I. Defining terms: "Embodied Workers" and "The New Economy."

Embodied Workers: Of course, all workers are embodied; we live physical lives, located in particular material settings, with limitations imposed by our human bodies and all their frailties. We use our bodies in work, and work always takes a physical toll, though quite differently in different kinds of work. Perhaps most importantly for our purposes, if workers are to continue in their jobs, their bodies must be sustained, in households and through services of various kinds, which may be provided collectively or purchased within or outside homes. I've foregrounded the phrase "embodied worker" here to call attention to this fundamental fact. I also use it as a "point of entry" to investigation of workplace organization and social policy, both of which often assume what Joan Acker has labeled an "unencumbered" or disembodied worker.

I've emphasized the materiality of human existence as a universal, even essential fact of human life. But of course, bodily differences and limitations are socially constructed and their consequences flow from the organization of the social relations people are drawn into. Our bodies are gendered and racialized, marked as typical and different, and some of our limitations taken as "normal" while others are construed as "disabilities" (and made disabling by the organization of social life). The comparative aspect of this conference asks participants to hold onto this two-pronged sense of the significance of embodiment: all people live in bodies, but the meanings and consequences of our bodily and material circumstances arise from the social organization of households, communities, workplaces, states, etc.

The "New Economy": The phrase "new economy" is being used by analysts and policy makers across a range of settings to point to several large transformations--underway for some time now--which are producing significant changes and challenges for workers, employers, and states. Most broadly, these changes include: 1) the kinds of economic restructuring associated with movement from industrial to post-industrial economies (in the developed nations) and with neo-liberal policies of economic "reform" and structural adjustment in Third World countries, including the global movement of jobs and labor; 2) the changing composition of labor forces (especially the increasing entry of women
into new forms of labor, in both rich and poor countries) and associated discourses of labor force participation and its negative, "dependency"; 3) transformations of work, especially those associated with new electronic and information technologies, and the related discourses that define key skills and the role of workers' competencies in global competitiveness; and 4) the new "consensus" that is bringing private-sector management logic and technique to the public sector.

Of course, economies continue to change and will, even as we meet to analyze them. As I have begun to explore this area, I've come to see the phrase "new economy" as part of the conceptual machinery with which employers, policy makers, and (to widely varying degrees) workers are making sense of this complex and contested terrain. This observation suggests that as IE analysts, we need to know what people are talking about when they use this phrase, but we also need to pay close attention to how they are talking, and to what ends.

My thinking about new economy issues and their significance has been influenced not only by recent scholarly writing, but also by my observation of two rapidly growing fields of research, both clearly fueled and shaped by contemporary policy concerns. Any US sociologist has to be aware of the immense research effort devoted to examination of the welfare reforms instituted in the 1980s. We now expect poor women to work for pay (in the "new" labor market) as well as caring for their children, and many government and foundation dollars are being devoted to investigation of how they are doing that. As I listen to research presentations in this area, I'm interested in what questions are being asked and not, and in the ways in which the conceptual underpinnings of "new economy" discourse (vocabularies of employability, skill, etc.) are woven into this field of research. In addition, my own research on family life and parenting work has taken me into the networks of scholars exploring "work/family issues" and "work/life policy" and I've become quite interested in charting the growth of this new field of scholarship and practice. It is an arena in which the Sloan Foundation has been heavily involved, through its funding of research centers around the country and the establishment of a network of researchers and practitioners, and the foundation defines the issues of concern in terms of a "new arithmetic" of middle-class family life. Despite some common, overarching conceptual currency, there appears to be relatively little interchange between these two arenas of research and discussion; thus, policy on work and work/family issues is developing quite separately for low-income and middle- to high-income workers and their families.

Finally, Alison Griffith's work (with Dorothy Smith and others) on a large collaborative proposal for IE research on new economy issues in the public sector made me aware of the Canadian SSHRC's Initiative on the New Economy and their statement of concerns (http://www.sshrc.ca/web/apply/background/ine_about_e.asp) provides a a window into how national governments might understand the challenges of economic transformation.

II. Research questions for the conference:
There are, of course, many fruitful ways to explore the issues I've begun to sketch above, and each conference participant will have her/his own research interests and questions. But for our collective work at the conference, I would like to bring a particular set of questions into focus, and in this section I'll try to define that terrain.

