WHAT DOES ADDICTION MEAN IN US POLICY DEBATES?

A Case Study of the "Welfare Addict"

Be Stone

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ABSTRACT The concept of addiction is threaded throughout US policy debates in unexpected contexts, yet this keyword in American political culture is understudied and undertheorized. A case study of the "welfare addict" demonstrates several facets of the term's political power—most notably, its capacity to discredit its targets as legitimate democratic actors. Ordinary language analysis of archival and media sources shows that the recurrent theme of recipients allegedly becoming "addicted to welfare" was critical to the consolidation of welfare reform in 1996 because it provided a "color-blind" racial logic of gendered poverty with which conservatives and liberals built distinct yet complementary cases for reform. Drawing upon the term's symbolic meanings, "welfare addiction" became a leading narrative in the reform era because it displaced public concern about the domestic effects of global economic interdependence, as well as elite anxiety about their own reliance on government subsidies, onto a systematically disempowered target population.

KEYWORDS ordinary language analysis, discourse analysis, critical addiction studies, welfare queen, welfare reform

"To dole out relief in this way is to administer a narcotic, a subtle destroyer of the human spirit"

Actors across the political spectrum in the United States regularly employ the concept of "addiction" in seemingly incongruous policy contexts.[1] From critiquing the oil industry's stranglehold on the US energy market (e.g., "America is addicted to oil") to denouncing money in politics (e.g., politicians are "addicted to dark money") and decrying the federal deficit (e.g., Congress is "addicted to deficit spending"), addiction is threaded throughout US political discourse in unexpected contexts in service to a range of political projects. What kind of political work might the term be doing in these debates, given that its applications are usually limited to personal vices such as drug and alcohol consumption or gambling? Why might political actors, the media, and everyday people be consistently deploying the concept in these unconventional ways, and how might naming a policy problem an addiction affect public debate and policy outcomes?

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A case study of one critical policy juncture in which addiction was deployed to substantial effect—the bipartisan dismantling of a key pillar of the US welfare state via "welfare reform" in 1996—offers preliminary answers to these questions. This study is grounded in the proposition that addiction is a keyword in the US political lexicon (Williams [1976] 2015; Stone, forthcoming). The term is key in that it symbolizes the antithesis of hegemonic values in American political culture—that is, masculinized, white-racialized conceptions of individualistic autonomy and nationalistic freedom (Pateman 1989; Roberts 1998). Further, the modern concept of addiction, which adds a medical veneer to the term's traditional moralistic meanings, is an American innovation, making it particularly potent in the US context (Valverde 1998; Courtwright 2019; B. Alexander 2008; Park 2024).

In his 1935 State of the Union address, quoted above, President Roosevelt (1935) voices a long-standing idea in Western political discourse that government aid engenders "dependence" that "induces a spiritual and moral disintegration fundamentally destructive to the national fibre." A rich literature on welfare discourse in the United States interrogates the concept of dependence, particularly its stigmatized (Fraser and Gordon 1994; Gordon 1994; Fraser 1993; Schram 1995), gendered (Pateman 1989; Mink 1994; Abramovitz 2000), and racialized inflections (Lubiano 1992; Bensonsmith 2005; P. Collins 2009), and its role in precluding sustained public support for a robust welfare state (Gilens 1999; Katz 2013). Beyond dependence, the idea that recipients can become addicted to government aid—that it is akin to a "narcotic"—is a recurrent narrative in US welfare discourse that several scholars have noted but none has fully explored (Fraser and Gordon 1994; Blank 1997; Sparks 2003; Schram 2000). Addiction is distinct from dependence in that the latter, while highly stigmatized, is a transient status. In contrast, addiction is an enduring, politicized identity that is never fully shed, only potentially transformed, into a "recovering addict" identity (Stone 2018).

Through ordinary language analysis of archival and media sources, I trace the history and policy impact of the concept of "welfare addiction," showing that the grammar of addiction—its implied causes and consequences, its hallmark signs, the ways outsiders are impelled to intervene, how recovery is achieved—provided a "color-blind" (Bonilla-Silva 2022) racial logic of gendered poverty upon which conservatives and liberals built distinct yet complementary cases for welfare reform. I begin by examining a little-studied precursor to federal welfare reform: Congressional efforts to exclude "drug addicts and alcoholics" (DA&As) from the Supplemental Security Income (SSI) Disability Insurance (DI) program. Existing studies identify how political elites conflate welfare recipients with people who use drugs to dehumanize them and justify disinvestment in antipoverty programs (Murphy and Sales 2001; Amundson et al. 2014, 2015; McCarty et al. 2016). But the SSI/DI case is distinct, as recipients received payments because of their addiction—addiction was their qualifying disability—giving credence to claims that recipients were also becoming addicted to the program itself.

Conservatives in Congress and the media regularly conflated SSI/DI with Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) by referring to both as "welfare," and they then redeployed this narrative to assert that AFDC itself was addicting and that its supporters were "enablers." By framing welfare recipients and their advocates as being in an addict-enabler relationship, critics discredited them as legitimate spokespeople in public debate, conflating their defense of AFDC with an addict seeking to preserve their "fix," offering a sheen of legitimacy to Republicans' efforts to circumvent the democratic process in repealing the program (Hawkesworth 2003).

With the public primed to perceive welfare as addictive, its defenders as enablers, and its critics as offering a necessary (if painful) intervention, the "welfare addict" became the central figure around which the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act (PRWORA) was designed, ultimately overshadowing the "welfare queen." My argument builds upon the wide-ranging critical literature on welfare reform at the state and federal levels, in which scholars of Black feminism interrogate the pernicious racialized and gendered stereotypes that drove these reform efforts (Lubiano 1992; Roberts 1998; Hancock 2004; Nadasen 2005), political scientists document the electoral considerations that influenced the bill's passage (Schram and Soss 2001; Soss and Schram 2007), and an interdisciplinary range of scholars contextualize welfare repeal as part of broader political projects seeking to discipline, disinvest in, and criminalize the poor, especially poor people of color (Beckett and Western 2001; Garland 2001; Piven and Cloward 1993; Quadagno 1994; Wacquant 2009).

I show that the multifaceted meanings of addiction bridged surface differences between conservative and liberal political projects pursued via welfare reform, with entrepreneurs on both sides of the aisle drawing upon the signaling function of addiction—what we are called to do once we have named something an addiction—to craft distinct moralistic and political narratives about why the welfare system needed to be reformed now. As the five-year lifetime limit for the new Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program arrived in 2001, media outlets selectively amplified the voices of former AFDC recipients who described welfare in terms of addiction, lending credence to the logic of reform and cementing this figure in the public imaginary.

