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There is probably no aspect of the work versus welfare debate that is more contested than the effects of welfare use on child development outcomes. Liberals tend to emphasize the detrimental effects of poverty and welfare stigma on children, while conservatives cite the negative socialization that occurs regarding the value of work within welfare dependent families. However, large scale longitudinal studies that have been used to address this question only indirectly measure critical influences on child development such as maternal mental health and do not consider the effect that a range of economic strategies that low-income mothers might undertake may have on their children. In this analysis, we employ data from a longitudinal study of 173 teen-mothers to assess the relative effects of maternal characteristics and economic strategies on the developmental outcomes of their children at time of school entry. Two principal findings emerge. First, over the period from their first teen birth to the reference child's entry into school, the sample subjects used a variety of household economic strategies aside from the simple welfare versus work dichotomy that is commonly used to depict the choices of teen-mothers. Second, while maternal depression appears linked to the prevalence of problem behaviors in early childhood, the particular economic strategies used by the mothers in the sample do not explain any variation in either the prevalence of problem behaviors or in children's learning preparation for school entry. These findings support the

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perspective that the influence of teen mothers' parenting qualities on child development cannot be assessed through an analysis of their labor force participation, use of welfare, or other strategies of household subsistence.

In *Making Ends Meet* (1996), Edin and Lein's widely read ethnography of low income single mothers, a very different and compelling portrait emerges of poor women and their families from those imageries commonly employed by proponents of both sides in the national debate on welfare policy. The women described in the book are neither "welfare queens" nor the perpetual victims of an indifferent society, but rather pragmatic actors living in difficult circumstances who engage in a variety of material strategies to minimize economic risks and maximize the survival and well-being of their children.

Although a rich and refreshing departure from the often murky quantitative studies of work and welfare among poor families that dominate the welfare policy literature, the conclusions derived from Edin and Lein's study may be unconvincing to many because they are not based on the positivist conventions of probability sampling and multivariate analysis. Additionally, Edin and Lein focus on the motivations and intentions of low-income mothers, rather than the impact of household-level decisions on specific child development outcomes. In this paper, we seek to test the conceptions that emerged in *Making Ends Meet* by examining the economic activities and choices of a cohort of teenage mothers followed since 1988 by researchers at the School of Social Work at the University of Washington. We also examine whether particular income maintenance strategies appear to influence key developmental outcomes in the first-born children of teen mothers, independently of other maternal characteristics. Before describing the details of our analysis and our findings, we provide a brief review of the welfare versus work literature that frames the context for our study.

Work, Welfare, and the Economic Bases of Low Income Single Parent Families

We chose a cohort of teen-mothers to examine the economic strategies of the working poor because as a group teen-mothers are at highest risk for long term welfare dependence. In perhaps

the most precise categorization of individual household heads at risk of long-term welfare receipt, Duncan et. al. (1996) find that young mothers under the age of 22 at first welfare receipt, single mothers having children under the age of three, mothers who are unwed at the point of initial welfare receipt, and those lacking a high school diploma or prior work experience are at greatest risk of long term welfare use (a period of five years or longer, a figure that coincides with federal time limits established in the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996). Moreover, although teen mothers represent a very small cross-sectional fraction of AFDC/TANF caseloads at a given point in time, research indicates that a large number of long-term users were teenaged, unwed, or both at time of first welfare receipt (Wertheimer & Moore, 1997).

The literature on characteristics, motivations, economic opportunities and economic behavior of women who comprise the ranks of the working poor is large, complex, and generally in service of different ideological camps. Three dominant explanatory perspectives are represented in this literature: conservative, human capital, and structuralist. We will briefly review each, beginning with the conservative perspective, since the assumptions of conservative doctrine have shaped contemporary welfare reform efforts.

The conservative perspectives articulated in the works of Charles Murray, Lawrence Mead and Robert Rector are perhaps the most cogent and persuasive within the conservative genre, and their impact on welfare policy cannot be underestimated. Each emphasizes the preeminent role of individual values and attitudes in shaping subsequent welfare entry, use, and duration. According to Mead (1986, 1992), poverty and long-term welfare use among the able-bodied are the result of a breakdown of public authority to enforce appropriate attitudes and behaviors towards work, education, and human capital investments necessary for an individual to succeed in the labor market. From this perspective, the poor are viewed as being responsible for their own condition in that they lack orthodox, middle-class values towards work and a willingness to make use of labor market opportunities available to them.

