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Poverty Talk: Beyond Attributions - A Discursive Approach

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Abstract

The present study examines poverty talk in Aotearoa/NZ during the 'poverty debate' of 1996. Social psychology's attribution studies on lay peoples explanations for poverty are reviewed. Methodological limitations with these studies are identified and a discursive approach to the topic advocated. Textual data from the media and two Barnardos Care Centre focus groups are analyzed using methodology developed by Potter and Wetherell (1987), Edwards and Potter (1992), and Wetherell (1998). Four interpretative repertoires from the media text are identified: 'social security as destructive'; 'dissolute character'; 'resourcefulness'; and 'absolutely impoverished'. A further five interpretative repertoires are identified from the focus group talk: 'financial hardship'; 'real DPB person'; 'catch 22'; 'working the system'; and 'resourcefulness'. Focus group talk focusing on the rhetorical construction, and 'situated practice' aspects of the members' accounts during this period is explored, and the ideological implications of the accounting practices discussed.

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

The poverty debate in Aotearoa/New Zealand: The Research Context

"The word poverty tends to make us think of people starving as a result of famine overseas, for whom poverty means an imminent death. But poverty is not limited to this tragic extreme. Relative poverty also exists where people do not have enough income to provide what most of us would consider a minimum standard of living. For one in every five New Zealanders, and three in every ten New Zealand children, this kind of poverty is a harsh fact of life..." (An open letter about poverty in New Zealand, Aug 18, 1996).

1996 was heralded 'The International Year for the Eradication of Poverty' by the United Nations. During this period, talk about being poor in Aotearoa/NZ became a topic of considerable national debate. Debate heightened as business sectors and social security recipients alike experienced the effects of the mid 1980 Labour Party 'free market' economic and social policy reforms developed to fruition by the National Government.

During this time programmes such as '*Time Bomb*' (Television New Zealand) warned the public of impending 'rioting in the streets' and possible 'urban terrorism' if welfare state policies were not curbed. Hundreds of people marched from the tip of the country to Parliament in the 'Hikoi of Hope' in protest to the Government about the negative effects that policy changes were having on increasingly larger sectors of the community.

Conferences were held in Auckland, two of which within days of each other.

One, *Beyond Dependency*, was organised by the Government as a forum to hear papers on social policy from other countries, for example, one advocating a return to turn of the century English 'poor laws' (i.e., no welfare benefits). The other conference, *Beyond Poverty*, hosted by academics and community groups, espoused concerns about right wing, market models pervading welfare culture.

Magazines and newspapers articles were published, attributing responsibility for events to a variety of sources. Some writers were critical of recent policy changes, while others were concerned about how Hikoi of Hope protesters found the time to protest.

Outgoing Prime Minister Jim Bolger exclaimed *...there is no poverty in New Zealand .....he'd been into schools and not seen any starving children, but instead, rather a lot of plump ones...* (Legat, 1996)

Mr Loyd of Palmerston North City's Community Services Council wrote *...what we are seeing is the tip of the iceberg, the figures don't tell the full story....A lot of young people wont come forward and say how badly off they are...it's about pride.....Some people who haven't enough money to feed a child properly won't tell anyone, fearing acquisition of poor parenting or money mismanagement ...* (Bethell, 1996).

Whether about poor people having too much 'pride' to speak up, or 'plump

children' in the schools masquerading as the poor in relation to poverty there was little evidence of media consensus. This is not necessarily surprising. The conservative government of the day was invested in promoting Aotearoa/New Zealand as an 'economic miracle', rather than accepting culpability or openly acknowledging the failure of their current policy as being responsible for the growing numbers of people joining the welfare queues. Similarly, sole parents, sickness beneficiaries and unemployed work seekers, were loath to accept that they were 'lazy, work-shy lay-abouts', responsible for soiling the country's reputation. The lack of media consensus was a reflection of the times.

Conducting the research

During this turbulent period I met with anti-poverty campaigner Charles Waldegrave of the Lower Hutt Family Centre and discussed my intentions to do some research within the poverty area. After considerable discussion we concluded it would be useful to conduct some qualitative work with focus groups, as little work had been conducted within the field, and it would also be complimentary to the quantitative work already conducted (e.g., Easton, 1995; Krishnan, 1995; Stephens, Waldegrave & Frater, 1995, 1996; Livingston, 1997).

Shortly after, I became aware of an article in the local 'Evening Standard' newspaper describing data which had collected from two focus group discussions on poverty. The groups had been organised by Kathleen

Livingston of Barnardos' F.A.I.R. Centre, Wellington, in the latter part of 1996. In the article, Ms Livingston reported that the main objective for the Barnardos' research was "To give parents a voice on poverty", and further stating "This will be a good resource for its staff and others contributing to the poverty debate" (Megan, 1996). I gained access to the Barnardos' focus group data and, consequently, was able to conjoin both the media reports and the lay peoples conceptions of the poverty debate. It soon became apparent that consensus was not only a media concern and a thesis question emerged.

From a social science perspective, the question posed is: how does one make sense of these peoples' accounts of poverty during this particular period? Such questions have traditionally been answered by a variety of disciplines including history, education, sociology, social policy, and psychology. Within psychology, social psychologists have produced the majority of contributions to this field. To begin to answer this question, some of the previous research conducted in the social sciences concerning how people account for poverty experiences will be reviewed. From there I will introduce an alternative method of examining people's accounts of poverty, followed by an analysis and discussion of 'poverty talk'.

Research on Poverty in Aotearoa/New Zealand

Chapter Overview

In this chapter some of the major themes concerning the definitions and measurement of poverty in psychology will be introduced. Research contributions from the discipline of psychology, in particular social psychology, and work done concerning lay peoples' explanations of poverty, will be reviewed. A number of methodological problems with these studies will then be examined. Finally, an alternative approach to the study of poverty explanations, a social constructionist perspective, will be presented as a possible solution to some of the problems associated with the previous work in this field.

Measuring and defining poverty

The problem in defining poverty is of no small proportion, with strong political implications. Despite the controversy surrounding public discussions of 'poverty' or 'the poor', various terms have gained credence within the debate. The most common academic definitions and terms used when the question of poverty arises are that of *absolute poverty, relative poverty, deserving poor and undeserving poor, social security, and poverty lines* (Becker, 1997).

Absolute poverty

This term refers to the idea of poverty defined as basic subsistence existence and was used by late 18th to early 20th century academics. Used when

people have insufficient resources required to sustain the basic life functions, it is equated with extreme need, starvation, hunger and destitution. Within discussions of poverty, it is still used by some of the more conservative thinkers.

Relative poverty

This is a more recent term, used by 'liberal thinking' academics. By describing poverty in more relative terms, the net is cast wider, conceptualising people and poverty more in terms of exclusion from social participation or citizenship, and thus in more 'relational' terms.

Deserving and Undeserving Poor

These two terms have been used to distinguish between groups of poor people. The *deserving poor* are those that due to infirmity or illness, are unable to contribute to a reciprocal market ethic, by virtue of their helplessness. In contrast, the *undeserving poor* have been characterised as the able bodied, and thus able and obliged to contribute. This group, at an extreme, may include the unemployed, solo mothers/fathers and able bodied elderly.

Social security/welfare

Social security is a term that came about as the result of efforts by governments to police welfare claimants who were *undeserving*. However, the consequence of the term *social security,* with its implications of 'surveillance',

has meant that the many 'deserving poor' have experienced feelings of stigma and embarrassment in the process of claiming entitlements (Golding & Middleton, 1982).

Poverty lines

One way of providing statistical data to provide evidence for the existence of poverty has been to establish measures of poverty or 'poverty thresholds'. According to research conducted by different advocates, 'the poor' are those who have been identified by various measures as being poor. These measures, however, have produced quite disparate claims as to the definition, numbers, and status of 'the poor' (e.g., Easton, 1995; Krishnan, 1995; & Stephens, Waldegrave & Frater, 1995).

Anti poverty campaigner and policy researcher Charles Waldegrave has established a 'Poverty line' for Aotearoa/NZ. The poverty threshold used in his research was set at 60% of median, equivalent, household, disposable income with poverty identified in 18.5 percent of households, 20.5 percent of individuals, 32.6 percent of all children, and 70 percent of all sole parent families (Stephens, Waldergrave & Frater, 1996). Psychologists have tended toward the administration of questionnaires and surveys in order to examine attitudes and beliefs about events. The following section introduces contributions to the psychological literature on poverty.

Poverty Literature in Psychology

Within the field of psychology contributions to the poverty literature have been minimal (Harper, 1991). The literature suggests two approaches to the study of poverty (Singh, 1989). Those concerned with psychologists' scientific interpretation of the causes of poverty, have examined the relationships between different factors, for example, whether behaviours of the poor are due to individual, or environmental determinants (Amato & Zuo, 1992). The bulk of research has examined lay people's explanations for the perceived causes of poverty (see Singh, 1989). It is to this approach that we now turn as it is of greater relevance to this study in that it enables us to explore the inconsistencies and personal interests that are at stake for people when they are reporting or explaining political topics, such as poverty.

Attribution Studies

Work in this area accounts for the majority of the poverty research in psychology over the past three decades. Using classic attribution theory (e.g., Heider, 1958; Jones & Davis, 1965; Kelley, 1973; McArther, 1972), this work analyses lay-people's perceptions of the causes of poverty. In the course of everyday discourse, people manage issues of agency and responsibility when offering reports of events. Attribution theorists have provided some understanding of how people deal with such issues by identifying whether people's explanations for poverty are causally attributed to internal causes (e.g., the person's disposition) or external causes (e.g., situational factors).

Attribution studies of the perceived causes of poverty have been conducted in many different countries around the world involving different ethnicities, political affiliation, gender, developmental stage, culture, and even personality factors (Singh, 1989). Most of this work is based on Feagin's (1972) earlier work which has subsequently been extensively replicated. In this study, Feagin asked 1,017 Americans to rate possible causes of poverty. Eleven different causes for poverty were identified which were then classified into three categories: *individualistic causes*, where poverty is blamed on the poor; *structural causes*, which assigns responsibility for poverty to societal causes; and *fatalistic causes*, where responsibility for poverty is attributed to fate.