I conclude by suggesting that economic elites and their advocates in Congress and the media drew upon the symbolic meanings of addiction in the welfare reform debates in order to displace their anxieties about their own reliance on government subsidies onto impoverished racialized and gendered "others." The "welfare addict" narrative resonated with the public by redirecting concerns regarding the domestic effects of globalized economic interdependence at a systematically disempowered policy target population, misconstruing collective policy failures as individualized moralistic failures, and offering former recipients a hollow hope in "recovery" from "welfare addiction." I begin by briefly describing my method and defining addiction and its key conceptual elements. I then identify prominent

themes in the DA&A controversy, trace how those themes were redeployed by Republicans and Democrats in the welfare reform debate, and show how politicians and the media used previous welfare recipients' postreform accounts to affirm their arguments about "welfare addiction."

"Let the use *teach* you the meaning"

My approach to studying discourse is Pitkinian-inspired ordinary language analysis (OLA) (Pitkin [1972] 1993), building upon interpretive analyses of the theoretical presuppositions underlying the language and practices of policymaking (Hawkesworth 1988; Yanow 2000; Schneider and Ingram 2005) and critical studies of American political culture investigating the interplay between the material and the symbolic at the national level (Rogin 1987; Norton 1993; Cole 2007).[2] In brief, OLA identifies what a concept means by examining how it is used. For Pitkin, language is a form of action; therefore, our terms have multiple meanings corresponding to how we use them. The sum of all the ways a term can be used sensibly is its grammar. In documenting a term's grammar, I elucidate the unspoken rules that determine how it can be used in relation to other concepts. This includes how the concept relates to actors and objects, how it appraises behavior, and what it promises about action to come.

Because our words are amalgamations of uses, OLA presumes they will include tensions and seemingly contradictory deployments in different contexts for distinct audiences, and that these meanings are always subject to contestation (Cole and Stone 2023). The inherent tensions among a term's various meanings are never resolved; each utterance emphasizes some aspects while others temporarily fade into the background. For example, on the one hand, drug policy reform advocates and scholars convincingly demonstrate how political entrepreneurs use the concept of drug and alcohol addiction to disproportionately police and incarcerate people of color, women, and immigrants in the United States (M. Alexander 2010; Campbell 2000; Hickman 2000; Zerai and Banks 2002). Yet at the same time, there are activist groups in the United States who claim their identities as "addicts in long-term recovery" as a political status, asserting their experiential knowledge in order to influence drug policymaking in a more evidence-based direction (Stone 2018). These seemingly contrary uses of addiction suggest the range of implications the term can encompass when invoked by different speakers to divergent ends.

Applying OLA to the public discourse about antipoverty policies in the United States espoused by politicians, pundits, the media, and laypeople in government archival sources and news media coverage allows me to consider how a term I expect to know the meaning of—such as *addiction*—is transposed into a new context (e.g., "welfare addiction") where its typical meanings do not directly translate. I investigate how the term's meanings, via its new uses, are transfigured in the process—by giving new meaning to the relationships between the contexts,

objects, and people involved. In my research, I encountered dozens of writers and speakers referring to "welfare addicts" or someone being "addicted to welfare" in media outlets across the country—from Philadelphia to Minneapolis, Atlanta to Los Angeles, in national outlets including *CNN*, *USA Today*, *The New York Times*, and the *CBS Evening News*, in the *Congressional Record* and *Public Papers of the Presidents*. Most results clustered in the late 1980s through the early 2000s, indicating that the "welfare addict" was a common narrative in the national discourse about welfare during this critical policy juncture.

What Do We Mean When We Say "Addiction"?

Addiction is a relatable and easily deployable concept in the United States, with nearly half of Americans reporting having a family member or close friend who has been "addicted to drugs"—an experience that cuts evenly across gender, race, and political affiliation and varies only slightly by education and age (Gramlich 2017). A full grammatical investigation of addiction is beyond the scope of this article (see Stone 2023). Instead, in this section I briefly articulate how the term is used in its most common contexts (drugs and alcohol) before tracing how its meanings are translated into a novel context (welfare) in subsequent sections.

Addiction is typically defined in two broad senses: as an immoderate dedication or devotion to an activity or occupation, or as a compulsive consumption of a drug or other substance despite adverse consequences.[3] The first definition reflects a normative sense of addiction being an inappropriately strong attachment to an object or behavior, with its roots in ancient Latin. Ancient uses of the term encompassed both positive and negative connotations—a devotion to religion, on the one hand, or to vice, on the other (Rosenthal and Faris 2019). Contemporary implications of addiction also range from the trivial to the devastating, depending upon the type of behavior—for example, being addicted to running versus being addicted to drugs—who is engaging in the behavior, in what context, and how others are perceived to be affected by it. The common thread is that these behaviors, even if socially condoned in moderation, are normatively condemned for being excessive or extreme, therefore purportedly harmful to the addict and those around them.

The second definition is informed by modern medical conceptions of addiction, originating in the United States at the turn of the nineteenth century (Levine 1978). Though medical definitions have changed over time (Leshner 1997; Vrecko 2010), the addict is consistently described as distinguishable from the nonaddict in that they persist in their addictive behavior despite negative consequences. Though informed by biomedicine, this definition also carries moralistic undertones, with the addict assigned at least partial responsibility for initiating the behavior in question and starting the addictive cycle. In this conception, addiction cannot be cured but can be "managed" through "addiction recovery" (NIDA 2020), a lifelong process of psychological and behavioral "techniques of the self" the addict adopts to abstain from their addiction (Keane 2000). The enduring

"recovering addict" identity is a position of normative restoration that echoes the American myth of social mobility through self-discipline (Keane 2000), but one that is always tentative, with relapse a common occurrence the addict must try to keep at bay through constant vigilance.

The core tension within the concept is whether the addict is *unable* or *unwilling* to stop their behavior. This tension is the root of the term's substantial discursive flexibility, as it can be used to invoke a more sympathetic or more demonized figure, depending on the speaker's emphasis and context (Acker 2002; Tiger 2013; Courtwright 1982; Musto 1987). Whether they deserve sympathy because they are unable—or punishment because they are unwilling—to alter their behavior, the addict identity is politicized in that a range of social, economic, and political interventions accompany naming someone an addict (Stone 2018). The concept implies that most of those called addicts will reject the label and will not want to stop their behavior—they are in "denial"—a telltale sign in which the addict rarely perceives their behavior as a problem. Breaking an addict's denial requires the imposition, or at least the threat, of punitive measures to motivate them to end their addiction and pursue recovery. These punitive measures are often imposed over the addict's objections to the contrary, justified as being for their own benefit.