According to Murray (1984, 1994) and Rector (1993, 1995,

1996), federal social policies aimed at improving the lives of the poor were not just ineffective but actually harmful. In fact, Murray and Rector view welfare receipt as a kind of social toxin. In their view, AFDC contributed to the deterioration of the condition of those on welfare by subsidizing destructive and short-sighted behavior such as school failure, voluntary unemployment, and unwed childbearing. In effect, generous government benefits led to changes in traditional family values and increases in illegitimacy, divorce, and non-work—the very factors that underlie poverty. Although conservative theories of poverty and welfare use have been heavily criticized on both ideological (Jencks, 1992; Lafer, 1994; Fischer, et al 1996) and methodological grounds (Greenstein, 1985; Katz, 1986; 1989; Kuttner, 1984; Aizawa, 1996), there is no question they have dominated the assumptions of the welfare reform agenda.

In contrast, the human capital approaches of Harris (1991, 1993), O'Neill, Bassi, & Wolf (1987), Gueron & Pauly (1991), and Bane & Ellwood (1994) view long-term welfare receipt primarily as the result of a lack of education, job skills and work experience which limits the wages and occupational opportunities low-income women can successfully pursue to achieve economic self-sufficiency. Human capital theorists thus advocate education and training, welfare-to-work, and workfare programs as a means to enhance self-efficacy and augment the job related skills that can contribute to long-term employability (Wiseman, 1986).

The structuralist perspective on welfare use points to labor market variables as being prominent in determining use, duration and exit patterns. For example, research conducted by Bassi (1990) and Blank & Ruggles (1996) suggests that increases in welfare use are primarily determined by increases in involuntary unemployment in the local area labor market. In a study measuring both entry and exit rates, Plotnick (1983) found that higher wages inhibit entry to and increase exits from welfare. In an empirical analysis of welfare dependence using SIME-DIME data, Plant (1984) found that persistent low earnings were a more robust predictor of welfare dependence than work disincentives associated with the guaranteed income program. In sum, the structuralist perspective is bolstered by research that suggests that welfare entry and subsequent welfare exits are associated

with low prevailing wages and high unemployment rather than individual behavioral or psychological factors. Consistent with the structuralist perspective, Edin & Lein (1996), Dodson (1998), and Seccombe (1999) all emphasize that welfare mothers are not different from other mothers attempting to maximize family well-being in the face of less than ideal economic circumstances.

The literature on the role of work versus welfare on child outcomes, while fairly extensive, is far from conclusive. One part of this literature tests conservative theories by examining whether welfare use by parents contributes to teen pregnancy, school failure, unemployment and future welfare dependence (Mclanahan, 1985; Duncan, Hill et al. 1988; Duncan and Hoffman, 1990; Haveman, Wolfe et al., 1991; An, Haveman et al, 1993; Clarke and Strauss, 1998; Baker, 1999; Moffitt, 2000). Another part of this literature considers the role of work versus welfare on early childhood development outcomes .

Although both these literatures contribute much to the understanding of the complex relationships between parent work, welfare use, and child outcomes; neither directly considers the other kinds of economic strategies aside from welfare and work that low income single mothers may rely upon. In particular, there is little consideration of latent strategies that combine welfare, work, deviant economic activities, and reliance on informal exchange networks. We address this omission by examining a variety of economic activities undertaken by a cohort of teen-mothers that might be suggestive of distinct economic strategies, and how these different strategies might influence early childhood development outcomes.

Data and Methods

Our data are based on a sample of teen-age mothers (N=173) and their first born children. The teen-age mothers were recruited from the Seattle metropolitan area during 1987–1988 by a team of researchers affiliated with the University of Washington School of Social Work. Because the subjects were recruited heavily from agencies and clinics serving low-income populations, the sample selected has a high representation of minority subjects (52%), and is generally considered representative of births to teenaged

females. The sample is also unique in its low rate of attrition (3%). Respondents were recruited to study the role of drug and alcohol use in relation to young adult behavior and patterns of parenting, and to gauge early development outcomes of the respondents' children. Data was collected through face-to-face interviews conducted at six month intervals.

