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Constructions of Welfare Recipients and Work in New Zealand

newspapers:

An examination of discourse and policy

A thesis presented in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

in

Psychology

at Massey University, New Zealand

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2016

## Abstract

This paper drew from discursive psychology and Foucauldian discourse analysis to analyse and critique constructions of welfare, its recipients and proposed policies as they were discussed in 200 New Zealand newspaper accounts published between 2005 and 2014. Analysis identified three dominant discursive formations related to welfare and work in the media accounts: the culture of dependence, carrot-stick discourse and work as a panacea. Media accounts were examined for stereotypical constructions of welfare recipients to reveal the promotion of particular social positions, attributions of blame and practices. Media accounts of proposed welfare policies that drew from these discursive formations were similarly examined to demonstrate the potential for media constructions to inform policy changes. Media accounts that resisted the dominant discursive formations were examined for alternative accounts of welfare recipients, work and policy. The dominant discursive formations were demonstrated to rest on a neoliberal social framework that promoted the interests of dominant social groups and shifted blame off an unequal society and economic structure onto welfare recipients. These findings demonstrate a need to increase the representation of welfare recipients' interests through research exploring their lived experiences of dependence and the continued critique of existing social and power structures.

## Preface

The inspiration for this body of research stemmed from two events in my life. The first was the three-month period I spent on the Unemployment Benefit after completing my undergraduate studies in 2012. The second event occurred when I picked up a young female hitchhiker a few years later. During our conversation she identified herself as a welfare recipient then proceeded to tell me how all the other people she saw at WINZ were taking advantage of the system. That she would provide such an account of her fellow welfare recipients intrigued me. Inspired by these events I began to read around the subject of the role of media accounts in the production of social discourse. During this reading process the interaction between media accounts and social policy stood out as a subject worthy of further examination.

This body of research is the fulfilment of my curiosity and a desire to resist that hitchhikers account of welfare.

## Acknowledgments

Without the support and encouragement of the following people this project would not have been possible:

My husband David. For your undying love and patience.

My friends and family. For understanding when I needed to go and live under my thesis-rock for a while.

Professor Kerry Chamberlain. For seeing me through my research and your invaluable input.

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## **Chapter One: Introduction**

Welfare recipients have been found to be one of the most stereotyped groups in Western countries. They are a group who are often disliked and disrespected in the societies in which they live (Bullock, Fraser Wyche, & Williams, 2001; Chauhan & Foster, 2014). In many countries where individualism is prominent, the receipt of welfare is considered a kind of personal failing. The aim of this project is to examine this phenomenon using discourse analysis, with a vision to examine the use of stereotypes in the construction of welfare recipients in media accounts. The relationship between media accounts of welfare recipients and the potential for those constructions to initiate and inform changes in welfare policy in response will also be examined.

It is important to examine news media accounts in social psychological research because of their role as a source of taken-for-granted knowledge for the everyday individual (de Goede, 1996; Silverstone & Georgiou, 2005). Social issues are constructed as problems by the meanings and practices used to frame them (Chauhan & Foster, 2014). A phenomenon may move from having little perceived effect on a society to being an issue of primary concern when particular meanings are attached to that phenomenon. News media play a central role in the dissemination of those meanings to the population and in lobbying for social and political interventions to resolve those issues (Barnett, et al., 2007). Therefore, an examination of the language and practices that construct an issue will reveal information about the social structures and interests present in that particular socio-historical context.

### **Media**

When approaching an examination of media accounts it is important to understand what media is, what it is not, how it can be put to use and the factors that constrain it as a tool. The term 'media' refers to any means of transmitting, or communicating "images and ideas, meanings and motivations" (Silverstone & Georgiou, 2005, p. 434). Even though mass forms

of news media are often referred to as a distinct entity, media does not refer to an object that can be separated from the humans who produce it. Instead, 'media' describes the means by which accounts of issues and events are produced and shared. Those accounts contain an amalgamation of the ideas, beliefs, rationales and preferred practices of the individuals who produced them (Chamberlain & Hodgetts, 2008; Silverstone & Georgiou, 2005). Common forms of media are art, film, television, music, radio, the printed word and internet sources amongst a myriad of other social expressions (Bullock, et al., 2001; Chamberlain & Hodgetts, 2008).

