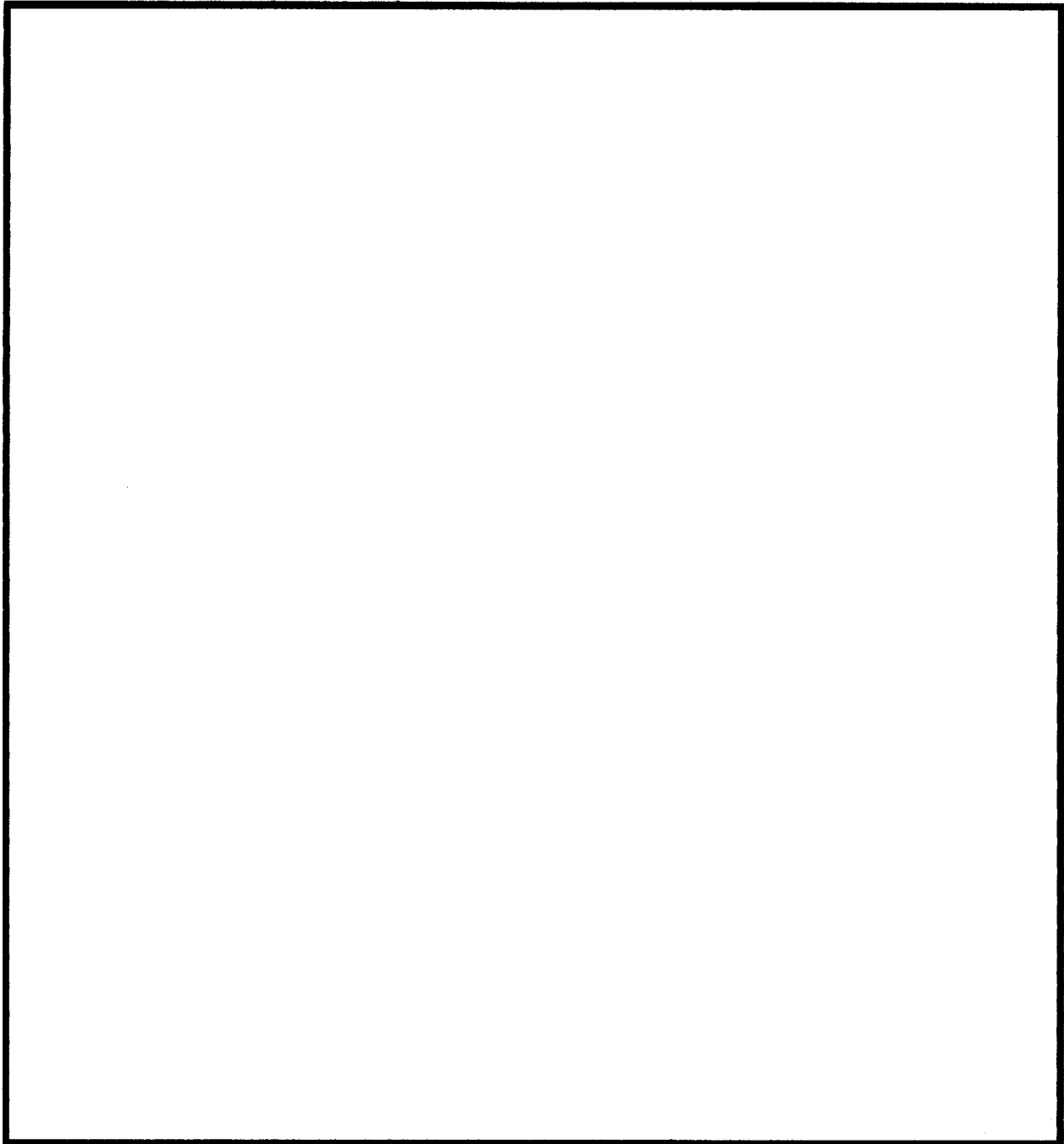
7) What type of industry is your business a part of?

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8) How long have you been hiring ex-welfare recipients?

- 1 ONE YEAR OR LESS
- 2 2-4 YEARS
- 3 5-7 YEARS
- 4 8-10 YEARS
- 5 OVER TEN YEARS

*Your comments will be appreciated, either here or in a separate envelope.*



**Thank you for your help.  
Please return your completed questionnaire  
in the enclosed envelope to:  
Julie Kozempel  
{Address}  
{Phone}**

## Appendix 2

The code sheet and coder directions were created as follows:

### Content Analysis Coder Directions

First off, thank you for coding my content analysis. I know everyone is busy with the holidays and their own work, so I really appreciate you helping me do this.

You will be watching three commercials from the Welfare-to-Work advertising campaign created by MRO Advertising. There are two 30-second TV spots and one 15-second TV spot. For this coding process you will concentrate on one unit of analysis: character.

The commercials have unique aspects to them (ex. they are all in black and white) but I am not interested in that for this content analysis. Simply look at the people in the commercials. Here is a guide to help you for each question:

- A. Type of speaker: Determine if the speakers in the commercials are children, adults, or “other.” There may be many people shown but for this question I want you to concentrate on the **type of voice speaking, or better yet, the actual person you see talking**. Some of the speakers are voiced-over (heard but not scene). Code these as well.
- B. Characters shown: Specify what kinds of people are being shown during the commercial. The ages are written on the code sheet.

C. Races: What races of people are shown? As best as you can, code how many of each race you see on the screen in the given commercial.

D. Audience: Who is the audience that the main speaker is addressing? Their mother, a potential employer, or someone else? Specify who the someone else is if you choose "other."

E. Type of message spoken: THIS IS THE MOST IMPORTANT PART!!!

What are the types of messages that the person is conveying? Put a check next to a different message each time the speaker makes a statement. **You should code every sentence they say.** Feel free to rewind the tape. Are they praising their mothers' actions (ex. "My mom makes me spaghetti"), praising the mothers' qualities (ex. "My mom will do anything for me" or "My mom is a hard worker"), saying words of encouragement (ex. "You can do it Mom"), displaying their own emotions (ex. "I'm not scared Mom) or being informative.

### Character Description Code Sheet

Put a check mark next to each category as you see it. You will have to rewind the tape many times for each commercial and possibly for each section.

Commercial #    1                    2                    3

A) Type of speaker: Adult \_\_\_\_\_ Child \_\_\_\_\_ Other \_\_\_\_\_

B) Characters shown: Child (1-12 years of age) \_\_\_\_\_

Teenager (13-18 years of age) \_\_\_\_\_

Adult (18+) \_\_\_\_\_

Other \_\_\_\_\_

C) Race: Caucasians \_\_\_\_\_ Latino/Spanish \_\_\_\_\_

African-American \_\_\_\_\_ other (specify) \_\_\_\_\_

Native American \_\_\_\_\_

D) Audience: Mother \_\_\_\_\_ other (specify) \_\_\_\_\_

Potential employers \_\_\_\_\_

E) Type of message spoken: praising mothers' actions \_\_\_\_\_

praising mothers' qualities \_\_\_\_\_

saying words of encouragement \_\_\_\_\_

displaying personal emotion (ex. not being scared) \_\_\_\_\_

informative \_\_\_\_\_

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