The average age of respondents at the beginning of the study was 16 (range 13–18) and at the point the sample had been followed for 72 months 67% had completed high school or had obtained a G.E.D, with 19% of the sample obtaining at least some college. Consistent with other research on teen-mothers, welfare use among the sample was high—with 89% using public assistance as a primary means of support at least once over the first 72 months following their first birth. However, a relatively small proportion of the sample (6%) were completely reliant on welfare use as their primary means of support during the 72 month period of our analysis. As we show in the analysis that follows, the teen-mothers in the sample relied to varying degrees on a complex mix of strategies for support during their first birth child's pre-school entry years—including work, cohabitation with an income producing partner, participation in illegal activities, and support from friends and relatives.

To analyze information associated with maternal characteristics, alternative economic strategies, and early childhood outcomes, the paper focuses on variables including labor force participation, welfare use, cohabitation, sources of informal economic support, mental health, illicit drug use, exposure to interpersonal violence, child-bearing, and standard measures of child development. Because the interviewing staff of this study has had relatively low turnover and a high level of training, it is our belief that the subjects have been more forthcoming in their responses concerning illegal economic activities and other stigmatized behaviors than might be typical in most survey research.

The analysis involves three steps. First, we employ exploratory principal components factor analysis to identify the prevalent economic strategies the sample subjects have engaged in over the six-year period that transpired following the birth of their first child. In a departure from other research on work and welfare use among teen-mothers, we base our measures of economic strategies on the latent correlation structure of economically relevant

variables rather than our own a priori assumptions about how best to construct measures of specific income maintenance variables (e.g. "occasional, frequent, or continuous welfare use"). We do this to avoid imposing our own assumptions about what may constitute viable, rational, or distinct economic strategies. In the second step, we use OLS regression in order to identify individual characteristics that are associated with particular economic strategies. In the final step, we regress early childhood outcome measures on both the maternal characteristic variables and the economic strategy measures to assess whether economic strategies have independent effects (either positive or detrimental) on early childhood outcomes. We discuss alternative theoretical expectations and interpretations as the findings for each analytic step are presented.

Analysis of Economic Strategies

From the time of their first child's birth until the reference child was approximately 72 months old, each subject was interviewed on 11 occasions and asked a variety of questions related to their means of economic subsistence. Each of the 11 interviews occurred in intervals approximating six months, with the exception of the second interview, which occurred at 18months. At each time point, respondents were asked whether they were cohabitating with a husband or boyfriend, whether they had received welfare during the previous six months, whether their current primary source of support was employment or financial support from others (such as a boyfriend, husband, or parent), whether or not they had lived in a temporary shelter, and whether they had engaged in prostitution, stealing, and selling drugs for money. From these questions we constructed eleven individual economic variables using a 0,1 coding scheme for the occurrence of any one of these distinct means of economic subsistence at the time of each subject interview. This resulted in eleven variables, each having a range from 0 to 11. These variables are then analyzed with exploratory factor analysis (PCA with varimax rotation) with the results shown in Table 1.

The factor analysis of the economic subsistence variables converged on five distinct subsistence strategies, each represented by the factor loadings that exceed an absolute value of .40. The first factor shows positive loadings on three variables: a cohabiting

Table 1

Principle Components Analysis of Latent Income Maintenance Strategies

	Latent Income Maintenance Strategy Factor Loadings					
Income Maintenance Source	*Mixed Welfare and Other Support*	*Profitable Deviance*	*Support Support Boyfriends and Husbands*	*Cohabitation and Labor Labor Force Participation*	*Shelter Assistance and Cohabitation*	
Secondary Support from Cohabiting Boyfriend/Husband	.433	.138	−.092	.557	.361	
Primary Support from Cohabiting Boyfriend/Husband	−.027	−.007	.872	−.052	.194	
Primary Support from NonCohabiting Boyfriend/Husband	.069	.006	.609	−.021	−.351	
Selling Sex	.077	.733	.191	.044	−.115	
Stealing Money and Merchandise	.049	.746	−.158	−.022	−.083	
Selling Drugs	−.025	.709	−.060	−.119	.158	
Primary Support from Parents/Relatives	−.844	−.009	−.163	.051	−.006	
Primary Support from Others	.746	.045	−.148	−.028	−.197	
Primary Support from Shelter Services	−.008	−.032	−.032	−.084	.796	
Primary Support from Welfare	.449	.127	−.584	−.542	−.004	
Primary Support from Work	−.139	−.131	−.027	.854	−.203	
Eigen Value	1.75	1.66	1.59	1.36	1.05	**Total Variance**
% of Variance	15.87%	15.11%	14.49%	12.40%	9.58%	67.45%