Other researchers, for example, Feather (1974), looked at cross-cultural and inter-generational differences in perception of causality of poverty. Results showed less attribution of poverty to individualistic factors than the American population studied by Feagin (1972), but also a tendancy for younger subjects to attribute causality of poverty to individualistic factors more frequently than older subjects.

An Indian study conducted by Pandey, Sinha, Prakash and Tripathi (1982) showed that political affiliation and ideology play a strong part in influencing attributional style (Singh,1989). In the United Kingdom, Furnham (1982c) found that *Conservatives* attributed causality of poverty to individualistic factors, whereas *Labour* supporters rated societal factors for

the cause of poverty more often. Furnham (1982b) observed that public school students perceived individualistic factors as more important for the causes of poverty than comprehensive school students who perceived societal factors as more important. Furnham (1982a) found a difference in attribution of causality in different religious groups in India, concluding that the Indian sample overall tended to be more individualistic than the U.K. sample. Further research in the field includes Zucker and Weiner (1993) and Stacey, Singer and Ritchie (1989), with Singh (1989) conducting a comprehensive review of literature in the area.

Limitations of Attribution Studies

There have been a number of criticisms mounted against attribution theory's theoretical and philosophical assumptions. Firstly, the emergence of attribution theory has been tied to Fritz Heider's (1958) research: *The Psychology of Interpersonal Relations,* discussing the legitimising of language as a starting point for social psychological theorising. However, concern has been expressed that the early attributionists Jones and Davis (1965) and Kelley (1973) ignored Heider's original discursive starting point in favour of Kelley's perceptually driven pro-social/cognition reformulation (Antaki & Leudar, 1992).

A number of concerns relating to this formulation of attribution theory, and its under theorising about language have been noted (Antaki & Leudar, 1992). By treating explanation as the causal identification of the individual,

attribution theory side steps the disputes and negotiations central to everyday explaining in talk. Further, it is impossible to do empirical work with Kelley's (1973) formulation of attribution with anything other than paper and pencil type apparatus. In this regard, application of the model to other areas of research such as texts, written or spoken, is problematic (Antaki & Leudar, 1992). Harper (1996) suggests there are four major criticisms of attribution theory's methods for analysis of poverty explanations. These include pervasive individualism, stability, constructed nature, and neglecting the effects of explanation.

Harper's (1996) first criticism of attribution theory relates to pervasive individualism. According to Harper, there are two effects associated with the idea of the 'individual explainer' as the unit of analysis. Firstly, it assumes that individuals' accounts are unitary and internally consistent, and secondly, organisational explanations like government press releases, ministerial statements, are not examined.

Harper's next criticism is that it assumes the existence of 'stable' underlying attributional structures. Attributions made by people are considered to remain stable, both across time and situation. The variable use of attributions made becomes problematic for this theory of people's accounting practices.

Another criticism made relates to the constructed nature of items and

factors used. In traditional attribution research, items and factors are taken out of their context and examined individually. This oversimplifies how people make explanations as causes may be interconnected. Furnham (1982) has noted that explanations for poverty may be used variably amongst different groups of subjects according to which poor 'target group' are specified.

The final concern is in relation to attribution theory's neglecting of the effects of explanation. According to Harper, there is a lack of concern about the types of effects and functions these explanations may have. What is lacking in such accounts is a clear understanding of the role ideology plays in structuring people's views of the world. As a result, the attribution literature has contributed little in political action toward the fight against poverty. Harper (1996) states " What is the point of focusing 25 or more years research on members of the public who have little control over world economic resources..." (p.252). Further, there has also been little empirical literature connecting such work with theories of justice or with ideas about why people make such attributions.

The biggest problem with this sort of characterisation of psychology subjects is that the role of language is neglected. Although the theoretical foundations of attribution theory are perceptual and cognitive, the research methodology relies on verbal descriptions of events, verbal communications of instructions, and the verbal formulations of causal explanations

(Edwards & Potter, 1992). Under-theorising about language is problematic as it fails to acknowledge how versions of events, via description and explanation, are constructed by speaking and writing subjects to perform social actions, such as justifying, blaming, invoking and resisting (Edwards & Potter, 1992). The causal understanding of people's accounts involves complex social rhetorical and attributional accounting practices (Edwards & Potter, 1992). These are central to the dynamics of naturally occurring talk and are thus overlooked by the purveyors of attitudinal life.

Such 'methodological weakness' has been addressed. For example, Hilton (1990) has produced a more powerful version of attribution theory. This has been criticised as inadequate, however, in relation to the full complexities of every day conversation (see Edwards & Potter, 1992; Antaki & Leudar, 1992).

In light of current concerns regarding attribution theory's inability to attend to the social and psychological dynamics of everyday conversation, how is one to approach the analysis of lay people's explanations for poverty, from a stance that is sensitive to the discursive dynamics of everyday discourse? The following section may illuminate this quandary.

Chapter 2

DISCOURSE AND SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY

Social Constructionism

Current trends in the social sciences, including social psychology, suggest that there may be another way of looking at the texts of public opinion and research on poverty. As a result of historical critical movements (post-modernism and post-structuralism) within the arts, sciences and social sciences, social constructionist philosophy has contributed to the re-thinking of traditional research practices in these disciplines. This challenge to traditional science and social science practices has been informed by a number of different philosophers (e.g. Wittgenstein, 1963; Kuhn, 1970; sociologists of science (e.g. Barnes, 1974; Latour & Woolgar, 1979) and psychologists (e.g. Gergen, 1973, 1985; Shotter, 1975, 1984; Sampson, 1981).

What is social constructionism? There is no single definitive answer to this question as there are many different assumptions regarding social constructionist enquiry in social psychology. Burr (1995), for example, notes that while different writers share some common assumptions, there is not 'one' thing they all have in common. According to Potter (1995), these approaches have three underlying familial characteristics. Firstly, they can be identified by their tendency to be in opposition with traditional social science realist philosophical positions; secondly, they stress that minds do not have fixed essences but are built from the symbolic resources of a particular culture; and thirdly, they all treat discourse as a central

organising principle of construction, although they may theorise about discourse differently (Potter, 1995).

Discourse analytic research

As a result of efforts to afford social psychology a more philosophical and theoretically plural environment, a number of discourse analytic approaches have been developed (e.g. Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Edwards & Potter, 1992; Wetherell,1998; Billig, 1987,1991; Parker, 1990a; Parker, 1990b; Holloway, 1989; Weedon, 1987; Walkerdine, 1987). Although there are similarities among them in the way they attend to discourse, they may be distinguished from each other by a number of characteristics.

Broadly speaking, the approaches may be divided into two groups: those aligned with the more fine grain analysis of the action orientation of talk, informed by conversation analysis (Schegloff, 1968; Sacks, 1992) and ethnomethodology (Garfinkel, 1967), and those affiliated with the French post-structuralist traditions, that is, the imbrication of discourse, power and subjectification (e.g. Foucault, 1972; Parker, 1990a, 1990b; Holloway, 1989; Weedon, 1987; Walkerdine, 1987). These authors, however, take quite different positions about such things as the nature of discourse, reality, ideological functions, and the effects of accounts in conversational practice.

Firstly, Parker (1992a), through the identification of discourses, has focused on how language is structured into abstract discourses which have the power

to shape the way people, including psychologists, experience and interact in the world (Burman & Parker, 1993). For Parker, assertions about reality are important (Parker, 1992; Burman & Parker, 1993). Such reality, however, is more to do with the 'real' domain of institutional power relations than the 'real' domain of an accessible, independent objective world, existing out there.

For Potter, Edwards & Wetherell (1993), the focus is on 'discourse analysis' and how discourse (naturally occurring talk and text) can be understood as the accomplishment of social action. Potter and Wetherell (1987) are more concerned with the ways in which discourse is organised through 'interpretative repertoires', that is, the discursive resources or systems used to sustain different social practices.

Edwards and Potter (1992) make no claims to realism but identify more with relativist ontological assumptions. That is, they are less concerned with what is 'real', and more concerned with how different accounts are made to seem real. Thus, they tend to put more emphasis on how talk is organised rhetorically in conversational practice to do certain things, for example, dealing with issues of blame, criticism, or responsibility. For Edwards and Potter (1992), speaking subjects have an interest or stake in what they are saying, thus issues of accountability in talk are paramount.

Wetherell (1998), in her formulation for a critical discursive social

psychology, has proposed that conversational/ethnomethodological analytic resources be grounded in post structuralist theory. My understanding of this is to look at how people deal with issues of subjectivity in the situated flow of discourse; the formation and negotiation of psychological states, identities, and interactional and inter subjective events in a discursive context.

This context can be examined or identified by considering the more macro post-structuralist notions of 'discourse', that is, the imbrication of discourse, power and subjectification in the discursive field of conversational practice (Foucault, 1971, 1972; Parker, 1990a, 1990b; Holloway, 1989; Weedon, 1987; Walkerdine, 1987). Thus, by utilising the rhetorical resources central to the business of successful conversational activity, speaking subjects are also realised in a broader social context (Wetherell, 1998).

Chapter 3

MY RESEARCH STANDPOINT

Having introduced some of the different discourse analytic research approaches, I will now introduce the background resource for the analytic practice used in this study. My choice of standpoint is the result of a journey I engaged in since first reading material in a theory and method undergraduate paper at Canterbury University in 1994. The other reason I refer to it as a journey is that, as a result of engaging in the research process and experiencing difficulties working with the research material, I have moved position on more than one occasion.

My current standpoint has been informed by my decision to make a commitment to a 'relativist' analytic stance. I adopt the position in an epistemological sense, thus "...the acceptability or unacceptability of knowledge claims is relative to a particular group or community, and there are no objective epistemological standards..." (Boyd, Gasper & Trout, 1991, p.780). That is, all claims to 'truth' are 'relative'.

The implication of this standpoint is that there is no ultimate position in which to stand in relation to knowing 'the truth', or attempting a closer approximation of it. I suggest the claim to 'truth' is a rhetorical technique used to perform certain social actions by certain communities. Given the premise that the quest for truth is not 'the' objective standard, what are the implications for research practices conducted under this premise? I propose

that any such analysis need be sensitive to how particular versions of events are constructed to appear truthful or credible.

Having established my philosophical research position, I will now introduce the different analytic sources or traditions informing my particular approach to discourse analysis.