Addiction is a keyword in the US political lexicon, in Raymond Williams's ([1976] 2015) sense of a significant word that indicates a shared vocabulary among a common culture, because it troubles two core aspects of dominant US political culture: the presumption of individual free will, and Protestant ascetic values of self-control and moderation. The addict is a condensation symbol of the opposite of the idolized atomistic liberal individual—signifying dependence, subjection, and unfreedom (Sedgwick 1993; Valverde 1998; Keane 2002; Room 2003; Reith 2004; Weinberg 2024), a potent opposition in a white-male-dominated political culture obsessed with setting itself apart from those it enslaved and dispossessed and those it continues to disenfranchise and dehumanize (Hartman 1997; Shulman 2008). In the following sections I show that addiction's multifaceted meanings have been employed as powerful political tools in the context of US antipoverty discourse, with important procedural and policy ramifications.

"The federal government has become an enabler"

References to "welfare addicts" date back to at least the 1960s in news coverage about growing welfare enrollment (Mulligan 1962; Horwitz 1969), and the term became a regular refrain among conservative commentators, members of Congress, and even President George H. W. Bush to decry the War on Poverty in the late 1980s (W. Williams 1987; Martin 1987; G. H. W. Bush 1989).[4] Describing antipoverty programs as "addicting" is part of a larger trend beginning in the late twentieth century in which speakers use addiction to characterize a broader range of troubling relationships and behaviors, due to shifts in cultural norms about drug consumption and perceptions of addiction as a treatable disease, which somewhat lessened the stigma associated with the term (Reith 2004).

In the context of a more capacious conception of addiction, "welfare addiction" became a leading narrative in the 1990s due, in part, to a little-studied precursor to federal welfare reform: efforts to exclude "drug addicts and alcoholics" (DA&As) from the SSI/DI program. In 1972, Congress approved SSI/DI for the elderly, blind, and disabled and included "drug addiction and alcoholism" as a qualifying disability, making those diagnosed as such eligible for payments if their condition prevented them from working and was expected to last for a year or more or result in death (SSA 2012). From the outset, DA&As were required to receive treatment as a condition of their benefits and payments were to be made to a third party to manage the funds on their behalf (GPO 1984).

In the late 1980s, the number of people receiving SSI/DI for a DA&A diagnosis grew substantially, and the little-known program drew the ire of media and politicians at the state and federal level (Rowen 1987). Media accounts included conflicting explanations for the increase—anonymous state administrators suggested that "word is out on the street" that SSI/DI was "free money," while federal officials argued it was due to increased awareness among doctors that addiction is a treatable illness that qualifies patients for SSI/DI (Rowen 1987). But unlike most other SSI/DI recipients, DA&As were framed as potentially able to disqualify themselves for the program by pursuing recovery, making them easy targets for critics' arguments that they were "undeserving" of public support. Even the Social Security Administration (SSA) commissioner testified to Congress that, though addiction is a disabling disease, "those suffering from substance abuse can, to varying degrees, influence their recovery by their own actions. The public has the right, therefore, to expect that they will do all they can to cooperate in recovering from their addiction and become self-supporting" (Hunt and Baumohl 2003). In other words, long-term participation in the program was used as evidence of its failure, rather than a measure of its success in keeping indigent—and, by definition, chronically ill or dying—people alive.

Helping addicts who are not perceived as actively pursuing recovery is often dismissed as "enabling," and formatively, a report from the General Accounting Office (GAO) released in 1994 cast the federal government as an "enabler" to SSI/DI "addicts" (GAO 1994). In the family systems theory of addiction, an enabler is someone who unwittingly perpetuates the addict's behavior, often covering up their misdeeds, preventing them from hitting "rock bottom," the basis for recovery (Hawkins and Hawkins 2021). In the DA&A case, in the twisted logic of enabling, providing otherwise impoverished people with a minimum means of survival was not helping but hurting them. Accusations that "tragically, these lax policies . . . are detrimental to substance abusers themselves by rewarding addiction" also aligned with preexisting conservative criticisms of Great Society programs that cast welfare state defenders as misguided paternalists who created more problems in their attempts to help the poor (Cohen 1994a).

Some advocates challenged the narrative that DA&A recipients were abusing SSI/DI, arguing that a lack of high-quality treatment options was the true cause of

low rates of exit from the program and that "in order to cure addiction, underlying economic and societal problems must also be addressed" (Fager 1994)—such as employment discrimination and access to mental health care. The GAO report conceded that the availability of Medicaid-covered treatment "varied widely" by state (GAO 1994: 8) but failed to note that addiction treatment was not a federally mandated Medicaid benefit at the time, meaning it was hardly available at all in some states (Hunt and Baumohl 2003). Media coverage often acknowledged that Congress failed to fully fund drug and alcohol treatment despite a chronic shortage nationwide, but it also portrayed treatment as largely ineffective, making its availability appear a moot point (Haner and O'Donnell 1995). "Our job is to write checks," the deputy Social Security commissioner stated in a news article widely referenced in Congress and subsequent media coverage (Haner and O'Donnell 1995)—and so Congress's job was construed as simply preventing the SSA from writing any more checks, blaming a systemic policy failure on the marginalized population it underserved.

In Congressional hearings on the beleaguered program, conservative commentators made a leap from describing SSI/DI as funding addictions to asserting the SSI/DI program itself was addicting: "Not only are DA&As addicted to chemical substances, they are also addicted to SSI" (Wright 1994). At the same time, media outlets, politicians, and critics of the program often conflated SSI/DI with welfare, using the terms interchangeably (Dash 1994). Importantly, in contrast to the "drug users on welfare" narrative, which claims welfare recipients are also addicts—and thus should be disqualified from the program—in the case of DA&As, recipients qualified for the program for being diagnosed as addicts; their status as addicts was unquestioned. Critics then used the program's rapid growth as evidence of its alleged addictiveness, giving credence to the long-standing narrative that aid itself was addicting—because an addiction-prone target population was enrolling in record numbers.

In August 1994, shortly before the midterm elections, the Democratic-controlled Congress imposed a three-year time limit on SSI/DI benefits to DA&As, reaffirmed the requirement that they be in treatment and submit to drug tests as conditions for receiving benefits, and required states to monitor recipients' compliance (Cohen 1994b). Then, in March 1996, with Republican control of Congress, the Contract with America Advancement Act terminated the DA&A program entirely (SSA 2001). Thus, amid Congressional AFDC reform debates, the DA&A program's critics declared victory against "undeserving" recipients of "welfare," eliding the fact that most of those receiving SSI/DI with a DA&A diagnosis still qualified for the program under another disability designation (SSA 2001), making its end largely symbolic.