boyfriend/husband that is not the source of primary income support, welfare use, and informal economic support of others, as well as a negative loading on primary support from parents and relatives. This depicts a pattern we have chosen to name "mixed welfare and other support" and reflects a subsistence pattern that is consistent with the narratives of women in the Edin and Lein study—women who could neither completely depend on employment or rely on help from relatives to get by economically. A second economic strategy identified, which we named "profitable deviance", is reflected in the strong positive loadings on selling sex for money, stealing money and merchandise, and selling drugs. It should be noted that the sample subjects that engaged in these activities were not consistently the same group of subjects over time, but rather reflected a tendency of some women to move in and out of these activities as their life circumstances changed.

A third distinct economic strategy is reflected in the positive loadings for receiving primary support from either a cohabiting or non-cohabiting boyfriend/husband and a negative loading for primary support from welfare. We term this strategy "support from boyfriends and husbands." A fourth economic strategy, "cohabitation and labor force participation", reflects what might be considered the normative ideal for young mothers—having a job and a cohabitating male partner who also provides economic support. The fifth and final economic strategy that emerged from the factor analysis, "shelter assistance and cohabitation," shows a marginal positive loading on secondary support from a cohabiting boyfriend and a strong positive loading for dependence on primary support from shelter services. This appears to reflect a two-partner family surviving under conditions of severe poverty and deprivation.

It should be noted that the proportion of the variance explained by each of these latent economic strategies are fairly comparable, with the exception of "shelter assistance and cohabitation," which is a somewhat less distinct strategy than the others. Collectively, the latent economic strategies explain approximately 67% of the variance in correlation matrix of specific economic subsistence activities. Overall, the results from this first part of the analysis are consistent with the argument that single mothers engage in a variety of strategies for economic subsistence, not

exclusively either work or welfare. We next turn to the issue of whether there are socioeconomic and behavioral characteristics of single mothers that are associated with the prevalence of particular economic strategies, or whether the economic strategies of single mothers may be more a matter of circumstance.

Analysis of Individual Characteristics Associated with Economic Strategies

As discussed previously, the structuralist perspective views entry and exits from both the labor force and welfare to be a function of factors that are external to individual agency, while both the human capital and conservative perspectives place more emphasis on individual characteristics. In this step of the analysis, we regress each of the five economic strategies that emerged in the first step of the analysis on individual characteristics that from either a conservative point of view or a human capital perspective should be predictive of welfare use. The dependent variables are the factor scores for each of the five principal economic strategies that were derived from the factor regression method.

As shown on Table 2, the individual variables employed in this part of the analysis include variables that are associated with both the human capital and conservative perspectives on welfare use. From the human capital perspective, we included educational attainment of the mother, her score on a verbal intelligence test (the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test, Vance and Stone 1990), and the subject's average level of depression according to the SCL-90-R, a standard self-report depression symptom scale that was administered at each interview (Derogitis 1994). The conservative perspective also places emphasis on the role of low educational attainment of teen-mothers; and to address related arguments of this perspective we also include variables measuring intergenerational patterns of low educational attainment and welfare use, and rates of drug use and subsequent childbirth.

Consistent with the findings of some studies that exposure to domestic violence is related to welfare use and difficulty in retaining employment, we also included exposure to violence either in the form of physical abuse from parents during childhood or from boyfriends and husbands (Lloyd, 1996; Allard, Colton,