Analytic resources utilised in the present study

The work of Potter, Wetherell and Edwards has contributed to the analytic approach to discourse I have adopted and utilised in the analysis. I will outline six central themes that have directly informed this research project. Described by Potter & Wetherell (1995) as analytic resources, they include: practices and resources; construction and description; content; rhetoric and ideological dilemmas; stake and accountability; and cognition and action.

Practices and resources

According to Potter and Wetherell (1995), answering discourse analytic questions requires a focus on both discursive practices and resources. Discursive 'practices' can be understood as what people do with their talk and writing, for example, mobilising a particular version to shift responsibility for events elsewhere, and 'resources' as the devices, category systems, narrative characters and 'interpretative repertoires' people draw on in their discursive practices. Both draw on different strands of analytic thought: the former 'conversational organisation' (Sacks, 1992) and rhetoric

(Billig, 1987), and the latter, 'discourse research', which draws on the notion of interpretative repertoires used to sustain different social practices. The aim of discourse analysis for social psychology is to contribute to our understanding of issues of identity, the nature of mind, constructions of self, other and the world and the conceptualisation of social action and interaction.

Construction and description

Discourse analysis is concerned with how discourse is constructed to perform social actions. It is also concerned with the immediate upshot of the versions they assemble, and how people's versions of the world, in the course of their interaction, are sustained over longer periods of time as part of ideological practices. Discourse analysis also has an interest in methods of description and how versions become established as credible, realistic versions rhetorically sustainable and independent of the speaker.

Content

Connected to the emphasis on construction is an emphasis on content. Within traditional social psychology, content is taken to be secondary to the real business of social interaction. For example, instead of focusing on the social cognitive aspects of attribution of poor people's accounts (internal verses external attribution), discourse analysts focus on the actual practices of giving an account within the ideological context. Thus discourse analysis treats content as literally where the action is.

Rhetoric

Attention to rhetoric concerns in talk has provided another important contribution to discourse analytic research. Rhetorical analysis has been particularly enlightening in exploring the way people's versions of actions, that is, features of the world and of their own mental lives, are designed to counter real or potential alternatives (Billig, 1991). This concern with rhetoric orientates an analyst to a world of social conflict. On a broader scale, the examination of rhetoric may also be revealing in understanding the organisation of 'ideology' and 'power' by looking at the social history of rhetorical moves.

Stake and Accountability

Stake and accountability are pervasive members' concerns and should therefore become a focus for analysts of discourse. Within the interaction between people and groups, people, including collectives (for example, corporations, governmental departments, and income support) treat each other as agents with a personal or institutional stake or interest in their actions.

The referencing of such stake is one important way of discounting the significance of an action or reworking its nature. For example, an offer can be discounted as merely an attempt to influence, a blaming may be also discounted by some as a product of spite. Potter and Wetherell (1995) also note that the converse is also possible, where participants anticipate this

affect by designing their accounts or conduct, on a particular occasion, so as to minimise their stake in the outcome. In doing so, they attend to their accountability within the conversational context.

Cognition in action

The last theme suggests that although discourse analysis has developed as an anti-cognitive position, it does in fact have plenty of explanatory power in relation to some of psychology's more traditional common 'mental' terms. In discourse analysis, however, when examining participant's practices, 'attitude talk' becomes inextricably tied up with issues of stake and the construction of factual versions, and forms part of a more broader ideological field in which one takes up a speaking position and is positioned (Davies & Harre, 1990). Although they take an anti-cognitive position, it does not mean they are not concerned with psychology's more traditional cognitive concerns. To the contrary, discourse analysis provides a novel theoretical and analytic approach which looks at how attitudes and attributions are played out by speaking subjects as part of social action.

Discourse analytic tools

Conversation analysis - rhetorical techniques

As mentioned previously, discursive 'practices' can be understood as what people do with their talk and writing, for example, mobilising a particular version to shift responsibility for events elsewhere. Discursive practices utilised in the various accounts of poverty practice draw on the craft of

'conversational organisation (Sacks, 1992; Schegloff, 1992) and rhetoric (Billig, 1987). Firstly, conversational craft is practised by participants in their talk and can be identified using the following conversation analytic ideas: studying the way in which social organisation is achieved in participants talking practices, competence at 'turn taking', recognition of the sequential organisation of talk (that is, a question typically demands some sort of answer), (Wetherell, 1998), inter subjectivity and conversational repair (Schegloff, 1992); and secondly, rhetorical techniques: category entitlement; extreme case formulations; rhetoric of argument; lists and contracts, systematic vagueness; and vivid description (Edwards & Potter, 1992). These devices are all common organising features of naturally occurring 'talk-in-interaction', and are features of the fine grained detail of interaction (Wooffitt, 1992).

'Interpretative repertoires'

Interpretative repertoires are systematically related sets of terms, descriptions, and figures of speech, often used with stylistic and grammatical coherence. They can be understood as the structural and sequential features of discourse, which are utilised as a resource by participants in their talk (Wooffitt, 1992). Often they are organised around one (or more) central metaphor, or vivid image (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). They are historically developed and make up an important part of the common sense of culture, although some may be specific to certain institutional domains (Potter, 1995).

The notion of interpretative repertoires draws on a similar idea to the linguistic repertoire of Halliday (1978) and has been developed to do similar explanatory work as Foucaultian post-structuralist notions of 'discourse' (Parker, 1992). However, the interpretative repertoire as an analytic resource has been developed to allow for a little more discursive flexibility than post structuralist notions of 'discourse' in that it can be selectively drawn on or reworked according to the particular context.

The notion of interpretive repertoires allows us to look at the way people use words or terms to accomplish a certain purpose, and are a way of understanding the content of discourse and how it is organised (Potter, 1995). The 'variability' of use of interpretative repertoires plays an important analytic focus for discourse analysts. In conversational practice, participants commonly draw on a number of repertoires, moving between them as they perform different social actions. Interpretative repertoires comprise members methods for making sense in a particular context. The whole phrase need not be spelt out in detail to evoke the repertoire. Reference to key fragments of the particular argument (e.g. 'dole bludger') are sufficient to evoke the relevant context of argumentation (Wetherell, 1998).

Chapter 4

THE FOCUS OF THE PRESENT STUDY

Having introduced the theoretical, methodological and analytic underpinnings of the research stance I have taken, that is, the analysis of interpretative repertoires in situated practice, I will now set out a number of objectives that will inform the particular research practice.

Firstly, I wish to capture the dynamics of the competing accounts and interests of those contributing to the poverty debate at the particular time in Aotearoa/NZ. Secondly, I wish to examine the personal implications for people claiming to be poor in this particular political context. That is, what does it mean to be poor? Thirdly, I wish to explore the conversational practices of being 'poor' from a discourse analytic position by looking at turns of talk and the uptake of subjectivity for group members. Further, I wish to consider this conversational practice in the broader conversational context of the poverty debate in 1996.

My personal interests in the topic

In addition to the theoretical knowledge obtained in social construction literature at Canterbury University, the choice of topic and research design have been heavily influenced by my experiences as a welfare beneficiary. As a sole caregiver of two children for the past twelve years, and student for nine of those, my experiences of living on the domestic purposes benefit have been enlightening. Apart from the immediate day to day restrictions of

financial resources, I soon learned that as a welfare beneficiary, I qualified as 'the poor' when it came to seeking assistance.

At times I felt like I was part of the 'underclass', such as when waiting for long periods crammed in a Social Welfare office with tired or sick, crying children, only to find my request could not be processed and I had to return the next day. Other regular occurrences included having my benefit cut off without notice, leading to the dishonouring of cheques, the incurring of default fees and a disrupted budget, and being challenged over my preference to buy better quality (and hopefully longer-lasting) items for home and family rather than the cheapest available. It's both difficult and humiliating to have to explain to children, eager to blend in with their peers, why a case manager from Income Support (who has never met them) can have such a strong influence over what they can wear and do on a daily basis. Continuously needing to defend any personal purchases or other 'luxury items' was similarly frustrating.

There were more positive moments, however. I had the flexibility to take the children to school and pick them up, and then to be with them rather than having to rely on others to provide care. Special concessions for the gym, movies, doctors, prescriptions and so forth were also available. Interestingly, my gender also provided some unexpected advantages. Unlike my similarly-disposed female friends, who were consistently criticised for their 'reckless and/or irresponsible decision' to raise children alone, I

received encouragement and accolades for my 'courageous and selfless act'. My former spouse received a level of criticism for her uncaring and 'un-motherly' act of passing responsibility for the children to me, their father, which appeared at odds with that awarded to fathers who similarly abdicated care giving responsibilities.

Overall, the experience of living on the DPB has given me an awareness that my experience as a sole parent/DPB recipient is 'my' experience. Being 'poor', to me, did not necessarily mean going hungry or going without. I had a flexibility in my day which was not available to other 'well off' working people I knew.

Beginning the research process

After initial contact with Barnardos, permission was given to use focus group material previously collected by a senior Barnardos staff member, conditional on the obtaining of ethical approval from the Massey University Human Ethics Committee and consent from all participants in the focus groups. As a caution against the possibility that retrospective permission may be impossible to obtain in all instances, a second research design was developed whereby the researcher would conduct focus groups on poverty within the Palmerston North area.

Approval was subsequently obtained from the Massey University Human Ethics committee for both research designs. At this point, copies of the

application, information and consent forms (see Appendices A, A1, A2 & A3) were sent to the Barnardos representative at the Wellington F.A.I.R. Centre, to be distributed to the original focus group participants. This process was utilised in order to maintain confidentiality of research participants.

Written consent was obtained from all focus group participants, primarily as a result of the dedicated work of Kathleen Livingston at the Wellington Centre, who followed up on those who did not initially reply to the mailing or who had changed address.

The next step involved transcribing the four audio tapes from the two focus groups. One group had only two participants plus the coordinator, while the other had eight participants and the coordinator. The participants were all current or former clients of Barnardos, and some were currently working for the organisation. All of the members had children and were experiencing financial hardship. The coordinator noted that participants had chosen the title *living with financial hardship* rather than poverty as a focus group name.

Transcription took considerable time as, in places, it was difficult to distinguish between voices and capture the conversational dynamics. At times, participants spoke at once, while at others, sections of dialogue were inaudible, even after multiple listening. However, after considerable attention, the majority of the transcripts were completed to a conversational

dynamic standard similar to that advocated by Atkinson and Heritage (1984) as suitable for analysis.