"The Coming White Underclass"

Conflating the DA&A program with AFDC by calling it "welfare" made it possible for conservative commentators to extend their arguments against the former

to the latter.[5] The DA&A controversy primed the public to perceive antipoverty programs as inherently addictive and defenders of those programs as enablers, making "welfare addiction" an easily accessible heuristic that opponents readily deployed in the welfare reform debate.

At root, the conservative imperative to reform the US welfare system was driven by the assertion that "welfare addiction" posed a looming racialized and gendered threat to the white poor. Critics described welfare as being like a drug that would immediately ensnare anyone who consumed it—similar to how crack cocaine was erroneously described as "instantly addictive" at the time (Newman 1989). Drawing upon the term's symbolism as the antithesis of dominant American values, conservatives asserted "welfare has become so addictive" because it "completely destroys any incentive to work or become self-sufficient," indicting the entire system for being inherently addictive and therefore needing to be fundamentally restructured (Shelby 1995a). The welfare addiction framework painted recipients and their "enablers" as culpable participants who needed an outside entity to sever their mutually destructive relationship—a role Republicans were eager to assume.

The fear of welfare addiction spreading among the white poor was stoked by none other than Charles Murray in his bestselling, highly controversial book *The Bell Curve* (Herrnstein and Murray 1994; see also Roberts 1998; Nadasen 2005). Herrnstein and Murray (1994: 520–21) end their social science–veneered eugenicist diatribe by warning that the "dysgenic pressure" of an "emerging white underclass" was reaching a tipping point, which would lead the problems ascribed to the Black-coded "urban underclass"—crime, chronic unemployment, single-parenthood—to spread among the white working class, enticed into "welfare dependency." This argument built upon Murray's earlier work, in which he had claimed that the poor had responded predictably to the "incentives and disincentives" (Murray 1984: 146) of federal antipoverty programs, leading them to rely upon those programs rather than work: "We tried to remove the barriers to escape from poverty, and inadvertently built a trap" (9; see also Roberts 1998: 217).

Murray (1984: 183) argued for ending all federal antipoverty programs in order to restore the "moral inequality" between those who received welfare and those who did not, reestablishing a conservative cultural code in which being "self-sufficient" is a "precondition for being a member of society in good standing" (180). Reinstating the "moral distinctions" (180) between these groups would impose a sort of reverse-cycle-of-poverty process, whereby impoverished people who did not receive welfare would "regain the status that is properly theirs" (229) and have the backing of the state in teaching their children it is "shameful to accept welfare" (182). This process would reestablish "pride in independence" (185)—a modern variant of the Protestant work ethic in which economic success allegedly reflects moralistic rectitude. Regarding former welfare recipients, Murray claimed most would find "they can work for low wages . . . if the alternative is grim enough" (228) and that this would be instructive to their children, encouraging them to

make different choices than their parents—pursue an education, value hard work, and delay childbearing (Hawkesworth 1988).

The racialized and gendered threat Murray conjured in his vision of the "coming white underclass" has strong echoes in US drug policy history, marked by recurring "drug epidemics" driven by political entrepreneurs who characterize novel drugs as threats brought upon white Americans by racialized "others" (Lassiter 2015). Each drug panic is imbued with the racial and gender anxieties of hegemonic whiteness distinct to that period, but there is a consistent pattern of a group of racialized "others" being construed as being *like* addicts, while white addicts are construed as being *like* the racialized "other" (Hickman 2000). Policy entrepreneurs use the threat of drug addiction potentially blurring the lines of gender and racial hierarchy to justify repressive drug policies and policing of racialized and gendered groups, under the pretense of protecting white populations, particularly young people and women (Lassiter 2015). Likewise, "welfare addiction" was described as crossing racial populations via women, who were construed as being more susceptible to addiction (Campbell 2000) and welfare dependence (Fraser and Gordon 1994), threatening to blur the racialized distinctions between the "urban underclass" and the white poor.

In 1993, in a widely cited article in the *Wall Street Journal*, Murray (1993) claimed that though the United States had weathered an "epidemic of illegitimacy" among poor Black women, the nation "cannot survive the same epidemic among whites." Reform was a pressing need not because the "welfare trap" was creating an underclass of poor women of color—it had allegedly already done that—but because Murray predicted it would soon ensnare increasing numbers of the white poor, using the "urban underclass" as evidence of what to expect when the "white underclass" arrived; activating anxieties about protecting hegemonic whiteness and maintaining the racial boundaries that circumscribed the existing underclass.

Conservative commentators voicing support for reform often referenced Murray directly, asserting that his "forewarn[ing] of a new emerging white underclass as addicted to welfare as any minority group" has "galvanized welfare reformers" to intervene in the "degenerative culture of welfare dependency" (*Gazette* 1994). Impoverished mothers, particularly young Black mothers, were scapegoated by politicians of all political stripes during this period for purportedly being the source of an intergenerational "cycle of poverty" (Roberts 1998). The text of PRWORA itself and a multitude of comments by members of Congress during this period echo these claims, asserting that an "epidemic of illegitimacy" was the alleged root cause of high rates of poverty, crime, child abuse and neglect, and welfare receipt, as well as low levels of educational attainment and social mobility among welfare recipients and their children (Shelby 1995b; Ashcroft 1995; Gramm 1995; see also O'Connor 2001).

Murray and his followers insisted on intervening in this process—by ending all antipoverty programs, eradicating the "welfare trap" (Lazio 1996; Ashcroft 1996; Lott 1996, S8531). The multiple meanings of addiction help us make sense of the

seeming contradictions in their arguments—that the "coming white underclass" is a result of "dysgenic pressure" but also the result of calculating choices made by impoverished women—allegedly choosing to have more children at taxpayers' expense. The modern public health understanding of addiction suggests that the prevalence of addiction is influenced by the availability of drugs in the environment (NIDA 2020). So while Republicans could not change the alleged genetic predispositions of the growing poor white population, public policy could change the environment in which those propensities were expressed—by limiting access to the "addictive" substance in question, imposing a "reverse-cycle-of-poverty" process upon the poor and their children.

"America's long, costly drug addiction to the easy, insidious welfare drug . . . end[s] today"

Short of Murray's call to end all antipoverty programs, conservatives in Congress settled on work requirements and lifetime limits that would "bring closure to entitlement programs," making it clear that welfare was temporary, eradicating the possibility for long-term addiction to settle in (Roth 1996).[6] Their policy proposals would require "long-term users" to find a way to survive without it (RNC 1994), a process of (re)initiation into the economically circumscribed polity.