The issues I'd like us to address, collectively, revolve around the following questions:
•To what extent, and how, are new workplace arrangements and gendered labor regimes responsive to peoples' embodied dilemmas of sustaining participation in paid labor and also a regenerative life outside of work?
•On what bases might we challenge, along with workers, the problems and injustices we may find in the arrangements and policies emerging in this "new" era?

Here's some preliminary discussion of this terrain:

Early second-wave feminist sociologists recognized a fundamental clash between the embodiment of women workers--especially their experiences of bearing and raising children and the insistent tugs of caregiving responsibilities--and the inflexible "clockwork" and demands of most paid jobs (Hochschild). Dorothy Smith (1987) argued that mothers lived with a sharp disjuncture between the embodied "everyday/everynight" world of caregiving, and the world of work where one is meant to act as if those grounded demands did not exist. A bit later, Joan Acker began to write about "Hierarchies, Jobs, and Bodies" (1990). The contradiction that Hochschild, Smith, and Acker pointed to 30 years ago has only deepened as the economy has come to be characterized by heightened inequality and uncertainty. And I've tried to suggest in my comments on embodiment that although these authors wrote specifically about women and family carework, the contradictions of sustaining paid employment under contemporary conditions are now sharply relevant for virtually all workers, though of course in different forms.

In the face of deepening contradiction, we can begin to see a patchwork of policies, programs, and services (both public and private) developing around the "problems" of embodied workers in the new economy. For stably employed workers, there is now a variety of "work/family" or "work/life" (WF/WL) programs, which are being developed by corporate and other large employers and, to a lesser extent, by unions and local, state, and federal governments (Glass and Estes 1997, Gerstel and Clawson 2002). These efforts have begun to produce new kinds of corporate human-resource work (V. Smith 2001) and, in some cases, have been accompanied by the development of new professional fields and associated credentials (see, e.g., the Association for Work-Life Progress: http://www.awlp.org/). A different but related kind of response can be seen in the design of the welfare-to-work (WTW) component of welfare reform which has included an evolving but generally quite meager ensemble of supportive services designed to assist new entrants to the labor force and those whose participation is deemed likely to be especially tenuous or precarious. Though they are rarely considered side by side (Albelda 2001 is an important exception), WTW and WF programs offer an interesting comparison. Both involve supports and services for parents (typically mothers) designed to facilitate coordinating care for others with paid work. Both represent efforts to respond to and also to manage and fundamentally reshape workers' attitudes, values, and practices
(though to varying degrees). And both offer services that workers may appreciate, but are tied into and shaped by powerful organizational imperatives that do not necessarily reflect the lives and needs of workers.

These kinds of institutional responses leave out two groups of workers located and embodied differently. Although they may receive special vocational training and services, it is somewhat unclear how we might expect people with disabilities to be positioned in this new economy. Under welfare reform, they may be exempted from work requirements, a policy and practice which might signal that this is a group left out of the public policy discussion and even denied opportunities to work—though they are often eager and well qualified to do so with appropriate supports. Similarly, immigrant and other non-citizen workers are recruited into the new economy in the U.S., and used heavily in its "shadow" informal as well as formal economy, but rarely have access to the kinds of supports and services that have begun to develop, however unevenly, for citizens. Immigrant workers, however (and others), may have access to some training or supportive services provided by employers or philanthropic and non-profit organizations.

There are predictable ironies that I think can be seen even in this brief sketch: Flexible and worker-driven supports are likely to be most easily available to those who have stable employment and/or sufficient income to purchase private services. By contrast, those who have the greatest needs and the fewest resources with which to meet them may have access to some assistance, but generally through programs that are relatively inflexible, often inadequate, and unlikely to offer much autonomy. And such practices are legitimated through discourses of citizenship, "independence," "skill," and so on.

I wish to suggest that IE methodologies are especially well suited to exploration of these developments, and in the next section I will try to explain why.

III. Methodology: Institutional Ethnography (IE).

Dorothy Smith developed the "institutional ethnography" (IE) approach out of feminist insights and first presented it as a sociology for (rather than about) women; she thinks of it more broadly as a sociology for people, and it has attracted increasing interest as a method of use to many groups. Combining theory and method, IE emphasizes connections among the sites and situations of everyday life, management/professional practice, and policy making, considered from the locations of everyday life (Smith 1987).