Media accounts play an important role in modern society through the communication of information between individuals both privately and in the public sphere. They are a source of social information that allows for the facilitation of relationships and social interactions between individuals and groups. As a vital source of education and influence, media accounts provide access to perspectives, attitudes and life experiences that may not be otherwise readily accessible to individuals in other parts of the world or sectors of society (Bullock, et al., 2001; Chauhan & Foster, 2014; Silverstone & Georgiou, 2005). News media accounts in particular enable audiences to engage with the issues affecting unfamiliar groups, by providing the information and language that audiences can draw from when constructing their own accounts of those issues (Bright, Marsh, Smith, & Bishop, 2008). This enables individuals to engage with the "imagined lives of strangers" (Chamberlain & Hodgetts, 2008, p. 1118) and to provide them with access to narratives and experiences that they have not personally observed. However, the constructions that media accounts produce invite audiences to read the stories in certain ways. The way in which a news story is framed will highlight some ideas and ignore others. In so doing, news stories can provide definitions of issues, attribute blame and causation and allow more easily for particular moral judgments of unfamiliar individuals and groups

(Beddoe, 2014; Chauhan & Foster, 2014). Thus, media accounts not only provide information about issues and social groups, but also assist in their construction (Franklin, 1999).

The tendency to rely heavily on media for information about unfamiliar groups and issues is rendered problematic when the constructions presented through media accounts are an inaccurate or stereotypical representation of the issue or group being portrayed (Silverstone & Georgiou, 2005). A lack of media participation by non-dominant groups means that media audiences have less access to constructions of issues and groups that differ from, or actively resist the dominant perspective. This results in the reinforcement and reproduction of the prevailing discourses in media accounts (Crow, 2014; de Goede, 1996) in which the dominant group is positioned as the 'norm' against which less dominant groups are compared (Gergen, 1999). The normalisation of dominant-group ideology in media accounts results in social pressure to engage in dominant-group practices and creates norms regarding how citizens should conduct their lives (Chamberlain & Hodgetts, 2008). Oftentimes this means that good citizens are constructed as those who adhere to dominant group norms and bad citizens are those who do not. The attribution of blame, and the social positioning of citizens provides information pointing toward symbolic power and the social norms that have informed the construction of media accounts (Barnes, et al., 2012). The constructions in media accounts are therefore important for addressing social issues and effecting social change (Fraser & Llewellyn, 2015).

**Media-audience interaction.** Audiences draw from media in an interactive and agentive way. They are not passive recipients who mindlessly absorb the information presented to them. Nor is the relationship between media sources and their audience a one-way relationship. Instead audiences are an integral part in the production of media accounts. Audience members may either accept and internalise the media constructions they are presented with or resist them (Chauhan & Foster, 2014). The interaction between media and

audience operates as a circuit, whereby the accounts produced by media sources may be reproduced, adapted and resisted by audiences, and vice versa (Silverstone & Georgiou, 2005). Media accounts are drawn from constructions, preferences and discourses already present in a society (Chauhan & Foster, 2014; Sotirovic, 2000). Those accounts then add back into the pool of social knowledge that can be drawn from by media and audiences alike. The circuit between media sources and audience accounts demonstrates the socially constructed nature of media accounts. The constructions present in a socio-historical context “interact, compete and inform each other” (Chauhan & Foster, 2014, p. 401) through social interaction to form discursive accounts.

Berger and Luckmann’s theory of the social construction of knowledge (as cited in Hodgetts, et al., 2010) describes the constructive process between media and audience in which objectivation, internalisation and externalisation take place. Objectivation is the process by which the ideas produced in a particular society become embedded or ‘taken-for-granted’. It is during this process that discourse moves from having an identifiable point of origin to being perceived to exist independent from human thought (Hodgetts, et al., 2010). In other words, discourse moves from being a concept to being an object or ‘thing’ that people assume to be real. The object is merely a social construction, but the individual considers it to be real (Willig, 2013). The reification of media from a medium by which human ideas are expressed to an independent entity referred to as ‘the media’ is an example of this process (Chamberlain & Hodgetts, 2008). It is through this process that media accounts become a source of taken-for-granted knowledge.

Internalisation occurs as individuals are socialised into a society and its discursive formations (Storr, 2010). Through the process of internalisation individuals take on the constructed knowledge present in their social context as their own and it becomes ‘common sense’ (Hodgetts, et al., 2010; de Goede, 1996). This is the process by which media audiences

internalise media constructions of issues and groups with whom they have little personal experience. It is also the process by which marginalised groups take on media constructions and negative stereotypes of their own social or cultural group (Barnett, et al., 2007).

By internalising the dominant forms of knowledge in their society, individuals reproduce that knowledge through their the language and the actions they engage in. This is the process of externalisation whereby individuals enact the internalised, objectivated ideas present in their society (Hodgetts, et al., 2010). Externalisation is the ‘living out’ of knowledge.