One of the most politically consequential implications of the conservative refrain that "welfare is an addiction" (*Charleston Daily Mail* 1994) was how it discredited recipients and their advocates as legitimate voices in public debate and positioned conservatives in a powerful third-party role outside the dysfunctional addict-enabler dyad. Critics implied that they could save the addict (welfare recipients) and the enabler (Democrats and the federal government) *from themselves* by forcing an end to their mutually destructive relationship, the intervener's (Republicans') clarity of vision justifying antidemocratic interventions to interrupt the addictive cycle, over the addict and enabler's objections. This "tough love" approach would offer recipients "an opportunity to break the addiction . . . to improve their lives," which conservatives predicted both the addict and their enablers would appreciate in hindsight, once their "denial" was broken (Vucanovich 1995).

Until then, the logic of addiction inverted defenses of welfare into further proof of the urgent need for reform. Conservative representatives chided "welfare addicts, some who will do anything to stay on the public dole" (Vucanovich 1995), dismissing the testimonies of current and former recipients who asserted that AFDC, though nearly impossible to survive on, was a critical stopgap for their families (Sparks 2003). Invoking the common addiction narrative of needing to hit "rock bottom," the editorial board of the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* insisted recipients' protestations should be ignored because "any recovering alcoholic or junkie can tell you that consequences, if not fatal, are an addict's best friend" (Tice 1994). Only after hitting rock bottom is the addict usually willing to make the needed changes to begin the recovery process, a narrative trajectory that empowered conservatives to assert that, despite recipients' objections, ending the program was

necessary—even in recipients' best interest—because "without the threat of extra suffering, people would have no reason to change" (Samuelson 1996).

Defenders of welfare, including "Congress, the media and the liberal advocacy industry" were likewise dismissed as being "'co-dependent' on welfare" (Tice 1994)—too embroiled in the addict's unhealthy reliance to objectively evaluate the program's merits. In response to criticisms of their proposals, Republicans redirected blame toward alleged welfare enablers: "What is mean-spirited is an administration which keeps feeding the addiction of individuals who cannot help themselves because they are trapped" (Vucanovich 1995). Some commentators went so far as to accuse the federal government of making the poor "slaves to the Department of Health and Human Resources," robbing them of the opportunity to be "truly free" (*Charleston Daily Mail* 1994), claiming that welfare "hurt the beneficiaries in many cases more than it has helped them" (Nickles 1996). What recipients needed instead was to "climb away from welfare into jobs" (Nickles 1996), with Republican proposals designed to "break the chains that bind families to the welfare state" (Zimmer 1996). Conservatives refuted accusations they were only interested in balancing the federal budget on the backs of the poor, claiming: "Our purpose in welfare reform is not to save money but to bring into the mainstream of American life those who now are on the margins of our society and our economy" (RNC 1996); echoing Murray's (1984) assertion that welfare reform would succeed not when "stingy people have won" but when "generous people have stopped kidding themselves" (236).

Conservative reform proposals situated welfare recipients at the crux of the addiction paradox—whether they were "unable" or "unwilling" to exit the program—they would have to prove their deservingness by helping themselves out of an impossible situation. This trial-by-fire approach aligned with broader conservative Christian aims to reinforce sexual prudence and heteropatriarchal family values among the poor by counteracting welfare's purported tendency to "undermine the values of work and family that form the foundation of communities" (Kolbe 1996). The solution to the "crisis" of "out-of-wedlock pregnancy and . . . out-of-wedlock birth" Congress asserted PRWORA was designed to address was a process of bootstrapping parallel to that required in addiction recovery (US Congress 1996). As Representative Zimmer (R-NJ) stated: "No more money for nothing. [This policy] tells the poor that we will help you get on your feet but we owe it to you as well as to ourselves, to require that you work for your benefits" (Zimmer 1996)—ignoring the lack of affordable childcare or living-wage work that would be necessary to make that transition possible.

While the proximate goal of strict work requirements and lifetime limits was to force welfare recipients into the job market, the primary aim was to foster changed attitudes, to restore "hope, optimism, and self-esteem," instilling in recipients the industriousness and sense of responsibility purportedly needed for them to take charge of their own lives (Zimmer 1996). Republicans sought to shore up the myth of American exceptionalism by instilling a modern Protestant work ethic

among the next generation of impoverished Americans: "Our goal is to get people to work and to self-sufficiency, to instill the values that make America great" (Santorum 1996). To that end, welfare reform promised a largely hollow hope for the American dream for former recipients in which "self-sufficiency, responsibility and pride" (Pressler 1996) would "move [them] from dependency to self-sufficiency" (McCain 1996), ignoring the limited opportunities recipients would face in an economy with a preponderance of low-wage service-sector jobs. Parallel to the "hope" offered in recovery from drug addiction (Stone 2018), recovery from welfare addiction offered a one-size-fits-all solution to the highly unequal realities of the labor market.

"Like 'economic methadone' . . . you people never let me do anything to break out"

The concept of "welfare addiction" tapped into long-standing cultural narratives about the alleged dangers of antipoverty programs, leaving recipients and their allies struggling to create compelling counternarratives in a discursive space where their credibility was undermined by the addiction frame.[7] Some Democrats deployed competing policy frameworks, describing welfare as protecting children. They argued that most people receiving AFDC were children and that placing conditions on benefits would put already vulnerable minors at further risk (Stokes 1995). But keeping the focus of the debate on children was undermined by conservatives construing the adult guardians receiving funds on children's behalf as addicts—presumed to be inherently unfit caregivers (Campbell 2000)—and, ultimately, most liberal political leaders yielded to conservatives' framing (Schram 1995).

Conceding that welfare "trapped millions in a cruel cycle of dependency and despair" (Hoyer 1995), liberal politicians and media commentators employed the welfare addiction narrative to meet two political objectives. The first objective was to replace the harmful "welfare queen" stereotype with a more sympathetic figure who needed paternalistic, white-saviorist "help"—providing Democrats political cover to claim they were not abandoning welfare recipients but offering them "opportunities" from which they would benefit. Second, the welfare addict figure aided liberal advocates' objective of resignifying the meanings of race and gender in the context of antipoverty policy, offloading an electoral liability under which the Democratic Party claimed it was languishing.

