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**Managing In and Against the New Culture of Welfare:
Challenges for Identity and Critical Practice**

Social and community services in Canada have been subject to successive rounds of restructuring and managerial reforms over the last fifteen years. Social workers practicing inside the meagre services that have resulted witness how shifting organizational and funding structures 'narrow the social' (Clarke 2007), limiting the scope of their work and reducing clients' and communities' entitlements to public support. Research indicates how some front line practitioners find ways to negotiate the resulting tensions and resist the confines of such narrowly defined practice (Aronson and Sammon 2000; Smith 2007).

We know much less about the tensions facing *managers* in this regressive context. The small literature suggests that, like their front line counterparts, many managers are at odds with the efficiency-driven controls they are charged to represent, and that some strive to challenge organizational practices that jeopardize the clients and marginalized communities they aspire to serve (Healy 2002).

To explore the strains and opportunities in managers' positioning, this paper draws on a qualitative study of women managing social services in southern Ontario - all women with extensive practice backgrounds and long-standing commitments to progressive public services and social justice. Study participants were, at once, implicated in managerial practices designed to narrow the social *and* finding spaces to challenge that narrowing. Practically, they produced the accounts and data required to legitimate and sustain their organizations, while also looking for ways to expand entitlements and deepen and politicize their organizations' work.

To enact this contradictory positioning – in and against managerial culture – participants assumed multiple identities and modes of performance. Strategic assumption of these multiple identities and roles posed challenges to their senses of integrity and coherence of purpose. They articulated the resulting tensions and 'internal jostling' (Halford and Leonard 1999) as personal dilemmas and seldom shared them with others. The tendency not to do so may reflect the confining boundaries of organizational confidentiality, individuals' particularities or, as also seems likely, the sanction on admitting complexity or confusion in the entrepreneurial culture of contemporary public service management. Exploration of these politically produced but privately borne struggles can contribute to our understanding of shifting modes of resistance and creativity in the new culture of welfare.

References:

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