Table 2

Descriptives of Regression Variables and Dependent Variables

	N					
	Valid	*Missing*	*Mean*	*Std. Deviation*	*Minimum*	*Maximum*
Maternal Background						
Mother's Schooling	165	8	4.05	1.16	1	7
Father's schooling	132	41	4.24	1.35	1	7
Parent on welfare	169	4	36.0%	—	—	—
Education level	173	0	2.18	1.25	1	6
Verbal Intelligence	173	0	85.81	13.69	60	131
Racial Minority/ Hispanic	173	0	52.0%	—	—	—
Fertility						
Number of Births	173	0	1.93	.79	1	4
Mental Health						
Depression	173	0	.92	.49	.09	2.60
Drug Use	172	1	2.28	2.96	0	11
Exposure to Violence						
Parent Violence	173	0	8.31	1.51	7	12
Boyfriend Violence	172	1	7.86	1.95	6	12
Income Maintenance Strategies						
Mixed Welfare	173	0	0.00	1.00	–2.41	4.08
Profitable Deviance	173	0	0.00	1.00	–0.69	7.80
Boyfriend/ husband primary support	173	0	0.00	1.00	–1.17	3.99
Primary work	173	0	0.00	1.00	–1.39	3.74
Shelter/ cohabitation	173	0	0.00	1.00	–2.74	6.47
Child Outcomes						
CBCL total problem score	172	1	34.28	20.82	2.00	111.00
Bracken raw score	162	23.00	191.06	33.60	65.00	249.00

Albelda and Cosenza, 1997; Shook and Guthrie, 1998; Jones, 1998; Tolman and Raphael, 2000). Exposure to domestic violence is argued to influence welfare use in a variety of ways: marital and cohabitative disruption, post-traumatic stress, low-self esteem, restricted access to both education and employment experience critical to economic independence. Whatever the mechanisms, studies of domestic violence prevalence among women on welfare have consistently shown higher prevalence than the general population of women (Tolman and Raphael, 2000).

Finally, we include race as a variable, less theoretically than as a control variable for unobserved aspects of disadvantage that multiple studies associate with minority race status.

Table 3 shows the results from the series of OLS regression models that assess the relative influence of the individual characteristics of the teen age mothers on the prevalence of the economic strategies they employed over the six year period following the birth of their first child. From the perspective of conservative theories of welfare use, we should expect to see the "mixed welfare and other support" strategy to be positively associated with having had a parent on welfare, higher rates of drug use and subsequent childbirth, and negatively associated with the educational attainment of the mother and the educational attainment of her parents. For the "cohabitation and labor force participation strategy," we would expect to see the opposite correlation pattern; that is, lower rates of drug use, subsequent childbirths, and parental welfare use, and higher rates of educational attainment on the part of respondents and their parents/guardians.

These theoretical expectations are not supported by the regression model estimates. In general, individual characteristics are at best weakly predictive of either economic strategy and the coefficients are for the most part either non-significant or in a direction that is contraindicative of theoretical expectations. Consistent with the predictions of conservative theory, having had a parent on welfare during the year preceding teenaged childbearing and subsequent childbirth are both statistically significant and in the expected direction. However, the educational level of the teenaged mother is opposite the expected direction and the coefficients for drug use and parent educational background are non-significant. Human capital theory doesn't fare

Table 3

Regression of Income Maintenance Strategies on Individual Characteristics (Standard Errors in Parentheses)

Independent Variables	*Mixed Welfare and Other Support*	*Profitable Deviance*	*Support from BF/ Husband*	*Cohabit. & Labor Force*	*Shelter Assistance and Cohabitation*
Maternal Background					
Mother's schooling	–.049 (.086)	.045 (.088)	–.091 (.095)	.024 (.092)	–.025 (.090)
Father's schooling	.049 (.072)	–.073 (.074)	.043 (.075)	–.004 (.077)	–.010 (.075)
Parent on welfare	.378 (.205)*	– .055 (.209)	–.125 (.212)	–.111 (.219)	–.002 (.213)
Education level	.201 (.076)***	.039 (.078)	–.059 (.079)	.070 (.081)	–.097 (.079)
Verbal Intelligence	–.011 (.007)	–.011 (.007)	.018 (.007)**	.006 (.008)	.000 (.007)
Racial Minority	–.148 (.180)	–.128 (.184)	–.351 (.187)*	–.119 (.193)	–.197 (.187)
Fertility					
Number of Births	.224 (.112)**	–.074 (.114)	.197(.116)*	–.061 (.119)	.263 (.116)**
Mental Health					
Depression	.049 (.194)	.098 (.198)	–.105 (.201)	.023 (.207)	.051(.202)
Drug Use	.018 (.031)	.114 (.032)***	.026 (.032)	–.026 (.033)	.002 (.032)
Exposure to Violence					
Parent Violence	.117 (.060)*	.025 (.061)	.064 (.062)	–.070 (.064)	.076 (.059)
BF Violence	.008 (.051)	.068 (.052)	.085 (.053)	.062 (.054)	–.011 (.053)
Model Constant	–1.092 (.916)	–.527 (937)	–1.246 (.951)	–.362 (.980)	–.180 (.952)
R^2	.177	.173	.145	. 073	.125
F-test of Model Significance	$p<.01$	$p<.05$	$p<.10$	*n.s.*	*n.s.*