Working with the data

After the transcription process, I began to read the transcripts in order to become fully familiar with the material. I then began a system of coding for any obvious themes that became apparent. A number of themes were initially identified, however, these were re-conceptualised or re-defined further along in the process of analysis.

In the process of coding for the themes in focus groups, other patterns or uses of particular conversational devices became apparent. These were identified as rhetorical conversational resources (extreme case formulations, vivid description, systematic vagueness, narrative, lists and contracts, category entitlement) used to manage the conversational activity (Edwards & Potter, 1992).

At the same time, editorial-type material from the media about poverty or the poverty debate, during the 1996 and 1997 period, was identified and coded in order to contextualise the poverty talk in a broader conversational turn prior to the focus group. Newspaper and magazine articles were selected and four broad themes identified for use in the analysis.

The next task involved the process of crafting the focus group discussion to

make sense in the broader conversational context provided by the analysis of media interests. Similar resources utilised from both analyses were identified, and exemplified in the conversational turns of the focus group members. The discussion of the analysis in light of the research objectives was then carried out.

Chapter 5

ANALYSIS - 'FIRST TURN IN CONVERSATION'

The metaphor I have chosen for organising the different analytic contributions is that of 'the conversation'. As a conversation is an interlocutory accomplishment of social action, it makes sense to consider the current talk produced by the members of the focus group, as conversation analysts do, in conversational 'turns'. Conversational turns signal potential sites for the active business of inter subjective activity (Schegloff, 1992).

However, I suggest that the metaphor of 'the conversation' be extended to the focus groups conversational accomplishment as a group. If one is to consider the current talk of the focus group, one needs to refer back to prior conversational 'turns' informing the current speaking. I suggest this can be done by examining the print media as the site of the 'first turn'. In the first part of the analysis, I will introduce the interpretative repertoires in the media to talk about poverty at the time. Next, I will discuss the 'second turn' which includes examining accountability issues, category entitlement, and use of focus group interpretative repertoires. The analysis will conclude with consideration of the situated practice of focus group members talk. From this point on I shall refer to the various interpretative repertoires simply as 'repertoires'.

Interpretative repertoires in the media

I will illustrate how the media of the time by representing different perspectives and interests in their reporting of events, reproduce certain images and identities for those associated with the poverty debate. These images and identities can be understood as being organised around the repertoires. Four repertoires were identified which occurred consistently within the media text: the 'social security as destructive' repertoire; the 'dissolute character' repertoire; the 'resourcefulness' repertoire; and the 'absolutely impoverished' repertoire. Each will be discussed in turn.

The 'social security as destructive' repertoire

The choice of terms used to label this repertoire can be explained as follows. In addition to its relevance to welfare (see Chapter One), the term 'social welfare' has also been used to describe a particular relationship between the State and its recipients. As Becker (1997) mentions, the term suggests a policing mechanism, with claimants viewed as criminals, to be policed, checked, investigated, and controlled. The next descriptive word used in the repertoire, 'destructive', was used to signify the act of 'warning' (caution), of 'catastrophic' impending danger, and is illustrated below.

"Welfare's fallout - A major documentary warns that our social welfare system is creating a time bomb (Campbell, 1997).

The preceding extract illustrates the use of the destructive metaphor in the media accounts. *Welfare's fallout* also suggests a sense of impending

disaster. The word 'fallout', I suggest, refers to the aftermath of a disaster of nuclear proportions, such as that associated with post war Hiroshima. Another possible interpretation of this 'nuclear' term is the relationship to the breaking down, or splitting of atoms in a nuclear explosion. The inference being that there are too many stray electrons, putting at risk other 'whole' atoms. The combined use of the fallout metaphor with *time bomb* further produces a sense of fear, or imminent disaster. Welfare is potentially a bomb and it's about to go off!

The 'dissolute character' repertoire

The 'dissolute character' repertoire, as used in the media depicts the poor as indifferent to moral restraint, shiftless, and lacking in resource or ambition. Such images also relate to the notion of the 'underclass', a term currently being utilised in America, regarding the defective nature of poor people's motivations, moral character and behaviour (Reed, 1990). I suggest this particular repertoire involves the blaming of a certain group of (poor) people as a rhetorical device to manage accountability concerns or 'stake' in the debated issues. By discrediting 'the poor', one lessens one's responsibility for costly intervention. Images often used to characterise welfare recipients involve teenage mothers, unemployed men, youth, and ex-criminals. Illustrations of the dissolute character repertoire are presented below.

....Anybody going hungry in New Zealand has to be either too dim-witted to locate their nearest Social Welfare office,or a slave to expensive vices which consume their weekly food budget..(Everton, 1996).

I suggest that the reference to *anybody going hungry* draws on the 'absolutely impoverished' repertoire discussed below. The invocation of *slave to expensive vices* suggests images of time spent at the Casino, drinking, and generally 'living it up'. This characterisation of people as *slaves to expensive vices* places responsibility for the situation solely in the hands of the hungry person, with the *dim-witted* reference suggesting that those experiencing poverty are less intelligent than the 'average' person. I suggest that the dissolute character representation is also related to notions of the 'underclass' (Reed, 1990), a reference used to identify poor people by their behavioural problems as a distinct group of people. In the next illustration, further reference is made to beneficiaries (i.e. poor people) by their behavioural deficiencies.

"they drink / smoke / buy lotto tickets", ... there are family tax credits for low income earners with children; could beneficiaries please just get their acts together and find a job.... (McLoughlin, 1996).

In the above quote, reference is made to the hoary old rebukes *"yes, but they drink / smoke / buy lotto tickets"*. This example is similar to the *slave to expensive vices* reference cited in the previous quote. Both these examples illustrate the 'dissolute character' repertoire. In the following example, New Zealand first party leader Winston Peters is quoted using reference to welfare recipients (poor people) as 'bums'.

... Among the public, the urge to "throw the bums off Welfare" is merely one response to a genuine social problem....(Campbell, 1997)

The use of the term *bums* or *throwing bums off welfare* as a public response to a genuine social problem characterises welfare recipients as a shiftless and lazy bunch of people.

The 'resourcefulness' repertoire

The 'resourcefulness' repertoire describes or supports the notion of skill in practice. The following use of this repertoire suggests a sense of proficiency, competence, mastery in life style, characteristic of poor people.

...Instead of chocolate biscuits there is baking, homemade jam and jars preserves; brown bread and rice; vegetables from the garden; insulation tape around the windows; handmade clothes and curtains; library books and second-hand toy's... ...It's not that Philip is idle. Survival on the dole is a full time job. All around the house are signs of his industry: carpentry jobs, painting, and gardening... (Legat, 1996).

'Absolutely impoverished' repertoire.

The 'absolutely impoverished' repertoire draws on images of starvation, and total lack of resource as a sign of real poverty. This repertoire has been drawn on frequently as a measuring device against claims of poverty in New Zealand/Aotearoa by right wing politicians to deflect responsibility for costly welfare intervention . Examples of this repertoire can be seen in the following media examples:

...One time Prime Minister Jim Bolger exclaimed ...there is no poverty in New Zealand ...he'd been into schools and not seen any starving children, but instead, rather a lot of plump ones... (Legat, 1996).

...Thirty one Manukau City schools feed up to 1,000 children a week; food banks remain with us; emergency houses are full and the incidence of rheumatic fever, a disease characteristic of developing countries, remains high....(Legat, 1996).

"My mother used to scrimp and save. I just scrimp."... ..."I have gum disease. They blame it on my diet. Yes, I have a poor diet, the diet of the poor."...(Campbell, 1998).

The above interpretative repertoires: the 'social security as destructive', 'dissolute character', 'resourcefulness', and the 'absolutely impoverished' repertoire, may be considered as a slice through the conversing community at the time. These repertoires capture some of the underlying social action being performed by the different groups' interests. They have been used as conversational resources by the different the competing accounts within the public debate about individual verses state responsibility for welfare provision. I suggest these repertoires also provide the discursive back cloth or the 'first conversational turn' for the focus group discussion to follow. Now I will explore the second conversational turn, that is, the focus groups' accounts.

Chapter 6

ANALYSIS - 'SECOND CONVERSATIONAL TURN'

Accountability - Barnardos

If one is to look critically at the account being produced, and take into account how the 'interests' of the different groups are managed, then 'accountability', that is, issues of agency and responsibility (Edwards & Potter, 1992) become an important focus. In terms of the interests of the focus group members, the first speaker in the group is the facilitator. As a representative of Barnardos, she structures and facilitates the programme and interaction within the group and has certain responsibilities to the organisation. Barnardos also relies on funding from the government and, to an extent, have to deal with the dilemma of 'stake' in influencing their reputation or organisational identity as a charitable organisation. I suggest that the role or interests of the organisation also need to be maintained within the group discussion.

At another level, the focus group members have a certain type of relationship with Barnardos as clients. Services, such as work opportunities and child care assistance, are provided by the organisation for group members. Any information they disclose could be potentially damaging to their service entitlement so the group have a particular relationship even prior to their commencement of talk.

Although the 'discursive stage' has already been set by the previous

conversational turns (media text), the introduction by the focus group facilitator below provides a working structure for the group and attends to the issues of organisational interests discussed previously. It also becomes a 'lead in' for the group members to introduce themselves in the personal introductory narratives that follow. Three sections, provided by the facilitator, offer a structure for the group members to work with in their production of a compelling account. These three sections are as follows.

Firstly:

... looking at you relating something about yourself uhm so we just get a bit of a picture about you and your situation....

Secondly;

.... we will talk about uhm its really your stories of how one would survive, or how one is surviving on a low income and what sort of things you do to manage what things are you likely to what's good and what's bad and how are you envisaging the future and things like that and the areas we can look at are, income and expenditure, housing, work, health, education and work recreation....

Thirdly;

.....we will just briefly look at is there any consensus about, how,....the most important thing that would help a person on a low income family.....
....So could we just hear perhaps a little about your family, the size of your family,..... ..... so that we have a little bit of a snap shot picture of the type of people this does affect uhm

In the next section, I will explain how the warrant to speak for the group members as credible speakers is established through establishing 'category

entitlement', a rhetorical technique used in successful conversational practice (Edwards & Potter, 1992).