Media accounts are not the only source of information from which everyday individuals draw when forming their own accounts of social issues. Personal experiences, preconceptions, common-knowledge, and social interactions can also inform individuals’ accounts. However, if an issue is outside of an individual’s lived experience and perceived to be of national importance they are more likely to rely on media constructions for information (Sotirovic, 2000). The constructions presented in media accounts help to provide the language, discourses and images audiences can draw from when forming their own accounts (Beddoe, 2014; Sotirovic, 2000). Media constructions are critiqued, interpreted and adapted by the audience, drawing from their own knowledge, experience and socio-cultural ideals (Crow, 2014). Audience critiques of media constructions may be connected to experiential knowledge of the issue. Gamson (as cited in Beddoe, 2014) proposed that media audience members whose accounts of social issues contain language like ‘common sense’ may be more reliant on media constructions for information. Conversely, those who can relate personal anecdotes in relation to the subject are more likely to reject media constructions that are contrary to their experience (Sotirovic, 2000).

Through the examination of media accounts, the current project will be able to glean social psychological information regarding the dominant social systems, values and ideologies related to work and welfare in Aotearoa New Zealand. The analysis of media accounts will

also reveal the subject positions and practices available to different groups in Aotearoa New Zealand (Barnes, et al., 2012; Chamberlain & Hodgetts, 2008).

**Media and social policy.** Politicians and law makers draw from the same media constructions and discourses that everyday individuals do. Media accounts assist in the formation of political structures, promoting some political agendas and undermining others (Fraser & Llewellyn, 2015). As with other media-audience relationships, government and media inform each other. Media are increasingly used by governments to provide policy information to constituents through advertising and interviews. Though, those accounts tend to be focused on policy options that line up with their political agenda rather than presenting the full range of policy options to address an issue (Franklin, 1999). Conversely, the discourse presented in media accounts provides policy makers with information regarding public sentiment toward social issues and the kinds of interventions that might be implemented to address them (Chauhan & Foster, 2014; Franklin, 1999) Interventions that garner more public support in media accounts have a greater likelihood of being implemented in policy.

The construction of social issues and the groups affected by them in media accounts helps to inform the development of social policies (Chamberlain & Hodgetts, 2008). This is known as the “CNN effect” (Barnett, et al., 2007, p. 297). The CNN effect refers to a link scholars found between the timing of images of impoverished children being televised, and the development of policies targeted toward helping such children. The CNN effect demonstrated that the coverage of an issue in media accounts was an important step in the development of policy, and not merely a by-product of policy (Kogen & Price, 2011).

Media accounts can have three different effects on social policy: setting agendas, catalysing decisions, and impeding policy (Kogen & Price, 2011). Media help to set the political agenda by covering and constructing social issues in particular ways that lead to them becoming political priorities. Such coverage of an issue can cause decision makers to make

policy decisions more quickly than they otherwise would, without weighing all of the available options. Media accounts can also impede particular policy positions by constructing policies in such a way that turns public opinion against them (Kogen & Price, 2011). Therefore, the examination of media accounts is important for more than understanding the construction of groups and social issues in a particular context, but also for understanding the effect those constructions have on the political landscape.

Discourse may be drawn on in media accounts to promote particular political actions for a particular purpose (Lyons & Coyle, 2007; Tuffin, 2005). This is demonstrated by the change in constructions present in media accounts over time according to the social and political climate. A study of media accounts of welfare in the United States noted that constructions that focused on the problem of the idle unemployed were common prior to and during periods of welfare reform but tended to disappear a year or two after reforms had been implemented (Bullock, et al., 2001). This demonstrated a link between media constructions and welfare policy. The construction of the unemployed as scroungers reproduced social biases in favour of neoliberal norms and created a demand for governmental policies that eased the concern that taxpayers were being taken advantage of (Barnett, et al., 2007). Once those policies had been put into place, the constructions of welfare recipients became less negative (Bullock, et al., 2001).

### **Symbolic Power**

The discourse and political actions promoted in media accounts often reflect the dominant economic system and political ideologies present in that society (Starke, 2008; Tsai, 2016). As media constructions reflect dominant ideological constructions, they represent the interests and discourses of social groups who have the greatest representative access and influence within mainstream media organizations. This is 'symbolic power' (Barnett, et al., 2007, p. 298), where the perspectives of dominant groups are given preference in news media

over less dominant groups when framing issues (Chamberlain & Hodgetts, 2008). Symbolic power provides dominant groups with the ability to shape issues and other groups in ways that reflect and perpetuate the ideology and discourse of their group (de Goede, 1996; Tsai, 2016). The constructive power of the dominant group in media typically results in policies that perpetuate their economic and political advantage and that mobilise social and material resources in support of dominant-group interests (Silverstone & Georgiou, 2005; Tsai, 2016).