The notion of a "standpoint" or location anchoring the research is key to the IE method. In this approach, standpoint does not refer to a determinate perspective, but serves as a methodological reminder that people's actual lives and activities should never disappear from the analysis. At the same time, the research is not confined to the everyday lives of the "anchor" group. Rather, the IE researcher traces how those lives are "organized" through the social relations of the contexts. This is not simply a matter of asserting a "macro" argument to frame "micro" findings: in IE research, as the analysis moves from one setting to another--seeking the sources of translocal coordination--the researcher
strives always to attend the activities of people operating institutional machinery. In most settings, texts of various kinds are key to these activities and especially to linkages among sites. Thus, IE researchers attend closely to the uses of texts and to the ways that texts (and the concepts and discourse they contain) "travel" from one setting to another.

The IE approach seems to me well suited for broad analyses of economic restructuring as it unfolds in the current moment, for two reasons. First, IE researchers pay particular attention to discursive sources of social organization, which have become the dominant mode of governance (in most arenas) and promise to increase in importance. Our studies have begun to highlight and also to develop sociologically-relevant methods for investigating a range of textually-based institutional technologies, from the daily texts that organize face-to-face activities (e.g. case records, organizational databases, scheduling software, etc.) to the broader conceptual frames (e.g. notions such as "flexibility," "participation," "choice," and so on) that drive local technologies and connect multiple local sites. In addition, IE analyses emphasize "regimes" of social organization. We conduct inquiries into what people do and how they fare, but always in light of governing organizational practices and schemes of accountability. As these institutional technologies change--becoming more similar and more integrated across varying sites--a focus on regimes will highlight aspects of the current moment that are less easily visible in research focusing primarily on individuals or on outcomes.

I am arguing that the developments I've discussed above are best understood as elements of systemic changes. IE perspectives help us to discover how these institutional practices are changing on the ground, concretely: we see that they are coordinated ideologically, as actors in various locations, whether grasping new strategic opportunities or struggling to adapt, take up the overarching discourses of an era proclaimed as "new." Conceptual currencies of the "consensus" discourses filter through the media, shaped by and setting terms for policy, and thereby establishing the ground on which unions and activists will confront employers and the state. Disseminated and taken up in myriad ways, key concepts may produce what Ridzi calls "ideological buy-in," and over time they come to stand as "common sense."

The analytic goal of the IE approach is to stand back from such common sense, and to replace ideological, common-sense understandings with detailed and specific "maps" of the institutional processes that shape people's organizational and extra-organizational lives. Such analytic maps should assist in pinpointing areas of "trouble" (Pence) for people subject to these regimes, as well as indicating directions for potential reforms that address their troubles. To the extent that our analyses can do this work, the IE approach can be seen as a radically democratic policy tool.

IV. The accumulation of knowledge in IE research.

Each researcher involved in the conference is studying labor force participation and/or work/family issues, from the standpoint of work but with an interest in the regimes that organize work and work/family experiences. Thus, each has rich empirical material to
contribute in developing the kinds of ideas outlined above. I believe that each will also see her or his material in new ways as they hear about and discuss the projects of the researchers working in different arenas or with different groups. While specific outcomes will depend on the course of each researcher's ongoing projects, I anticipate that some will be interested in developing proposals that extend ongoing studies via these ideas and research strategies.

I am also convinced that bringing together the literatures, as well as the foci, of these various projects will lead to useful development in each area. Albelda's article calling for studies that encompass both welfare-reliant and more affluent families in our consideration of work/family policy is one source of inspiration. Another is writing from the British "social model" in disability studies, which posits that disability results from social arrangements that present barriers to full participation by those with impairments of various kinds.

Again, I can only point to possibilities that developing these ideas will afford. However, I've designed the conference to support my own efforts at continuing this kind of comparative thinking and writing, to support my students' projects in ways that will connect their work to broader literatures and foster creative extensions of their dissertation projects, and to create and support collaborative connections among a focused group of scholars working with compatible approaches across these different sites and areas.

IV. Some alternative conceptual tools we might share.

a) the "generous" concept of work (Smith 1987).

b) IE audit methods.

c) processing interchanges:

d) "welfare users" as a constituency.

V. Research in progress: Marj's overview of conference participants' research.

VI: Questions/issues for discussion.