'Category entitlement'

The veracity of a report is warranted by the entitlements of the category membership of the speaker; people in particular categories official, unofficial are expected to know certain things and have certain epistemological skills. Category membership may be given or worked up by the member (Sacks, 1979).

Given that certain groups are afforded certain epistemological skills, according to their established category entitlement, what are the implications of this for the focus groups' accounts of living with financial hardship? What I will illustrate here is how the focus group members' 'warrant' to speak, as an important conversational resource, is established. As Sacks (1979) has noted above, category membership may be given or worked up.

I suggest that category entitlement/membership for the focus group members as legitimately poor people may be given to the group through their association with Barnardos as a charitable organisation. Barnardos are a social service agency which helps lower income families.

Establishing the credibility of the organisation and thus, by association, the

credibility of its members, assigns category entitlement by virtue of membership in a facilitated (and directional) focus group. The task for members is to 'work up' their personal category membership. This process begins at the start of the transcript where the group members introduce themselves. The task of working up category membership is aided by providing personal 'narratives', which are rhetorical devices used to increase the plausibility of an account (Gergen, 1988). Examples of the members working up category entitlement are shown below.

1 *...I'm Debbie, I'm the (.....), I am actually here today as a single parent on a low income. I have one daughter who is 7. I rent in (.....), my income comes partly from Barnardos because I work 15 hours a week and the rest of it comes from a top up from DPB.....*

2 *...Well, I'm Richard, I'm married and have been for 9 years,have 3 children,.. ... Uhm.and I am a student with Victoria University doing social work studies and that's why I'm on such a low income...*

3 *...I'm Julie and I've got two children 11 and 13 uhm and we are in our own home and I work for Barnardos it is great and I really enjoy it, uhm.*

4 *...I'm Sue and I have just recently been married and have a little boy he is nearly two. My husband works, and I work part time, but we still get a top up from social welfare, not very much!....*

5 *...My name is Caroline, uhm, I'm a single a parent with three children 7 1/2, 6, 4 1/2 uhm .. I am currently on the DPB and 50% of that goes on the rent. Uhm I live in the (.....) area I have been on the DPB for 3 1/2 years and it's like there is no*

future.....

6 *....I'm Sonia and I am a working women now, and I have a husband and three boys aged 7, 9 no, 7, 10 and 12.. just had a birthday. Uhm we have been through the poverty stuff.....*

7 *...I am Donna, I am a single parent with three children. Holly is 15, Dean's 12,...10 Ahm we live in (.....) we wouldn't be able to do it without the garden ....*

Within the preceding dialogue the members of the group identify themselves by giving a 'snap shot' picture of the type of people they are. Within these introductory narratives, 1-7, participants commonly describe having dependents. Other identifiable categories, or possibilities for group membership include being: *on the DPB* (domestic purposes benefit); *a single parent*; *working part time*; *a student*; *married; in our own home; and a working woman.* All of the aforementioned descriptions have contributed to the mobilisation of the groups category membership(s) and serve the purpose of qualifying them for the position of credible speakers, within the bounds of giving an account of living with financial hardship.

Having laid claim to category membership, what are the implications for the group members personally, if they identify with being poor? How do they manage the more problematic aspects of being a member of this particular group in light of how they, as members, have been characterised in the media text, for example by the 'dissolute character' repertoire, 'absolutely poor' repertoire, 'social security as destructive' repertoire, and the

'resourcefulness' repertoire?

I suggest this is managed by members drawing on conversational resources. These include interpretative repertoires and a variety of rhetorical techniques which indemnify against the successful undermining of the previous accounts that have produced problematic identities for the credibility of focus group members in their current conversational practice. In the following section, the interpretative repertoires I have identified in the focus group members account of living with financial hardship will be presented.

Focus Group 'Interpretative repertoires'

I suggest that the groups' discursive activities can be organised around five interpretative repertoires: 'financial hardship' repertoire; 'real DPB person' repertoire; 'catch 22' repertoire; 'working the system' repertoire; and the 'resourcefulness' repertoire.

'Financial hardship' repertoire

The 'financial hardship' repertoire refers to a particular type of talk, for example, not being well off, a single parent, a university student, and working part time. These are generally utilised where category membership of a 'poor' person is required. This repertoire can be seen in the talk in the focus group introductory narratives where the group establish category membership. Examples of these are given below.

> *....My name is Caroline, uhm, I'm a single a parent with three children 7 1 /2, 6, 4 1 /2 uhm .. I am currently on the DPB and 50% of that goes on the rent. Uhm I live in the (.....) area I have been on the DPB for 3 1 /2 years and it's like there is no future....!*

> *...I'm Debbie, I'm the (.....), I am actually here today as a single parent on a low income. I have one daughter who is 7. I rent in (.....), my income comes partly from Barnardos because I work 15 hours a week and the rest of it comes from a top up from DPB.....*

The 'real DPB person' repertoire

In the focus group text reference is made to a particular type of person, that

is, *the real DPB person.* I suggest this refers to a similar resource as the 'dissolute character' repertoire utilised in the media text at the time.

B *....so I mean, therefore I'll just sit down and get fatter and fatter and feel depressed and just turn into what they call a real D.P.B. person ..*

J *....but unless the stigma of the D.P.B. people, are given a chance, I won't be! Because no one is going to give me a job if they think, I'm what they think, D.P.B. people are!*

The group also talk about being *on the DPB* which I suggest refers to the particular lifestyle associated with being a social security/welfare recipient, and is related the 'social security as destructive' repertoire identified in the media accounts. What does it mean for this select group of people to be '*on the DPB*'? Given the characterisation of social security/welfare recipients by the media at the time, I would suggest the term has negative associations. Some examples of this are given below.

S: *....um and so now I'm on the D.P.B. I'm nothing, ...*

D: *...Yeh it keeps me happy and my independence and I feel like I'm not on the D.P.B. when I'm out working, because half the time I'm really embarrassed to be on the D.P.B.....*

J *....but they won't give it to me because I'm on the D.P.B. so I'm a scum bucket (mm).*

'Catch 22' repertoire

The 'catch 22' repertoire is a descriptive resource used in the focus group

which describes, in a narrative form, a circular trap or 'no-win' situation. Group members often referred to this as a 'catch 22' situation. This repertoire may also be seen co-articulating with the 'resourcefulness' repertoire as it also draws on the metaphor of 'skill' to describe how they manage this 'no win' situation in practice. Examples of this repertoire are shown below.

S: *It would have been better if I hadn't been working, we would have got more help if I had not been working, and we thought about that, and he would still have been at Polytech if I hadn't been working because he really enjoyed what he did and would love to go further with it but we just can't afford to we can't afford to have no money coming in unless I can get a full time job but uhm its one of those catch 22 situations we can't do it.*

S: *That's where you go through quality of life to,.. you do those things to get ahead, or do you actually do them them to get behind, and the way it is at the moment you actually get more behind by trying to get yourself ahead.*

D: *Because if you are on a benefit there is no incentive to save even if you could because as soon as you get x amount of dollars in the bank they start taking money away....*

'Working the system' repertoire

This repertoire refers to the members' need to, and skill at, getting around bureaucratic red tape. Reference to 'the system' implies that there is some sort of order imposed. The adjective 'working' refers to the activity of getting around the inflexible. The following are examples of the 'working the system' repertoire.

C: *Bring them in as a boarder in the shed out the back he can go on the DPB and you can go on unemployment and you'd be a darn sight better off .....I have lots of friends who talk like that...*

S: *When my husband lost his job all his holiday pay which came to quite an amount we go and put it all into someone else's account because we can't have it...*

D: *And I actually felt quite good, I lied at social welfare I said I have a whole lot of debt and I am going to pay it all off and I won't have any money in the bank.*

'Resourcefulness' repertoire

The 'resourcefulness' repertoire in the focus group, as in the media accounts, describes or supports the notion of skill in practice. This repertoire refers to various practices of proficiency, competency, mastery and ingenuity by people experiencing financial hardship. Some examples are illustrated below.

D: *... I worked since last year since I've been in this house and with the garden, trying to market myself, now I am doing green dollars I'm the cut flower lady, when they grow! (laugh) .....*

D: *... I actually hope that not my one year forecast but my 5 years in advance I might be actually working, I'm finishing my degree at the moment, and I am hoping that maybe in ...10 years that ultimately my degree will be finished! and I will have the qualifications to go and earn money, before my daughter hits secondary school when I will need the money to actually pay for her but I am hoping within 5 years to have nearly finished my degree!*

Having identified some of the interpretative repertoires utilised by the group, I will now explore how the members, individually and collaboratively, manage and maintain their established category membership as bona fide 'poor people'. A central organising principle for the analysis is the classic conversation analysis question, 'why this utterance here?' (Schegloff, 1992).

Chapter 7

ANALYSIS - REPERTOIRES IN SITUATED PRACTICE

As the group interacts in the production of a collaborative account of their poverty experience (the 'second turn' in the conversation), the members utilise conversational resources, that is, interpretative repertoires and rhetorical devices, to establish their own version of 'being poor'. Within this, they have to manage issues of personal agency and responsibility (i.e., accountability issues) as they arise. To maintain their identity as credible speakers, the group members also manage their category entitlement as persons experiencing financial hardship.

In the following turns of talk selected from one of the focus groups, I will demonstrate how group members, both individually and collectively, manage accountability issues (at a personal and collaborative level) through the use of the focus group repertoires and rhetorical devices. I will also demonstrate where these group members resist and moderate discursively three of the media repertoires (the 'social security as destructive', dissolute character', and the 'absolutely impoverished' repertoires). First, I will illustrate this with Debbie's introductory narrative. Debbie introduces herself first and Kate enters the dialogue.

2D: I'm Debbie, I'm the (.....), I am actually here today as a single parent on a low income. I have one daughter who is 7, I rent in Richmond, my income comes partly from Barnardos because I work 15 hours a week and the rest of it comes from a top up from DPB. Uhm what do I need now. ....

from a top up from DPB. Uhm what do I need now. ....

3K: You are living in Nelson?

4D: In Richmond.

5K: In Richmond, so you have got transport and stuff like that?

6D: I've got a car, which goes most of the time.

7K: It's quite important you know, it gets you around.

8D: Yeah.

9K: Thanks.