* $p<.10$ ** $p<.05$ *** $p<.01$

much better in these findings. Education is positively associated with the "mixed welfare and other support" economic strategy and is not associated with the economic strategy that emphasizes labor force participation. However, consistent with the findings of multiple studies finding that exposure to violence is associated with welfare use (see Tolman and Raphael, 2000) the coefficient for violence from parents is positively associated with the mixed welfare and other support economic strategy.

Other statistically significant correlations merit discussion. The positive association between drug usage and the economic strategy we have termed "profitable deviance" suggests that illicit drugs may lead to a variety of underground economic activities but not necessarily welfare use (or conversely, welfare dependence does not lead to drug usage). The positive association between verbal intelligence and the economic strategy that places emphasis on gaining primary support from boyfriends or husbands is an interesting finding. Verbal intelligence (or its unmeasured correlates), appears to benefit the teenage mother's capacity to seek and sustain relationships with male wage earners who are willing or able to contribute financially to the household.

Although these are interesting speculations, the most important finding apparent from Table 3 is that the individual characteristics of the teenage mothers in general are weakly and ambiguously predictive of the economic strategies they employ. Although we included most of the major individual characteristics that are theoretically predictive of both welfare use and labor force participation, the actual explained variance in any of the economic strategies employed by the sample of teenage mothers fails to exceed 18%. We believe these findings are far more consistent with structuralist theories of welfare use than either human capital or conservative theories, since the individual attributes of the teen mothers appear to have only a small amount of influence over the economic subsistence strategies they employ.

Examining the Role of Maternal Economic Strategies on Early Childhood Outcomes

In the final step of our analysis, we regress two child outcome variables on the maternal characteristic variables and the five eco-

nomic strategy variables identified earlier in the paper. We do so to test the proposition of some conservative theorists that receipt of welfare, rather than poverty per se, contributes negatively to healthy child development. For example, Rector (1995) offers this vitriolic appraisal of the relationship between welfare programs and the well-being of children:

> . . . there is no evidence that enlarging benefits and expanding enrollments in most U.S. welfare programs will improve children's lives. While higher welfare payments and spending do not benefit children directly, they do increase dependence and illegitimacy, both of which have devastating effects on children's well-being. Thus, overall, welfare operates as a system of organized, well-funded child abuse (Rector, 1995, p.3).

As noted previously, existing evidence is mixed as to whether early childhood outcomes are positively or negatively influenced by welfare use as opposed to other household economic strategies. In our study, we use two early childhood outcome measures collected on the first born children of most of the 173 teen-mothers in the sample. These measures were taken at age six, representing the development outcomes of first birth children at the point of school entry. Thus we have some capacity to test whether welfare use as opposed to other economic strategies appears to have detrimental effects on children at the point of school entry, as conservative theory suggests.

The first child development measure we employ, the Child Behavior Checklist (N=172), has been utilized in a number of child development studies to assess the problem behaviors of a child—with a higher score indicating a higher level of problematic behaviors (Achenbach 1991). The second early childhood development measure employed, the Bracken Readiness for School Inventory (N=162), assesses the extent to which a child at the age of school entry has learning skills that are important to school success (Naglieri and Bardos 1990). Although 11 cases were excluded from this part of the analysis due to missing information on the Bracken score, a logistic regression analysis of the missing Bracken scores failed to show any association between the variables that we employ in the analysis and missing information on the Bracken score.

The first set of child development models we test, shown in Table 4, assess the relative effects of individual characteristics of the teen mothers and their economic strategies on the CBCL problematic child behavior measure. Here we use the block entry method in order to examine the influence of different aspects of maternal characteristics on explained variance in the child development outcome measures—as well as the unique contribution of the economic strategy variables. The results shown on Table 4 indicate that problematic child behaviors appear to be exclusively a function of maternal depression rather than the particular economic strategies employed by young mothers in the sample. It is interesting to note that the coefficient for depression is unmodified by the income maintenance strategies employed by the mothers, suggesting that the effects of maternal depression on child behavior are completely unmediated by either work or welfare use.