Where the interests of one group are represented, others will typically be suppressed. This results in less access to the same discursive resources and fewer economic and social freedoms granted to non-dominant groups through social policies (Barnett, et al., 2007). The symbolic power present in media constructions not only provides a framework for social inclusion through the fostering of particular kinds of discourses and practices, but also simultaneously provides the framework for the social and political exclusion of any groups or individuals who fall outside of those standards (Silverstone & Georgiou, 2005).

Within this project, the examination of the practices and symbolic power at work in media accounts will assist in highlighting the social positioning of welfare recipients and provide information concerning the political motives behind constructions and policies related to welfare (Tsai, 2016).

### **Neoliberalism**

A discussion of welfare policy and the construction of welfare recipients is often centred around work as the solution for the ‘problem’ of welfare. Frequently media constructions and welfare policies reinforce work as the most valuable social resource, regardless of the wages that individuals might earn and the balance of costs and benefits involved in individuals moving from welfare to work (Bullock, et al., 2001). This focus on work in welfare policy stems from neoliberalism. Neoliberalism is an economic and social



ideology in which participation in the free market is the individual's primary and essential social responsibility. Participation is therefore inherently beneficial (de Goede, 1996).

In neoliberal thought, engagement in the free market is centred on supply and demand: individuals supply labour in exchange for wages then create demand for the goods and services they want to consume (Dewey, 2015). The ideal neoliberal citizen is an autonomous, adaptable, self-motivating, responsible and work-focused individual (Coombes & Morgan, 2015; Schrecker & Bambra, 2015). The role of the neoliberal state is to ensure that individuals and private companies are able to innovate and consume in a self-determined and self-reliant manner (Simpson & Envy, 2015).

Neoliberalism can be divided into three components: neoliberal policy and economic programmes; neoliberal state organisation; and neoliberal ideology (Schrecker & Bambra, 2015). Neoliberal policies and programmes include welfare reforms that reduce the size of the welfare state and policies that increase workforce participation. Neoliberal state organisation involves the privatisation and contracting out of previously state-run departments and programmes. Neoliberal ideology is the way in which disciplinary power is used within society to reproduce neoliberal norms (Schrecker & Bambra, 2015). Ultimately, the needs of the market take precedence over the needs of individuals.

The media accounts of welfare recipients and welfare policy analysed in this project will be examined for the influence of neoliberal economics, state organisation and ideology in the relation to the social norms and practices underpinning welfare discourse.

### **Blame and Deservingness**

Media accounts prioritise establishing culpability when addressing a social issue. Blame, villains and victims, and conflicting ideological arguments are some of key ingredients for a 'good story' which increases the probability of media coverage (Brindle, 1999). The attribution of blame in media accounts can provide some justification for unpopular policies,

or policies that target particular groups (Lindbom, 2010). Typically, media accounts of welfare recipients and welfare policy use the “conservative” or “liberal” frames (Barnett, et al., 2007, p. 298) when attributing blame for welfare dependence. A frame is taken-for-granted discursive formation that may be easily evoked using particular linguistic resources (Lakoff, 2004; Wenzelburger & Hörisch, 2016). The conservative and liberal frames draw from political ideology to construct and attribute blame for social issues, and promote policies that correspond with those ideologies (Marston, 2008).

The conservative frame tends to be drawn on to “individualise poverty” in media accounts (Allen, Tyler, & de Benedictus, 2014, p. 2), determining that the individual is the primary cause of poverty (Beddoe, 2014). In the conservative frame, individuals are constructed as deficient and are portrayed as being responsible for their family’s dependence on the state. Jensen (as cited in Allen, et al., 2014) argued that this frame is important during periods of welfare reform, when government is seeking to limit welfare spending.

The conservative frame does not address the financial nature of poverty; financial deficits are not considered causative. Instead, causation is often applied to the constructed welfare recipient through the use of negative character tropes. This locates the welfare recipient within the social hierarchy as being fundamentally different from the normative citizen, and perpetuates the idea of welfare recipients being undeserving of financial assistance (Bullock, et al., 2001). An example of this phenomena is the construction of intergenerational unemployment or dependence. Welfare recipients have often been constructed in media accounts as the cause of their adult children’s unemployment by modelling worklessness to them, despite a lack of empirical evidence to support this idea (Beddoe, 2014). Since blame was attributed to the parent as the cause of their adult child’s poverty and dependence, potential social and economic causes went unexamined.

The construction of welfare recipients according to the conservative frame promotes neoliberal norms such as individualism and free market participation (de Goede, 1996). Individuals framed in this way are positioned outside of the social norm and have a lower social standing. They are constructed as a burden on taxpayers and are widely viewed to be undeserving of financial support because they are not helping themselves. When this frame is prominent in media accounts, policies will often be introduced to limit that support (Chauhan & Foster, 2014). Those who fall into the category of the undeserving poor will also tend to be subjected to greater levels of scrutiny and monitoring at the social and institutional level (Beddoe, 2014).