In Congressional welfare reform debates, the "welfare addict" was often drawn in implicit contrast to the "welfare queen." The "public identity" of the "welfare queen" is one of the leading pernicious stereotypes about Black women that blames them for racial inequality, marginalizes them from the political process and white-dominated middle-class culture, and contributes to undemocratic policy outcomes (Hancock 2004; Roberts 1998; Lubiano 1992). However, the "welfare queen" did not need to be invoked explicitly in the welfare reform debate because iterations of her image have been thoroughly baked into the public psyche through centuries of

repetition—most recently in media images as the inaccurately construed "typical" welfare recipient (Gilens 1999). In fact, much of the media coverage and Congressional debate about welfare reform sought to dispel this image of the typical welfare recipient and place a different figure at the center of the conversation. An analysis of the dozens of Congressional hearings on welfare reform in 1995–96 found the term "welfare queen" was used less than a dozen times, usually to suggest the speaker was not stereotyping welfare recipients (Sparks 2003: 194n11), and that the biggest villain in the welfare reform narrative was the "welfare system itself" rather than recipients (181). By the time decades-long reform efforts coalesced into law, the prevailing image of the person receiving welfare was no longer the "matriarch" of the Moynihan Report but the young Black mother caught in the "welfare trap" who was "dronelike and passive" (Fraser and Gordon 1994: 327).

The woman caught in the "welfare trap" (Harkin 1995) is the opposite of the "welfare queen." She is not taking advantage of the system; rather, the system is failing her by keeping her ensnared in it. As Senator Byron Dorgan (D-ND) asserted from the Senate floor: "This issue is not, as is often portrayed, a caricature about Cadillac welfare queens whom we have heard about over a couple of decades of debate about the welfare system." Rather, the average recipient "want[s] to go to work . . . she [does] not want more help. She [does] not want more welfare"—she "want[s] to find a way out of that trap" (Dorgan 1996).

Portraying welfare as an immiserating life sentence that needed to be ended for the recipients' own benefit, Democrats adapted the logic and language of welfare addiction to suggest that they were dismantling AFDC out of compassion for recipients, to "free" them from a self-defeating "cycle of dependency" (Exon 1996). In an effort to move past scapegoating "cultural" explanations of long-term welfare receipt, such as Daniel Patrick Moynihan's "tangle of pathology" (Cole 2007), Democrats described the welfare system as "broken," claiming it had become a "social placebo" (Traficant 1996), like "economic methadone" (Wyden 1996). To redirect blame away from recipients and toward the system itself, Democrats suggested reform would offer a "way to break out . . . of a system that doesn't work for those who are in it," with allegedly equal employment opportunities on the other side (Wyden 1996).

"Deracializing" Poverty

Democrats' redeployment of welfare addiction also served some welfare rights activists and New Democrats who sought to reframe the welfare debate. Within the National Welfare Rights Organization, the largely college-educated white male staff wanted to shift the organization's messaging to characterize women on welfare as potential workers (Nadasen 2005). At the same time, Democratic operatives were seeking to rout Republicans' electoral strategy of laying blame for "wasteful entitlement" programs on the Democratic Party and to "deracialize" poverty by portraying impoverished Black Americans as workers rather than "welfare cheats" (Soss and Schram 2007: 112–13).

However, Democrats' use of the welfare addict figure was not a "deracialization" of poverty but rather an attempt to resignify the meaning of race in the context of gendered poverty. The term allowed Democrats to reconstruct the typical welfare recipient as a—still inaccurately construed—impoverished Black mother allegedly alienated from the mainstream economy and white middle-class social norms, but who had the potential to integrate herself into the mainstream, who wanted a "hand-up" rather than a "handout" (Traficant 1996). Welfare recipients were not social pariahs but women in difficult situations who had been "condemned . . . to a lifetime at the margins of our society" and now needed help in the "transition from dependence to dignity. From welfare to work" (Al Gore, in C-SPAN 1996). That is, the still "undeserving"—but potentially economically assimilable—poor, akin to an addict capable of recovery.

Even Democrats who opposed the legislation characterized the policy changes needed in terms consistent with the logic of eradicating an addiction via psychological and behavioral interventions. Some argued that greater investment in social services were needed to make the transition from "dependency" to "self-sufficiency" (Jackson-Lee 1996; Collins 1996) possible, but they too described the goal of effective policy as restoring "hope" and "self-esteem" (Harkin 1995) with welfare recipients "gain[ing] independence" as a result (Pelosi 1996). Senator Carol Moseley Braun (D-IL; 1995) spoke forcefully against the "false analogy" that recipients were "addicted to welfare" as she argued for expanding childcare and job training available through AFDC, rather than dismantling the program. But even her language echoed the logic of addiction, suggesting that the proper goal of any changes to welfare policy was to enable recipients to "do for themselves, to pull themselves up by their bootstraps and to provide for their children" and to "encourage personal responsibility."

In Democrats' redeployment of the welfare addict narrative, the former welfare recipient would become the protagonist in a modern-day Horatio Alger story—the main character now coded poor, Black, and female—who would bootstrap herself into the working class as the "recovering welfare addict," a self-made woman. Immediately after President Clinton (1992) infamously vowed to "end welfare as we know it," he claimed that end would include what welfare recipients "deserve": "the opportunity . . . to liberate yourself." Democrats offered welfare recipients, charged with liberating themselves, the chance to be "truly accountable for their choices" (Grassley 1996) ceding the last vestiges of collective responsibility for alleviating poverty and obfuscating the role of government programs in generating much of the class mobility of the twentieth century—as well as how those programs were designed to benefit white Americans (Katznelson 2005).

This modern-day shero was personified in Lillie Harden, who introduced Clinton at the PRWORA signing ceremony. Harden, a Black mother of two, had completed a welfare-to-work program during Clinton's tenure as governor of Arkansas, and she and two other former welfare recipients—one Black, one

white—flanked him as he signed the legislation into law. Harden described the sense of "independence" she enjoyed as a working parent, affirming that she now took her work "seriously" and demanded the same from her children, and credited Clinton with "start[ing] my success, and the beginning of my children's future" (C-SPAN 1996). Clinton then thanked Harden for her "power of example" to other families on welfare and "for all of America" to see (C-SPAN 1996)—parallel language to how people in addiction recovery are frequently held up as examples that "recovery is possible" (G. W. Bush 2003).