In the first part of this narrative sequence, Debbie is involved in the process of establishing category entitlement for herself individually, and the group, collectively. By mentioning that she is a single parent on a low income and that she receives a top up from the DPB, Debbie draws on the 'financial hardship' repertoire. In the next part of the sequence, Kate inquires where Debbie is living and how she gets around. In her reply, Debbie discloses that she owns a car. I suggest this disclosure is problematic. If one is to take up the position of being 'poor', how is it one is able to own and have the use of a car? It is possible that owning a car could be considered inconsistent with the 'financial hardship' repertoire.

Debbie manages this dilemma, responding in her own defence, *I've got a car, which goes most of the time* (6D). In the last part of the sentence, Debbie attempts to clarify her position by qualifying that although she owns a car it is not just any car. It's one that is only functional part of the time, not reliable, not a 'normal' car, and definitely not a rich person's car. In disclosing that she has this type of car, she is appealing to her audience not

to be too hasty in eliminating her from the category membership of one experiencing financial hardship. Kate assists Debbie, jumping in in co-defence, *it's quite important you know, it gets you around.* Debbie agrees. By drawing attention away from the issue at stake, Kate appeals to the usefulness of the object in question rather than the status of the object as a material possession. Shegloff (1992) refers to these type of interjections as conversational 'repairs, used when there is something problematic for the speaking subject in a previous utterance.

I would also suggest that in drawing on the 'financial hardship' repertoire, both Debbie and Kate resist the media text repertoire of the 'absolutely impoverished', firstly by disclosing and then by qualifying the status and function of the car. That is, one can experience financial hardship and not have the characteristics (e.g., visibly starving) pertinent to the 'absolutely impoverished' repertoire.

In the following introductory narrative, Richard also engages in discursive work to manage issues of accountability.

10R: Well, I'm Richard, I'm married and have been for 9 years,have 3 children,2 boys, 4 and 3, and a daughter, 3 weeks old... Uhm.and we moved over from the UK 3 years ago and moved from Wakefield which is I'm not sure how far that is about 41kms. Uhm and I am a student with Vic University doing social work studies and that's why I'm on such a low income and we have got a house, sort of, a mortgage,which is on a fixed rate, interest only, it's the only way ....!

11K: Are you receiving a student allowance?

12R: Yes a student allowance and the family benefit.

During his introductory narrative, Richard attributes his position as a low income earner to being a student. By referring to his identity as a student, Richard draws on the 'financial hardship' repertoire (as financial hardship is characteristic of student life). In doing so, he also resists the 'dissolute character' repertoire and its associated identity of 'poor' people being wayward.

In this narrative sequence, Richard also discloses *we have got a house sort of mortgage, which is on fixed rate, interest only, its the only way.* Revealing that he and his partner own a house could potentially undermine his credibility of being a 'financially strapped' student and invoke an identity inconsistent with one experiencing financial hardship. According to the 'absolutely impoverished' repertoire, poor people don't generally have enough food to eat, let alone own a house. Richard conducts conversational 'repair' (Schegloff, 1992) with the utterance, *we have got a house, sort of, a mortgage.* This statement indicates that Richard and his partner do not actually own the house, the bank owns at least part of it. The next part of his statement *which is on fixed rate, interest only* indicates that Richard and his partner are only able to afford to pay the mortgage interest and, furthermore, only by using the fixed interest rate scheme.

The narrative sequence is concluded using an 'extreme case formulation' (Pomerantz, 1986), *it's the only way.* This rhetorical device, by drawing on

extremes of relevant dimensions of judgment, can be used to make a report or version seem warranted. In this instance, it appeals to the audience's judgment that there are no exceptions to the reported events. That is, having a house on a low income is only possible using a fixed rate, interest only mortgage arrangement.

Similar to Debbie, Richard discursively appeals to his audience that they make a concession and not eliminate him from the category membership of one experiencing financial hardship. In doing so, he attempts to extend the boundaries of this category membership to include the discordant aspects of his disclosure, that he is a home owner. In hedging a new identity, 'low income earner/come home owner', Richard is also resisting identification with the 'absolutely impoverished' repertoire (i.e., one can experience financial hardship without being 'absolutely impoverished'). I suggest that Richard further resists identification with the 'dissolute character' repertoire by claiming to own a house.

Jessica, in this next narrative, also does discursive work to manage accountability issues. However, her accountability concerns are peculiar to her own experiences of financial hardship.

Similar to Debbie and Richard, Jessica's introductory sequence uses 'narrative' as a rhetorical device (Gergen, 1988) to work up category entitlement. She starts off by introducing herself.

15J: I'm Jessica and I've got two children, 11 and 13, uhm, and we are in our own home and I work for Barnardos...

Interestingly, though Jessica mentions she owns a home, unlike Richard, she does not get involved in justifying it. Possibly, because Richard has already qualified this disclosure discursively, Debbie does not need to. That is, it is no longer considered a problematic issue for the group's account.

After disclosing family demographics, that is, 'low income earner /working /with dependents', Jessica discusses her desire to further her education at polytech in order to pursue her work ambition of working with disadvantaged people. She also cites her dilemma of having dependents and the difficulty in getting funding for part time study. At this point, Kate invites more dialogue about Jessica's work status by asking *umh, have you got a job?* The following dialogue ensued in 17 J.

17J: I do lots of jobs, lots of jobs, I've got about 3 different jobs

18K: Really!

19J: So we all work very very hard and my partner is on a I see it as a low wage uhm I don't really know what low wages are but for all regards he is with the same firm for 7 years and uhm getting $11.75 an hour, so he is working on not a great wage and uhm I think everything has gone up in this country, mortgages have gone up, rates have gone up anything to do with housing, groceries have gone up, school fees have gone up and uhm every things gone up, but wages haven't! uhm..the government needs to be aware of that!

Jessica concedes *I do lots of jobs, lots of jobs, I've got about 3 different jobs... so we all work very very hard.* In terms of conversational activity, Jessica seems to labour over the issue of her work status, making it clear that there is very little time left in her day to indulge herself in any type of 'work shy behaviour' characteristic of the 'dissolute character' repertoire used in the media text. By mentioning she is working so many jobs, Jessica draws on images characteristic of the 'resourcefulness' repertoire, for example, she is 'hardworking' and skilful.

Within this narrative, a number of rhetorical devices can also be identified. These assist Jessica to manage accountability issues and maintain her category entitlement as one experiencing financial hardship. First, in 19J, Jessica uses 'systematic vagueness', *I don't really know what low wages are* . 'Systematic vagueness' refers to the use of vague global formulations and is the rhetorical converse of 'vivid description' where rich contextual detail is given (Edwards & Potter, 1992a). Systematic vagueness can make an inference more difficult to undermine or rebut (Edwards & Potter, 1992).

Jessica displays caution in disclosing her partners hourly rate, *my partner is on a, I see it as a low wage uhm. I don't really know what low wages are* ... and *..but for all regards he is with the same firm for 7 years and uhm getting $11.75 an hour, so he is working on not a great wage..* By using 'systematic vagueness' and positioning herself as one who is not an authority or informed about current wage rates, Jessica manages her and her partner's

identity as a couple experiencing financial hardship, thus avoiding the possibility of a rebuttal. I suggest that it is possible that others in the group may be on a lower hourly rate than Jessica's partner, and that they might interpret $11.75 as a reasonable, or more than reasonable, wage. Jessica could be concerned that her disclosure might be interpreted as inconsistent with the 'financial hardship' repertoire that is being utilised by herself and the group.

Second, Jessica, in the second half of her introductory narrative (19J), utilises a rhetorical device known as 'rhetoric of argument' (Billig, 1987; Potter & Wetherell, 1988).

> *..uhm I think everything has gone up in this country mortgages have gone up, rates have gone up anything to do with housing, groceries have gone up, school fees have gone up and uhm every things gone up....but wages haven't! and uhm the government needs to be aware of that!....*

By using this device, utilising logical, syllogistical, and other well known argument types, claims are made to seem external to the speaker's interests (Edwards and Potter, 1992). In the text above, Jessica suggests that pertinent factors, *housing, groceries and school fees*, which are external to her and beyond her control, are responsible for the current financial hardship being experienced. By minimising her interests and making an appeal to a seemingly logical and sensible deduction, Jessica's narrative commands more credibility. This is further assisted by her use of a 'three part list':

housing, food and education costs, which the literature suggests possess rhetorical importance in their ability to convey completeness and representativeness (Edwards & Potter 1992).

Sarah's narrative (28S-31K), which follows Jessica's, also provides an example of negotiation of subjectivity in the process of conversational activity.

28S: I'm Sarah and I have just recently been married and have a little boy he is nearly two. My husband works and I work part time but we still get a top up from social welfare ...My husband he is actually an Accountant so you would think that would be reasonable. We rent a house from my brother in law, so we are really lucky that way umh ...but apart from that, we...yeah....mm...(small laugh) ..

29K: And you live in the Nelson area?

30S: Right in Nelson town, we are very lucky because my brother-in-law owns the house and we get it cheaper than .....

31K: Excellent.

Sarah provides minimal personal detail (one child, recently married and both work) and then mentions she gets a top up from social welfare. By disclosing this, Sarah draws on the 'financial hardship' repertoire, as financial hardship is characteristic of those receiving welfare assistance.

Sarah then discloses *my husband, he is actually an Accountant, so you would think that would be reasonable,* which potentially affects the credibility of her account of financial hardship. However, her disclosure displays caution in

saying *he is actually an Accountant*, not just *he is an Accountant.* By using the adverb, *actually*, (i.e., 'strange as it may seem'), Sarah warns or prepares the reader to the possible inconsistency which follows. In her following comment, *so you would think that would be reasonable.*, Sarah implies that their situation is anything but reasonable, or what you would normally expect of an Accountant's family. Resisting being positioned as a 'rich Accountant's wife', Sarah hedges an appeal to consider their situation as an 'exception' and endeavours to negotiate her identity as one who is experiencing financial hardship.

Sarah further manages accountability issues in her next sentence. She reports *we rent a house from my brother in law, so we are really lucky that way.* By using the word 'lucky' (meaning 'obtaining by chance'), Sarah implies that the only reason they are able to afford the house that they are renting is due to their good fortune in having a generous brother-in-law.