In contrast to the undeserving poor are the ‘deserving poor’. The primary distinction between the conservative and liberal frames is how they determine who is deserving and who is undeserving of welfare provisions (Marston, 2008). The differentiation between the deserving and undeserving poor dates back to religious traditions of allocating of charity according to moralistic standards. By constructing and positioning welfare recipients according to the “liberal frame” (Barnett, et al., p. 298) the deserving poor are constructed as victims of larger social circumstances and therefore deserving of sympathy and assistance (Chauhan & Foster, 2014). In this frame the individual is not considered to be the cause of poverty but rather social and economic factors, such as a lack of jobs. Since the problem is considered societal, individuals are more likely to be positioned inclusively and retain their social standing as a participating citizen.

Children from poor families have often been constructed using the liberal frame, whereas their parents are more often constructed according to the conservative frame. The disparity in the framing of parents and children from the same family has resulted in complex and conflicted determinations of deservingness and provisions of social assistance (Chauhan & Foster, 2014).

## **The Provision of Welfare**

The constructions drawn from in media accounts do not exist in a vacuum. The ideas present in any account have been accumulated, shaped and reproduced over time (Gergen, 1985; Marston, 2008). Therefore, the history of the provision of welfare in both the local and global context can provide insight into current welfare practices and discourse, demonstrate the changes that have occurred in the perceptions and policies of welfare, and reveal the things that have not changed.

Welfare and the provision of assistance to the poor has some of its historical roots in the traditions of the dominant religions of the world: Buddhism, Christianity, Islam and Judaism. Each of these religions contain doctrines where generosity to the poor is valued (Cadogan, 2013). As a result, a common form of provision for the poor has been religious charity. However, religious organisations have tended to limit their provisions primarily to health and financial advice rather than monetary assistance, and decided who they would support according to particular moral standards. This resulted in a distinction between those deemed to be deserving of assistance and those who were undeserving (Villadsen, 2011). This distinction still remains in the modern context (Marston, 2008) and will be important for the analysis of media accounts of welfare recipients in this project.

The more humanistic traditions of state welfare can be traced back to ancient Greece and Rome. In these societies provisions of food were made for the poor, widows and orphans (Cadogan, 2013). However, before the advent of modern welfare states, many state initiatives aimed at assisting the poor were punitive in nature. For example, from 1575 until the 1800s workhouses were used in Britain to provide the poor with work, food and shelter. These provisions costed the individual their personal freedom and they were usually imprisoned in the workhouses (Berend, 2005). The policies discussed in media accounts will be examined for

similar punitive measures being deployed to discourage poverty and welfare dependence in the context of Aotearoa New Zealand.

The industrial revolution beginning in the 1800s saw waged labour and capitalism become the norm in Western countries. This system became increasingly entrenched during the twentieth century. Problematically, capitalism inherently generated economic inequalities, particularly for those who were not able to engage in the labour market. These individuals tended to be excluded from society (Fraser & Gordon, 1994). Welfare policies were designed in response to these inequalities, to highlight social citizenship and the right of every citizen to live according to the same standards (Berend, 2005). The earliest of the modern welfare states reflecting this ideal was established in Germany in the 1880s. Sickness insurance, accident insurance and an old age pension were the first national benefits to be made available by the German government. The establishment of the German welfare state paved the way for other countries to follow suit (Berend, 2005).

In 1898 the first step toward the establishment of a welfare state in Aotearoa New Zealand was made with the establishment of a means-tested Old Age pension targeted toward those who had fought in the Land Wars. This benefit was not drawn on at the levels that were initially expected (Carpinter, 2012) but demonstrated the government's acceptance that some of the country's poorer citizens would need social assistance in order to engage in the capitalist marketplace (Belgrave, 2012).

Between 1900 and the end of the Second World War the welfare state grew substantially. In 1938 the Old Age pension was universalised to everyone over the age of 60 (Carpinter, 2012) and the unemployment and invalid's benefits were established (Starke, 2008). Provisions were made for widows, the sick and the disabled, and a means-tested family allowance was established in the hopes that it would promote larger family sizes by offsetting the cost of living (Belgrave, 2012).

Economic legislation played a key role in welfare provisions during this time. Legislation that provided a stable economy and wage protections was established to promote full employment. Men were employed in the workforce, and women in the home (Belgrave, 2012). These policies were rooted in liberalism, whereby well-being was achieved through work. Under that system, while there were provisions of welfare for those few who needed it, the main focus of the government was on the creation of jobs (Belgrave, 2012).