The optics the Clinton administration chose to accompany the PRWORA signing ceremony are suggestive of their attempts at racial resignification. By centering Black women, Clinton reaffirmed the racial and gender politics of welfare—conflating welfare recipients with Black women—but sought to reframe who the typical welfare recipient was and what she was capable of doing: uplifting herself from purported state dependence to self-sufficiency. In this framing, the object of welfare reform was to strike the right combination of minimal incentives and stringent requirements to convert welfare recipients into the supposedly race-neutral idealized hard-working American. Poor Black women remained at the crux of the so-called cycle of poverty, but rather than being construed as the drone-like agents perpetuating it, Democrats recast them as active, responsibilized individuals who wanted to be empowered to interrupt the cycle and who could assert their credibility as equal citizens by doing so.

Democrats used the welfare addict figure to create discursive distance between AFDC recipients who deserved an opportunity to succeed on their own and the cultural bogeyman of the "urban underclass" and its most maligned figure of the "welfare queen." However, this discursive distinction did nothing to change the structural conditions that created concentrated poverty in the first place—including the intertwined effects of political disenfranchisement (Pinderhughes 1987), deindustrialization, white flight, and urban wealth extraction (Taylor 2019), mass incarceration (M. Alexander 2010), and educational and job opportunities segmented by race and gender (Crenshaw 1991)—all of which, of course, persisted after the enactment of PRWORA.

In effect, "welfare addiction" set up impoverished Black women to yet again be blamed for their political, economic, and social marginalization (Roberts 1998). The welfare addict narrative obfuscated the larger political-economic context and its racial and gender dynamics by blaming poverty on a poorly structured government system that generated unhealthy reliance that could be changed through radical policy reform and internalized self-discipline among its soon-to-be-previous recipients. By "recreat[ing] the nation's social bargain with the poor" (Clinton, in C-SPAN 1996)—offering the opportunity to work, or else—Democrats billed PRWORA as offering poor Americans an equal chance to succeed. Their success or failure would then be a personal problem for which they would solely be responsible, rather than a policy failure to which state or federal governments had a responsibility to respond.

"It's an addiction . . . just like taking someone off of drugs cold turkey"

Part of the experiential epistemology of addiction is that only the addict can confirm, by their own admission, that they are, in fact, addicted. In claiming the addict identity they signal that their denial is shattered and has been replaced with a sincere attempt to recover (Stone 2018).[8] In the case of welfare, politicians and pundits accused welfare recipients of being addicted to the program for decades and used that framing to push reform through Congress over their objections. But only "welfare addicts" themselves could validate the logic of reform in hindsight.

Former recipients describing welfare as being like an addiction was a remarkable element in the postreform discourse of the late 1990s through the early 2000s. Importantly, media depictions of the race and gender of former recipients remained largely consistent with previous studies (Gilens 1999). Among the articles I analyzed that included visual or narrative descriptions of former "welfare addicts," all but one article depicted Black women, instead depicting Black and Latino men. But these were decidedly not former "welfare queens"; rather, they were much more sympathetically construed individuals who were striving to meet the challenges and opportunities before them—that is, recovering "welfare addicts."

In asserting their recovery from welfare addiction, former recipients were reincorporated into the postreform debate as credible public voices, their stories held up in media outlets and elected officials' statements as vindication of both parties' respective deployments of the welfare addiction narrative. When President Clinton claimed that "the debate is over" and that "we know now that welfare reform works" a year after he signed PRWORA into law, his assertion was buttressed in an Associated Press article, printed in more than 80 local and national news outlets around the country, by the experience of Pamelia Ferguson. Ferguson, a former welfare recipient who had secured a "good job" making six dollars an hour, identified herself as a "former cocaine addict" and described welfare as being "as addictive as drugs." Though she "misse[d]" her previous welfare payments, she reported "feel[ing] better . . . paying cash instead of food stamps" (Meckler 1997). Not only was Ferguson a former welfare recipient giving credence to the idea that she experienced welfare as addicting, but as a former drug addict she could *truly* know what an addiction was like and speak with authority about what other experiences could reasonably be called addictions. As someone formerly "addicted" to welfare who now "felt better" without it, voices like hers were powerful, persuasive tools media outlets used to shore up politicians' assertions about the law's effects—such as Clinton's grandiose claim that one year later welfare reform was an unmitigated success.

Another common theme in postreform media coverage was former recipients and their advocates recanting their previous objections to Congress' intervention. In a feature-length *Newsweek* piece, a welfare caseworker admitted that, while initially skeptical, after seeing the results of reform, "he began to regard welfare as an addiction and himself as 'an enabler'" (McCormick and Thomas 1997). He and

his clients had been like the "walking dead" before PRWORA, but after, he felt attached to the "lives and hopes" of his clients (31). The piece closed: "It will be years before welfare reform can be judged a success or failure. But the experiences of Shari Pharr [former recipient] and Preston White [case worker] show that welfare reform can be made to work—despite considerable suspicion and resistance" —vindicating Republicans' heavy-handed approach (32).

Welfare recipients who were critical of reform were also included in some media accounts, including LaTanya Boler, who remarked: "On talk shows I hear about how lazy we are and how they have to stop welfare, but I haven't heard a word on how they are going to find me a $10-an-hour job." Yet the rest of the article characterized the primary difficulty of implementing reform as breaking recipients' "psychological dependence on the aid," in which "some spoke of welfare like an addictive drug" (Shepard 1996)—rather than the formidable barriers single mothers faced in securing family-sustaining work, including lack of affordable childcare, housing, and transportation.

In 2001, as TANF's new five-year lifetime limit arrived, the consensus among national media was that the impacts of reform were muddled—welfare caseloads had fallen, but causes for the drop were uncertain, whether it was PRWORA, the late-1990s booming economy, or other policy changes—but, unequivocally, "attitudes" had changed among former recipients (Rivera 2001). Elizabeth Jones was one example, a mother of three who worked two jobs. When asked to imagine what her life might have been like if she had stayed on welfare, Jones stated she "would have been a better day-to-day mom but a lousier role model" (Boo 2001). What she wanted most for her kids now was to stay in school—lending credence to the reverse-cycle-of-poverty approach—instilling the values of education and hard work in the next generation via "tough love" on their parents.

With the results of welfare reform ambiguous, both conservatives and liberals pointed to measures implied by the welfare addiction and recovery framework to claim their predictions had come to fruition: changed attitudes and behaviors among Black working-poor mothers, and the absence of the prophesied "coming white underclass." The fact that reform was hailed as a success while poverty indicators remained steady, continuing to fluctuate with the economy, and federal expenditures to combat poverty—largely in the form of tax subsidies—increased (Golden 2005), suggests that the true aim of reform was not saving state or federal governments money, or even pushing former welfare recipients into stable work so they could support themselves. Rather, the goal was to engender attitudinal and behavioral changes among the poor, especially impoverished Black single mothers, so they would identify with and, most importantly for Democrats' political purposes, be perceived as active workers rather than passive recipients.