Helen's introductory narrative, 32H, provides further examples of the discursive work being done to manage accountability issues. She begins:

32H: I'm Helen, and I am a working women now, and I have a husband and three boys aged 7, 9, no 7, 10, and 12, just had a birthday. Uhm, we have been through the poverty stuff and we probably what you would call on a medium income now, which is a little bigger really, because we are not really well of yet either, but... it's got its own trappings, because you start having to buy your own car and pay your mortgage properly and things like that, and uhm we still haven't got the money for the doctor and we still skimp... I mean that our bank balance is on nil continually so its a real

case of just surviving still...

34H: ...My husband went to Polytech last year for 6 months, and uhm, I would like to put in a comment about the lack of help, I suppose the lack of benefits...He did it to try and get ahead, he is on $11 something an hour which is not high, when our mortgage and rates and everything just keep on going up!... uhm he did it to try and get ahead, but because I was working, .. more than $9,000 worth a year, I could not get any social welfare benefits and he could not receive the student allowance...

41H: ...It would have been better if I hadn't been working, we would have got more help if I had not been working, and we thought about that, and he would still have been at Polytech if I hadn't been working because he really enjoyed what he did and would love to go further with it but we just can't afford to, we just can't afford to have no money coming in unless I can get a full time job,..but uhm, its one of those catch 22 situations. We can't do it.

In the first line of her introductory narrative, 32H, Helen states *I am a working women now.* This disclosure could cause one to wonder about what type of identity Helen may have assumed prior to her commencing her current work engagement. I suggest that her claim to be a 'working woman' signals her resistance to the 'dissolute character' repertoire.

Having mentioned she is a working woman, Helen establishes category membership by saying she has *been through the poverty stuff.* In turn 34H, Helen reasons that she and her partner have both endeavoured to 'get ahead' by working and studying, thus invoking the 'resourcefulness' repertoire and further resisting the 'dissolute character' repertoire. However, despite now working and having a medium income, she says this has *its own trappings.* Some of the traps she talks of are having to buy a car, pay the mortgage

'properly', and not being able to get social welfare benefits or student allowance. So, despite her working, *their bank balance is on nil*, they can't afford to go to the doctors, they *still skimp,* and it's *a real case of just surviving still.* She describes this as a *catch 22 situation.* That is, she utilises the 'catch 22' repertoire (i.e., despite her working, they still can't make it). Furthermore, by saying it's *a real case of just surviving,* Helen invokes images of the 'absolutely impoverished' repertoire. Here, rather than resisting the 'absolutely impoverished' repertoire as others have at various times, Helen utilises this repertoire to promote her category membership as someone experiencing financial hardship.

In the last section of her introductory narrative, 41H(above), Helen alludes to the possibility of her and her partner 'not working', as a solution to her intractable 'catch 22' situation *It would have been better if I hadn't been working, we would have got more help if I had not been working, and we thought about that.* This I propose, is an example her utilising the 'working the system' repertoire rhetorically, for the purpose of justifying how intractable their situation was.

Like other group members, Violet also manages accountability issues as she gives her account. She begins by describing her family.

46V: I am Violet, I am a single parent with three children. Heidi is 15, David's 12, Troy's' 10. Uhm, we live in Richmond, we wouldn't be able to do it without the garden.... ...with extra expenses, uhm, the services available, there for disabilities ...but you have

to fight all the time to get it...they don't say, look this is what you can have, ...this is what is available, you have to go and battle for what you know is allowed and I do know the system quite well now and I feel ...all the same uhm so the last couple of years have been hard financially on the benefit, but on a two family income ... and my rent is very high...also working and I have to decide whether, what I was going to do, what it costs, ...but I think without my garden, we would be on food parcels every fortnight.

Having talked about her family, Violet discloses that she lives in Richmond. As established in an earlier turn, Richmond is considered to be a more wealthy suburb of Nelson. Her disclosure of Richmond as her place of residence could be considered problematic for her category entitlement of one experiencing financial hardship. Violet manages this by conceding *we wouldn't be able to do it without the garden.* In saying this, Violet also draws on the 'resourcefulness' repertoire, thus resists the 'dissolute character' repertoire.

Violet then mentions that things *have been hard financially on the benefit.* By referring to her identity as a beneficiary, Violet draws on the 'financial hardship' repertoire as financial hardship is characteristic of receiving social security. Following this, she notes her rent is very high, another contributing factor to her low income.

In the final utterance of her introductory narrative, Violet summarises, *but I think without my garden, we would be on food parcels every fortnight.* Here, the 'resourcefulness repertoire' (having a garden) is used with the 'absolutely

impoverished' repertoire (*we would be on food parcels).* Violet utilises the 'absolutely impoverished' repertoire to qualify the importance of being resourceful.

Lee's introductory narrative below, L48, provides further examples of the use of rhetorical devices and interpretative repertoires within the text.

L48: My name is Lee and I am Barnardo's family support worker and my son is 15 years old and I have been on the benefit since Simon was 2 1 /2 and survived quite well, had the odd under the table cleaning job and then went back to Polytech for 2 years luckily the DPB paid for all my training and now I am working for Barnardos and I seem to be I know I am getting more money but I seem to be worse off, I don't get a lot of money because I only work 24 hours a week uhm but, I used to have flatmate boarders in to help pay for the rent ...

This narrative is organised rhetorically using 'rhetoric of argument' (Billig, 1987; Potter and Wetherell, 1988) in the form of an inductive argument. Lee presents a scenario which is in response to the premise, if people are poor, it is because they don't work, or they are lazy, that is, the 'dissolute character' repertoire. Lee retorts, she <u>has</u> continued her education, <u>is</u> now working, and is <u>still</u> poor!, despite her hard working endeavours,drawing on the ('resourcefulness' repertoire). In the process of drawing on the 'resourcefulness' repertoire Lee discloses that she has had *the odd under the table job.* This disclosure although being utilised as an example of her resourcefulness in managing her account also draws on 'working the system' repertoire as it alludes to the type of skilful endeavours people may have to

turn their hand to, even if it is unlawful. However, depending on the function one is performing in talk, this disclosure may be interpreted also as being related to the 'dissolute character' repertoire, as working to evade tax, may be considered a sign of the immoral type of behaviour characteristic of this repertoire.

In the following example from the focus group Christine talks about a particular dilemma she has experienced, beginning 137C.

137C Oh yeh cause I've found when I was, before I had Ben I was quite slim and I've got quite big now...and uhm I was starting to go to weight watchers ...for a start and ah, you know, they're really so kind to beneficiaries, instead of 14 dollars its 13 dollars, (ha ha) one dollar off! and then um, I've got to buy all the vegetables and stuff like that. I've never spent so much money shopping in my life, so I mean I can't even better my own body and self esteem, because I can't go out and buy all these foods.

138K 'Special' foods?

139C ...Yeh, cause I just can't afford it! Its cheaper for me to buy a big pack of fatty sausages or a pork chop than to buy the fruit and vegetables I need to have for my diet,...so I mean, therefore I'll just sit down and get fatter and fatter and feel depressed, and just turn into what they call a <u>real D.P.B. person</u>, I mean cause we've got such a stigma about us, that we're just fat, and lazy you know, basically!

This turn further illustrates how being 'poor' is not a simple matter. In resisting the stigma associated with being a welfare beneficiary, (i.e., 'dissolute character' repertoire), Christine manages her accountability concerns by engaging in considerable discursive work to explain her dilemma of not being able to afford the type of food she believes is necessary for a

healthy diet, and to facilitate her desired weight loss. She expresses despair at her lack of choice in this matter: *therefore I'll just sit down and get fatter and fatter and feel depressed,* (i.e., the 'catch-22' repertoire. She also discloses her further dilemma, that because she cannot afford a decent diet (i.e., 'financial hardship' repertoire), she will look even more like a 'real DPB person' (i.e., the 'real DPB person' repertoire). Thus Christine as for the other group members, struggles to maintain her category membership as one who is experiencing legitimate financial hardship, and works hard to resist the media rhetoric characterising beneficiaries as wayward.

Chapter 8

CONCLUSION - A FURTHER 'TURN IN TALK'

In keeping with the chosen analytic metaphor of the 'conversation', this conversational turn can been seen as the process of articulating the previous conversational turns for the purpose of producing an account that makes sense, in light of the objectives set by the analyst. To begin with, I refer back to the thesis question posed in the introduction. *From a social science perspective, the question posed is, how does one make sense of peoples' accounts of poverty during this period?*

As I have approached this question from a social constructionist, relativist philosophical standpoint, the objective of analysis has not been to examine the 'truthfulness' of the differing perspectives but rather, to examine how the different constructions or accounts are put together to serve different functions and interests of their users. If this is so, what meaning can be made of the use of the different rhetorical activities identified as descriptive resources in the analysis thus far? Below, I will briefly summarise and discuss the social action function of the rhetorical activities peculiar to the different conversational turns in the analysis.

The 'first turn' in conversation, that is the examination of the political context presented through the media text, produced four interpretative repertoires including the 'social security as destructive' repertoire, 'dissolute character' repertoire, 'resourcefulness' repertoire, and the 'absolutely

impoverished' repertoire. These discursive resources, I suggest, are 'relatively' representative of the political context of the public debate instigated through right wing political policy implemented between 1984 and 1999.

The 'social action' objective underlying the rhetoric generated during this period can be understood as organised around the interests of the different groups involved. If we understand the evidence of 'poverty' as acting to undermine confidence in market driven policies of the government, we can read the media repertoires as politically biased producing ideological effects, in that they function to support government policy and to refute any presence of poverty as the fault of the government.

For example, the function of the 'social security as destructive' repertoire presents welfare expenditure at crisis proportions and thus in need of 'cutting back' in order to prevent the destructive social consequences. Thus, the stage is set for changes by the government in welfare budgets.

The 'dissolute character' repertoire constructs 'people in need of assistance' as being responsible for their own dilemma by suggesting that they must be *...to dim - witted.... or, ...slaves to expensive vices...* therefore they are to blame, not the government. In terms of social action, this repertoire can be understood as a central organising discursive resource used by the politically conservative, interested parties identified in the media text.

The 'resourcefulness' repertoire, however, serves the function of managing the blame and responsibility for 'poverty' and 'poor people' by more liberal, left wing members of the community. It is used to resist the problematic aspects of identity offered by the 'dissolute character' repertoire. In the talk, this repertoire performs the social action of resisting responsibility for the accusations of 'state dependence' and lack of skill characteristic of the 'dissolute character' repertoire.