The post-war years saw little change to the welfare system and, due to high employment and home ownership rates, few relied on welfare provisions (Carpinter, 2012). However, social change in the 1960s and 70s saw shifts in family structures, an increasing number of women participating in the workforce, and an increasing number of people relying on state provisions (Belgrave, 2012). There were three major welfare changes during this period: the introduction of the Domestic Purposes Benefit (hereafter DPB), National Superannuation, and the formation of the Accident Compensation Corporation (hereafter ACC). These initiatives stemmed from a general acceptance that welfare encouraged societal participation and well-being for all (Belgrave, 2012). The DPB was a benefit that provided income for widows, sole-parents who were out of paid work while raising their children, and those caring for sick and disabled family members (Starke, 2008). National Superannuation replaced the Old Age pension in providing a universal income for those over sixty years of age, was adjusted to keep up with the wage levels of workers, and was not based on previous earnings (Starke, 2008). ACC provided universal accidental injury cover, regardless of employment status (Starke, 2008).

Increasingly since the 1970s globalisation, the rise in competition in the economic markets and changes in life expectancies have created tensions in the provision of welfare. These tensions have led to changes in the way welfare was administered and its recipients were publically perceived (Berend, 2005). The conflict between welfare dependence and neoliberal ideals such as self-sufficiency and independence led to welfare reforms in 1980s and 90s that

were more in step with neoliberal policy. Neoliberal social and economic reforms during this time were considered to some of the most radical in an OECD country (Starke, 2008). They included opening up the previously protected economy to the international market, a reduction in the size of the state, and making state-run services subject to market forces (Belgrave, 2012). The age of entitlement for Superannuation was raised to sixty-five (Carpinter, 2012), benefits were cut to reduce the cost of welfare and those who received welfare were directed to seek employment. Those policies all stemmed from a belief that welfare dependence was undermining labour participation in the market (Belgrave, 2012). The media accounts of welfare policies aimed at addressing welfare dependence examined in the current project will seek to determine whether this idea remained prevalent in the social discourse of Aotearoa New Zealand.

**Recent welfare reform.** Welfare reforms have since moved toward increased scrutiny and control of the lives of welfare recipients aimed at minimising undesirable behaviour. Simultaneously the levels of income maintenance and social housing provisions have been scaled back (Beddoe, 2014). One of the key features of those welfare reforms was an increased focus on work. Since 2010 parents on benefits such as the DPB have been required to meet job-seeking requirements once their children reached specific ages, under the threat of loss of part or all of their benefit. Parents on the DPB were initially required to seek part-time work once their youngest child turned six years old (Beddoe, 2014). This age was later lowered to three years old (Ministry of Social Development, Sole parent support, n.d.). When their youngest child turned fourteen years of age, parents were required to be looking for and available for full-time work (Beddoe, 2014). A policy was introduced in 2012 that required sole parents who had another child while receiving a benefit to return to work when that child turned one (Beddoe, 2014).

In 2013 the number of categories of benefits were reduced from sixteen to five. The Jobseeker Support benefit replaced the Unemployment Benefit, DPB categories related to those without children or with children over fourteen years of age, and the Sickness Benefit (Ministry of Social Development, 2013). Sole Parent Support replaced DPB categories related to parents with children under fourteen years of age. The Supported Living Payment replaced the Invalid's Benefit and the DPB category related to those who cared for sick or infirm family members (Ministry of Social Development, 2013). Youth and Young Parent Payments were introduced for youth living away from home and for parents under the age of eighteen. The Supplementary Benefit category grouped together the remaining main benefits such as the Emergency Maintenance Allowance, Unemployment Benefit Student Hardship and the Emergency Benefit (Ministry of Social Development, 2013). The new benefit categories contained clear job-seeking requirements that varied according to the category of benefit they were eligible for.

From July 2013 welfare recipients were required to meet social requirements in order to retain their benefits. These social requirements included enrolling their children with a general practitioner and completing health checks. Children aged three and over were to be enrolled in at least fifteen hours of early-childhood education, and children aged five and over were to attend school (Beddoe, 2014). Welfare recipients were expected to pass any pre-employment drug tests requested by potential employers (Ministry of Social Development, Obligations to look for and prepare for work, n.d.), and any welfare recipients with warrants out for their arrest would lose their benefits until the warrants were cleared (Ministry of Social Development, Arrest warrants, n.d.). Welfare recipients were also encouraged to make use of mentoring, parenting and budgeting assistance.