Table 5 shows a set of regressions that are identical to those shown in Table 4, except that the Bracken Readiness for School is used as a dependent variable. In the Bracken, we are interested in the extent to which maternal characteristics and the economic strategies employed by the mothers might influence a child's preparation for success in school. Head Start programs and the entire pre-school industry are predicated on overwhelming evidence that children who are prepared for a positive start in school are more likely to achieve long term academic success and eventual economic success as well.

The results shown on Table 5 provide equivocal support for conservative theory contentions that a family history of welfare use has a negative impact on children's educational achievement, as indicated by the marginally statistically significant ($p<.10$) negative coefficient for the teenage mother's having had a parent on welfare and the Bracken Readiness for School score. However, the teen mother's educational attainment and the educational attainments of her parents are not associated with a higher Bracken score—nor is her own use of welfare. Although the lack of a positive coefficient between the Bracken score and the mother's educational attainment may be a function of the mother's relative youth at the at the time of the Bracken observation (mean=22 years), these other findings collectively suggest that variations in

Table 4

Regression of Problematic Child Behavior on Individual Characteristics and Income Maintenance Strategies (Standard Errors in Parentheses)

Independent Variables	*Model 1*	*Model 2*	*Model 3*	*Model 4*	*Model 5*
Maternal Background					
Mother's schooling	–2.557 (1.791)	–2.699 (1.803)	–.831 (1.696)	–.529 (1.697)	–.581 (1.700)
Father's schooling	.781 (1.524)	.812 (1.527)	.117 (1.407)	–.519 (1.413)	–.750 (1.425)
Parent on welfare	–2.536 (4.422)	–2.390 (4.433)	–2.693 (4.070)	–2.913 (4.014)	–3.959 (4.060)
Education level	–.310 (1.576)	–.483 (1.593)	–.698 (1.502)	–.390 (1.491)	–.598 (1.543)
Verbal Intelligence	–.123 (.154)	–.175 (.152)	–.120 (.140)	–.152 (.140)	–.008 (.145)
Racial Minority	–1.336 (3.814)	–1.226 (3.823)	.091 (3.534)	1.493 (3.535)	.042 (3.610)
Fertility					
Number of Births		–1.893 (2.369)	–.796 (2.219)	–1.031 (2.189)	–.785 (2.303)
Mental Health					
Depression			16.420*** (3.577)	14.206***(3.806)	14.235***(3.794)
Drug Use			.646 (.606)	.480 (.606)	.799 (.639)

Table 4

Continued

Independent Variables	*Model 1*	*Model 2*	*Model 3*	*Model 4*	*Model 5*
Exposure to Violence					
Parent Violence				2.238 (1.178)	2.250 (1.198)
BF Violence				.881 (.998)	.931 (1.016)
Income Maintenance Strategy					
Mixed Welfare					.961 (1.808)
Profitable Deviance					–2.706 (1.763)
BF/Husband Support					–2.679 (1.741)
Cohabit/Labor Force					–1.800 (1.691)
Shelter/Cohabit					–.925 (1.743)
Model Constant	58.685***	63.071***	34.967	17.981	10.656
R^2	.032	.037	.204	.240	.281
F-Test R^2 Change	—	*n.s.*	*p<.001*	*p<.10*	*n.s.*
Model Significance	*n.s.*	*n.s.*	*p<.001*	*p<.001*	*P<.01*

* $p<.10$, ** $p<.05$, *** $p<.01$

Table 5

Regression of Bracken Readiness for School Score on Individual Characteristics and Income Maintenance Strategies (Standard Errors in Parentheses)