Less remarked upon in postreform media coverage was how welfare for low-income families was converted into corporate welfare. As Clinton signed PRWORA, he claimed that "welfare will no longer be a political issue," imploring "every employer in this country that ever made a disparaging remark about the welfare

system" to consider "hir[ing] somebody from welfare" (C-SPAN 1996). What Clinton omitted from his remarks was the 50 percent wage subsidies and tax breaks employers could expect to receive by hiring former welfare recipients (Yant 1998). "Without welfare-to-work, I would not be able to meet my staffing needs," stated a hiring manager interviewed at a conference encouraging companies to take advantage of this government-subsidized source of low-wage labor (Yant 1998). The conversion narrative of welfare addiction reframed reform from a government-funded corporate giveaway to an opportunity for former recipients to play the protagonist in a classic American cultural drama through which they would be given the chance to "prove" their civic worthiness, despite the odds stacked against them.

"They seem to be addicted to welfare"

In the case of welfare reform, both liberals and conservatives used the concept of welfare addiction to develop complementary political narratives to justify dismantling a key US antipoverty policy.[9] Under the sign of "color-blind" hegemonic American principles, welfare recipients were cast as whitewashed entrepreneurs-in-training, setting up the next generation of working-poor Black women to be blamed for their own marginalization from white-male-dominated US political economy and culture. Since 1996, lifetime limits on TANF have dampened arguments that individuals can become addicted to welfare.[10] However, the logic and language of welfare addiction remains a key pillar of the ideological blockade that precludes restoring or expanding antipoverty programs in the United States, including arguments against even temporary aid, such as that issued during the COVID-19 pandemic (DeParle 2021; Filipovic 2021; Marshall 2021; Solender 2021).

But why did the welfare addict narrative resonate across ideological lines in the public discourse of the 1990s reform period? I suggest that entrepreneurs across the partisan spectrum employed the welfare addict figure at this critical moment in political time to displace two core anxieties percolating among the public and economic elites. First, blaming entrenched poverty on poorly designed welfare policy displaced growing public concern regarding the domestic effects of a globalized, interdependent economy. In 1994, the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) accelerated a half century of offshoring working-class jobs and a broader shift from a manufacturing-based to a service-based economy (Fernández-Kelly and Massey 2007). Welfare addiction displaced the possibility of contextualizing increasing rates of poverty, declining numbers of living-wage blue-collar jobs, and thus increasing numbers of people turning to welfare as the cumulative result of decades of economic and political elites' narrowly self-interested decisions. The welfare addict figure drew upon centuries-old narratives conflating marginalized women and racialized minorities with addicts, providing a tidy (though inaccurate) explanation for why a growing portion of the population was struggling to survive and why wealth in the country was increasingly being hoarded by a smaller and more removed elite—naturalizing modern formations of ascriptive American hierarchies (Smith 1993) in a mode that aligned with American hyperindividualism.

FIGURE 1 Tom Engelhardt, "They Seem to Be Addicted to Welfare." *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, February 4, 1992. Courtesy of the State Historical Society of Missouri Art Collection.

Second, welfare reform redirected public attention when the windfalls of a decade of tax cuts for corporations and the wealthy could have been interrogated as a source of government budget strain (Balz and Yang 1990). Elite fears of potentially having to reckon with their own dependence on government subsidies—in the form of regressive tax breaks—were displaced onto the poor, despite the relatively small portion of the federal budget dedicated to antipoverty programs even before reform (Steuerle and Mermin 1997). Indeed, economic elites were perhaps legitimately concerned about such a reckoning after President George H. W. Bush signed a nominal tax increase in 1990, though he paid dearly for it at the polls (Lane 2018). To preempt this possibility, wealthy interests, including those in Congress, media organizations, and think tanks around the country, coalesced around the welfare addict narrative, projecting their fears of being forced to confront their own reliance on government subsidies onto a maligned target population. As figure 1 illustrates, some skeptical commentators redeployed the welfare addiction framework to criticize corporate welfare policies, but it remained a fringe counternarrative that most Democrats failed to take up.

Public focus on eradicating the purported addictiveness of welfare directed collective action toward eliminating a key antipoverty policy rather than addressing the lack of living-wage employment, affordable childcare, health care, housing, and quality education for low-wage workers and their families. The public's use of the term during this period enabled a majority of the population both to support social welfare programs in the abstract (Gilens 1999) and to support—or fail to prevent—Congress from dismantling the primary program that served that purpose. It allowed pundits to discount the experiences of welfare recipients and their advocates by construing them as unreliable narrators—as addicts who would say and do anything to maintain their, or their charges', addictions. Writing off the issues facing the impoverished and marginalized on welfare addiction allowed the American public to avoid grappling with the structural conditions that caused

welfare to become a necessity for a small subset of the population, clearing the collective hegemonic American conscience by displacing reality with fantasy.

The case of "welfare addiction" suggests that colloquial terms in our political lexicon deserve our academic scrutiny (Schaffer 2016). Limiting discourse analyses to formal terms risks missing key heuristics that entrepreneurs are using to influence the public's perceptions of political issues. This article explores several meanings of addiction as deployed in the context of welfare reform in the 1990s, but it is far from an exhaustive examination of all the term's possible meanings. Addiction's use in this and other modes deserves further study, as well as how political actors are using other nonspecialist terms to shape public perceptions in past and present policy debates.

Be Stone is assistant professor of politics and law at Rhodes College, where they teach courses in American politics, public policy, and qualitative-interpretive methods. Stone's book manuscript, "American Addictions: What Addiction Really Means and How We're Using It to Undermine Democracy," is forthcoming.

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Notes

1 For the quotation that serves as this section's heading, see Roosevelt 1935.
2 For the quotation that serves as this section's heading, see Wittgenstein (1953) 1958: 212, quoted in Pitkin (1972) 1993: 84.
3 *Oxford English Dictionary*, "addiction," https://www.oed.com/dictionary/addiction_n?tab=meaning_and_use#16361332 (accessed July 10, 2024).
4 For the quotation that serves as this section's heading, see Cohen 1994a.
5 For the quotation that serves as this section's heading, see Murray 1993.
6 For the quotation that serves as this section's heading, see Pressler 1996.
7 For the quotation that serves as this section's heading, see Wyden 1996.
8 For the quotation that serves as this section's heading, see Rosemary Turner, interviewed in Chung 1992.
9 For the quotation that serves as this section's heading, see fig. 1.
10 However, conservative commentators continue to use the term regularly; see Tobin 2017.

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