The history of welfare provision in Aotearoa New Zealand demonstrated an ongoing tension between the idea that welfare enabled social inclusion and market participation for all,



and that welfare promoted dependence and undermined the labour and economic markets. This tension played out to varying degrees through the differentiation between the deserving and the undeserving, where some groups have been considered entitled for state support and others have not. The standard for determining who belonged to which group depended on the social and moral norms in that socio-historical context. For example, the changes to benefit categories in 2012 demonstrated the categorisation of welfare recipients and their deserving- or undeservingness to financial assistance was determined according to the norm of work. The benefit categories clearly laid out an expected level of work availability and the social acceptability of dependence for each of those categories of welfare recipients. Those on the Supported Living Payment, for example, had no expectation placed on them to work due to long-term disability or illness (Ministry of Social Development, Supported living payment, n.d.), whereas there a high expectation for those receiving the Jobseeker Support benefit to be looking for work (Ministry of Social Development, Jobseeker support, n.d.). The difference between attributions of blame for the circumstances that led to reliance on state support resulted in differences in the construction of deservingness of support.

**Scroungerphobia and the culture of dependence.** During the welfare reforms in the early 1990s media accounts tended to blame the unemployed for their own problematic circumstances. The unemployed were often constructed as avoidant of work and overly reliant on working taxpayers to support their idle lifestyle. The unemployed were dubbed as “scroungers” (Barnett, et al., 2007, p. 297) or “bludgers” (Porter, 2012, p. 3) and were constructed in contrast with the social norm of the participating taxpayers. The moral panic caused by the contrast between these two groups is known as “scroungerphobia” (Barnett, et al., 2007, p. 297).

Scroungerphobic constructions of welfare recipients tend to portray them as overly wasteful or fraudulent with taxpayer funds. Welfare fraud is the most extreme and most feared

version of the scrounger trope. For example, disabled individuals came under particular suspicion of welfare fraud in the UK in 2012 when media accounts constructed some disabled individuals as fakes. These fakes were believed to be individuals of working age who faked physical impairment or disability in order to receive a state benefit (Crow, 2014). Media accounts of fraudulent behaviour committed by welfare recipients promoted widespread suspicion of welfare recipients and shifted the issue of welfare from one of survival and income security to an issue of potential criminality. This led to policy initiatives where the monitoring of welfare recipients to ensure their legitimacy was increased to prevent any exploitation of the welfare system (Crow, 2014).

In a less extreme account of scrounging, the existence of the welfare system has often been constructed in media accounts as a deterrent to individuals engaging in work (Chauhan & Foster, 2014; Crow, 2014). In 1980s USA this was termed the “Law of Unintended Consequences” (de Goede, 1996, p. 324). Under this ‘law’ the availability of benefits was believed to decrease the incentive for the poor to change their circumstances and promoted the idea that unemployment was preferable to work (de Goede, 1996). Welfare was constructed as a self-perpetuating cycle that created a kind of culture of dependence. This culture was blamed for the breakdown of work ethic and family structures in some sectors of society, and was believed to encourage antisocial and criminal behaviour that resulted in a social underclass (Beddoe, 2014; de Goede, 1996; Schrecker & Bamba, 2015). Providing women with benefits was seen to destroy males’ roles as the bread-winners, to diminish their authority in the home, and resulted in men resorting to anti-social behaviour such as alcoholism and violence to reassert their manhood (de Goede, 1996). The provision of welfare was also seen to deter couples from the normative practice of marriage and to promote single motherhood. Couples who conceived children outside of marriage were believed to remain unmarried and living apart for economic reasons, thus undermining traditional family structures (de Goede, 1996). A

culture of dependence was portrayed as the cause of welfare recipients' negative stereotypical behaviours, their lack of social participation and productivity and their continued dependence on the state. Under this discursive formation, it was believed that the poor could be made to adhere to the social norms and values of the taxpaying, middle-class through welfare policies that disincentivised or dismantled the welfare system and incentivised work (de Goede, 1996).

The culture of dependence is one of the major discursive formations in this project and is examined for stereotypical constructions of welfare recipients, the social positions and practices those constructions promote. Media accounts will also be examined for the scrounger and fraudster stereotypes.

### **Research Goals**

The current project has three primary research goals. The first goal is to examine the way that welfare recipients are constructed in newspaper media accounts in Aotearoa New Zealand between 2005 and 2014. The use of use of stereotypes in those constructions will be of particular importance. The second goal is to analyse the broader discourses underpinning the construction of welfare recipients. The analysis of those discourses will reveal social norms, subject positions and promote particular practices. The third goal is to demonstrate the link between media constructions of welfare recipients and the formation of welfare policies. Media accounts will be examined for welfare policies that have been implemented in response to constructions of welfare recipients and their underlying discourses.