The 'absolutely impoverished' repertoire, functions to identify the overtly poor, that is, those who are 'starving' as the eligible category membership for receiving government assistance. By defining poor in this way, they absolve responsibility for the welfare of those not meeting their criteria.

In the second section of the analysis or the 'second turn' in conversation, five repertoires used in the Barnardos focus group talk were identified. These included: 'financial hardship' repertoire; 'real DPB person' repertoire; 'catch 22' repertoire; 'working the system' repertoire; and the 'resourcefulness' repertoire. These repertoires have a discursive interactive dynamic relationship with the media text repertoires.

The 'financial hardship' repertoire performs the social action of resisting the 'absolutely impoverished' repertoire as a qualifying measure for social security/welfare assistance, by drawing on more relative notions of poverty. It also functions to resist the 'dissolute character' repertoire by

extending category membership of 'poor' to other social identities, such as, Accountants' partners and students. People experiencing 'financial hardship' are thus not responsible for their dilemma.

Within the focus group talk, the 'real DPB person' repertoire is used in a satirical sense by the group members, in reference to their characterisation by the media text as 'wayward' (i.e. 'dissolute character' repertoire). Group members use this resource to achieve different functions at different times, sometimes to resist the negative associations of being a welfare recipient and other times, to qualify category membership.

The 'catch 22' repertoire is used to help manage the onus of personal responsibility for those who identify with living with financial hardship, within the poverty debate.

A 'working the system' repertoire is also peculiar to the talk of the focus group members. Revealing that members engage in such activities in other more public forum may result in making their account easy to rebut, as focus group members have already been identified as wayward characters by the media. However, in this forum, it helps to justify unlawful activities as a necessity for the members, to make ends meet.

The 'resourcefulness' repertoire, by characterising the poor as skilful and able, performs the social action effect of 'resisting a blaming' for the group

members, thus helping to thwart rebuttal by any problematic conservative political social action.

The interpretative repertoires and focus group practices of giving accounts of living with financial hardship, are not ideologically neutral. Talking about 'poverty' or any other similar political topic is not 'value' free and involves taking a moral stand on such issues. Evidence of poverty in Aotearoa/NZ during this period meant different things for different people. I suggest that the issues being debated, or the different interest of the different voices in debate at that time, produced a 'discursive problematic' for the focus group members. Members were constantly having to manage accountability issues at both a personal and group level, as claims to the category membership of 'being poor' invariably rely on negotiation and argument of multiple criteria for membership.

Thus being poor is not a simple matter. If you take up the identity of one who is 'poor', you are likely to incur the stereotypical characteristics associated with this category membership. However, as well as negotiating this category you also need to craft a new category membership of one who is not stereotypically poor, for example, one who owns a house or car, and manage them both as the conversation evolves. This process of negotiating multiple criteria for membership in talk highlights the discursive complexities of speaking subjects in dialogue.

In identifying the interpretative repertoires and rhetorical devices used to sustain the conversational practice of giving an account of living with financial hardship, one does not, however, necessarily exclude other possible discursive interpretations of the groups' accounting practices. The broader discursive back cloth of the different competing accounts discussed opens up a considerable array of interpretative possibilities that may be analytically fruitful in further elucidating the Barnardos focus group members' practices of speaking about living with financial hardship.

Although the project captures a slice of the social action peculiar to the practices of accounting for 'poverty' or 'financial hardship' by members of a charitable organisation, future discursive analysis of poverty talk may be extended to the talk of other groups. This could involve further critical examination of the ideological effects of hegemonic political discourse (talk by political parties, government departments, business communities, world banks etc.) informing the speaking practices of lay people and various community groups [1].

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[1] Further research conducted using focus groups may need take into account the difficulties in analysing groups larger than five people. Areas of concern include: not being able to distinguishing between voices in heightened interaction; difficulties in transcription, where turns start and finish; more need for active facilitation of groups (for those concerned more with naturally occurring talk); the need for quality sound, or video recording equipment. Ideally, having a number of smaller groups may be advantageous in this respect.

In conclusion, consistent with Billig's (1991) work, the process of giving an account can be understood as dilemmatic and ideological. For these group members, it requires the dilemmatic task of negotiating different social identities to maintain speaking rights for category membership of one who is 'poor'. In this sense, it is also ideological in that, in the process of establishing and managing the different identities required for maintaining category membership, the problematic identities and social action characteristic of this time are discursively reproduced.

In spite of the many difficulties and contradictions experienced by focus group members, I feel they displayed considerable diligence and courage, not only in their task of contributing a voice for parents living with financial hardship during this politically turbulent time, but also in their efforts to raise children in what has often been a critical and un-supportive social environment.

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Appendix A

POVERTY TALK: BEYOND ATTRIBUTIONS - A DISCURSIVE APPROACH

INFORMATION SHEET

What is the study about? In 1996 you took part in a group interview with Kathleen Livingston from Barnardo's in which you talked about life on a low income. In the proposed study I would like to use the audio tapes recorded from your interview as part of my own research about financial hardship.Through the completion of this study I hope to identify some of the different ways in which peoples talk about poverty is conceptualised in New Zealand.

What would I have to do? We are asking you to give your permission for the researcher to use the interview conducted by Kathleen Livingston for Barnardo's. If you choose to give permission for the researchers to use the audio tape after reading the enclosed information sheet, you will need to read and sign the attached consent form and return it to Kathleen Livingston in the stamp addressed envelope enclosed. This form allows us to get a recorded copy of the audio tapes from Kathleen Livingston.

About the Researchers The study is being run by: Paul White, a part time masters student in psychology (My particular interest in this topic stems from my own experience as a sole parent living on a limited income); Dr Christine Stephens, lecturer in Psychology and the primary supervisor for the study; Dr Mandy Morgan lecturer in Psychology and secondary supervisor for the study.

If you choose to participate in this study, you can expect!

* All information on the audio tape will be completely confidential to the researchers. All records will be identified only by code, and the relation between your name and code number will be known only to the researchers. Brief quotes may be used in publications that are prepared about the study, but

it will not be possible for you to be identified. The audio tapes will be returned to Barnardo's upon completion of the study.

* You can withdraw from the study after you have given your consent, by contacting (Kathleen or Paul), and your voice will be deleted from the transcripts (written copy of the audio tape).

* That whether you agree, or decline to give your consent for this study, it will not in any way affect your entitlement to any of the services provided by Barnardo's.

* To be given a summary of the findings from the study when it is concluded, if you so wish.

Please feel free to contact any of the following people, either before you take part in the study, or at any time during the study for further information or to clarify any questions you may have about the study.

Many thanks

Paul White
Department of Psychology
Massey University

Contact Details:

Paul White, messages to: The Department of Psychology, Massey University. Phone 3569099 (ask for Psychology Dept)

Kathleen Livingston, FAIR Centre Wellington. Phone 0800 222 345

Christine Stephens, The Department of Psychology, Massey University. Phone 3504146

Mandy Morgan, The Department Of Psychology, Massey University. Phone 3504133

Appendix A1

POVERTY TALK: BEYOND ATTRIBUTIONS- A DISCURSIVE APPROACH

CONSENT FORM

I have read the Information Sheet for this study and have had the details of the study explained to me. My questions about the study have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.

I agree to give permission for the researchers of the above study to use the audio tapes about experiences of living on a limited income, recorded by Kathleen Livingston of the FAIR Centre Wellington.

I agree to give permission for the researchers to use the audio tape on the understanding that my name will not be used and I will not be able to be identified.

I also understand that direct quotations from the interview may be used in reports about the study. The audio tape will be returned to Ms Livingston at Barnardo's when the study is concluded.

Signed: .....

Name: .....

Date: .....

Appendix B

POVERTY TALK: BEYOND ATTRIBUTIONS-A DISCURSIVE APPROACH

INFORMATION SHEET

What is the study about? The aim of this study is to give people the opportunity to contribute their views, thoughts and experiences, about poverty in New Zealand, to the poverty debate in general. The contributions offered by participants may also be extended to literature in the social sciences. The study is being run by Dr Mandy Morgan (lecturer in psychology), Dr Christine Stephens (lecturer in psychology) and Paul White (masterate student in psychology).

What would I have to do? If you choose to participate, you will be invited to attend one of two open discussions with a small group of other volunteers and one of the researchers who will facilitate the group. You will be invited to share your views about the subject of poverty within the group. The session will be audio taped for research purposes. The discussion will take approximately one hour and you can leave anytime you want.

At the beginning of each group discussion a protocol will be agreed upon by the participants regarding group confidentiality and stopping the audio tape. This agreement will also be recorded.

If you choose to participate in this study, you have the right to:

* Ask any questions about the study at any time during participation. Refuse to answer particular questions, and to withdraw from the study at any time.

* Provide all information on the understanding that it is

completely confidential to the researchers. All records will be identified only by code, and the relation between your name and code number will be known only to the researchers. Brief quotes may be used in publications that are prepared about the study, but it will not be possible for you to be identified. The audio tapes will be disposed of at the completion of the study.

* Be given a summary of the findings from the study when it is concluded.

Please feel free to contact any of the following people, either before you take part in the study, or at any time during the study for further information or to clarify any questions you may have about the study.

Many thanks

Paul White
Department of Psychology
Massey University

Contact details:

Paul White, The Department of Psychology, Massey University. Phone 3569099 (ask for Psychology Dept).

Christine Stephens, The Department of Psychology, Massey University. Phone 3504146

Mandy Morgan, The Department Of Psychology, Massey University. Phone 3504133

Appendix B:1

POVERTY TALK: BEYOND ATTRIBUTIONS- A DISCURSIVE APPROACH

CONSENT FORM

I have read the Information Sheet for this study and have had the details of the study explained to me. My questions about the study have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.

* I understand that I agree to participate and have the right to withdraw from the study at any time and to decline to answer any particular questions.

* I agree to provide information to the researchers on the understanding that my name will not be used and that the information will be used only for this research and publications arising from this research project.

* I agree to the researcher audio taping the interview with me. I understand that direct quotations from the interview may be used in reports about the study but I will not be able to be identified. The audio tape will be destroyed when the study is concluded.

* I also understand that I have the right to ask for the audio tape to be turned off at any time during the interview.

* I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.

Signed: .....

Name: .....

Date: .....