Independent Variables	*Model 1*	*Model 2*	*Model 3*	*Model 4*	*Model 5*
Maternal Background					
Mother's schooling	–.175 (5.729)	–.778 (5.754)	1.162 (5.899)	–.146 (6.000)	.020 (6.176)
Father's schooling	–4.279 (4.874)	–4.145 (4.872)	–4.828 (4.893)	–4.613 (4.996)	–4.851 (5.177)
Parent on welfare	–23.816* (14.143)	–23.192 (14.147)	–23.704* (4.160)	–24.013* (14.192)	–24.790* (14.748)
Education level	–2..852 (5.040)	– 3.591 (5.884)	–4.132 (5.225)	–3.776 (5.523)	–4.358 (5.605)
Verbal Intelligence	.652 (.487)	.645 (.487)	.691 (.489)	.627 (.497)	.635 (.527)
Racial Minority	–5.183 (12.199)	–4.640 (12.200)	–2.970 (12.293)	–3.377 (12.498)	–2.759 (13.112)
Fertility					
Number of Births		–8.07 (7.561)	–7.338 (7.719)	–7.208 (7.740)	–7.686 (8.366)
Mental Health					
Depression			17.877 (12.444)	14.581 (13.457)	14.569 (13.780)
Drug Use			.0096 (2.109)	–.124 (2.144)	–.193 (2.323)

Table 5

Continued

Independent Variables	*Model 1*	*Model 2*	*Model 3*	*Model 4*	*Model 5*
Exposure to Violence					
Parent Violence				–4.252 (4.165)	–4.502 (4.403)
BF Violence				3.412 (3.527)	3.416 (3.691)
Income Maintenance Strategy					
Mixed Welfare					2.536 (6.566)
Profitable Deviance					.114 (6.405)
BF/Husband Support					.886 (6.323)
Cohabit/Labor Force					.556 (6.142)
Shelter/Cohabit					–.841 (6.333)
Model Constant	152.156***	171.374***	144.813**	103.749**	170.038***
R^2	.064	.073	.090	.102	.103
F-Test R^2 Change	—	*n.s.*	*n.s*	*n.s.*	*n.s.*
Model Significance	*n.s.*	n.s.	*n.s*	*n.s.*	*n.s.*

* $p<.10$, ** $p<.05$, *** $p<.01$

the Bracken score are attributable to a number of unmeasured parenting characteristics that are not correlated with verbal intelligence, family educational background, or the mother's level of welfare participation. In fact, no latent economic strategy appears to have a specific positive or negative impact on the children's preparation for school, and collectively their influence on the total explained variance is statistically non-significant. These results resonate with the general theme of ethnographic studies of poor women which suggest that the economic strategies employed by single mothers are a matter of pragmatic adaptation and not an attribute of parenting ability (Rank, 1994; Jarrett, 1994; Schein, 1995; Oliker, 1995; Edin & Lein, 1996; Dodson, 1998; Seccombe, 1999).

Conclusion

As they progress toward adulthood, teen mothers use a variety of economic subsistence strategies—few of which are strongly predicted by their individual characteristics in ways that are consistent with either human capital or conservative theory. We believe the findings from this study are most consistent with the view that single mothers at risk for poverty and long-term welfare dependence use whatever economic opportunities are available to them according to immediate individual circumstances. Contextual circumstances are harder to capture in quantitative terms than are individual characteristics, which is why the insights gleaned from ethnographic studies of poor women are so difficult to capture in a 60 second social science soundbite. Unfortunately, truncated or overtly ideological information sources are all too often the basis of public decisions on issues pertaining to welfare, work, and the well-being of children. Except for findings from the principal components factor analysis that suggest that welfare use is in part a function of the availability of support from parents and relatives, findings from this study do not isolate the individual circumstances that are associated with either work or welfare dependence as a primary strategy of household subsistence. Rather, our analysis shows that teen-mothers employ multiple subsistence strategies—none of which are strongly associated with the individual characteristics of teen-mothers in a ways that neatly

fit the prevailing theoretical dichotomy that frames the welfare and work debate.

We have also shown that while maternal mental health is associated with critical aspects of early childhood development—work, welfare use, cohabitation and other means of economic subsistence are not. Although these findings are based on a modest sample cohort of 173 teen-age mothers, the longitudinal nature of the data is superior in assessing cause and effect relationships than the larger cross-sectional studies that are prevalent in this domain of social science research. Moreover, the data from the 173 teen-mothers in our sample replicate the observations from ethnographic research on the women and children caught in the ideological debate on welfare and work—observations that portray low income single mothers as pragmatic and responsible parents. We believe these findings collectively suggest that the future success or failure of welfare reform will have little to do with changing the motivations of the individual women who are at most risk for welfare reliance—but rather (like politics), will reflect the art of the possible.

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