## **Chapter Two: Method**

Discourse analysis reflects the ‘turn to language’ in the psychological examination of social and political struggles between social groups (Burman, 1991). This project examines the struggle to define and construct welfare, its recipients and its social policy in newspaper media accounts in Aotearoa New Zealand. This chapter provides an overview of the epistemological and methodological framework of the project before outlining the project’s research process.

### **Epistemology**

The analysis in this project drew from a social constructionist understanding of knowledge production. Social constructionism is a varied epistemology with roots in sociological and psychological thought. According to social constructionist thought, human knowledge is produced and reproduced through social interaction (Burr, 2003). There are multiple features and approaches highlighted by different theorists, but at its core social constructionist research will typically have one or more of the four key principles outlined by Gergen (1985) and Burr (2003).

The first of these principles is based on the critical realist position of “epistemic relativism” (Parker, 1998, p. 3) where knowledge is always open and available for critique and change. Social constructionism is critical of ideas that appear embedded in human knowledge and experience. Burr (2003) referred to this as taken-for-granted knowledge. This means that those things assumed to be infallible and indelible, such as scientific or cultural practice, can be called into question and opened up for scrutiny and critique (Gergen, 1985). Cultural practices such as the categorisation of people according to gender, ethnicity, or income source are therefore open to scrutiny and critique.

The current project draws from this principle in multiple ways. First, news media accounts are an often taken-for-granted source of knowledge. According to this principle it is important that such forms of taken-for-granted knowledge are opened up for critique. In

applying that principle further, this project examines the social norms and practices that underpin those media accounts and critiques the constructions of welfare recipients contained within them.

The second principle of social constructionism recognises knowledge to be historically and culturally located (Gergen, 1985). This means that the ideas individuals hold to be important and true are specific to a certain time and place and are determined by consensus within that society (Hollekim, Anderssen, & Daniel, 2016). Thus what is ‘known to be true’ can vary across history and culture. Current forms of knowledge are acknowledged as socio-historically located in this time and this place, and are therefore open for critique (Burr, 2003). Critiques of current forms of knowledge may provide the foundation to establish new modes of thought in the future.

As such, the current research project is not intended to be an all-encompassing look at constructions of welfare recipients, with universal generalisability. Rather this research is an examination of the newspaper media representations present during the time period examined, in the context of Aotearoa New Zealand, as they are understood from the predominantly Pākehā worldview of the author. It is acknowledged that the media accounts examined were produced for a particular purpose, and neither the ideas expressed nor the individuals who produced them are fixed in position.

The third principle of social constructionism is that contextually located knowledge does not exist in isolation from other forms of knowledge from other time-periods and cultures (Gergen, 1985). New forms of knowledge do not “sweep away the old” (Marston, 2008, p. 360). Instead, knowledge is the result of the accumulated forms of understanding within a society, that have been negotiated and resisted, produced and reproduced through social interaction across the history of that society (Gergen, 1985). Forms of knowledge are constructed between individuals in their daily interactions and the language they use to make

those interactions meaningful (Burr, 2003). Thus knowledge and truth are not dependent on empirical evidence and observation but on the ever-changing ideas accepted within a particular society as they are negotiated through social interaction (Gergen, 1985).

The current project draws from this principle in its acknowledgement that the constructions of welfare recipients and welfare policy that have been produced in the newspaper media accounts have been reproduced and negotiated across the history of welfare provision in Aotearoa New Zealand, and been influenced by discourse from other social, political and economic contexts. Therefore, it is important to consider past ways of thinking and ideas from other contexts and the effect that those forms of knowledge might have on current constructions and the norms underpinning them.

The fourth principle of is that the way the world is described and examined in social interaction encourages certain types of social action (Gergen, 1985). The ideas held in a particular society determine which behaviours and practices are deemed to be acceptable and which are not. As ideas change within a society, so too do the kinds of practices people engage in (Burr, 2003).

This principle is drawn on in the current project in its examination of the practical implications of discourse: the production of social and moral norms and practices and policy responses to media constructions. By examining media accounts of welfare recipients and policies, the norms and practices that underpin them will also be revealed and made available for critique.

### **Discourse**

The meanings attached to different aspects of human interaction shape social processes and structures. Those meanings are known as discourse (Fraser & Gordon, 1994). Discourse is constructive in nature (Burr, 2003; Edwards & Potter, 1992; Lyons & Coyle, 2007; Potter & Hepburn, 2007; Tuffin, 2005; Willig, 1999). It constructs objects (Burr, 2003) and accounts of

objects (Willig, 1999) through talk and texts using linguistic resources (Potter & Hepburn, 2007; Lyons & Coyle, 2007). The ‘object’ being constructed may be a phenomenon, group or experience (Willig, 1999).

Oftentimes individuals are unaware of their use of discourse or the social power they wield when they construct an object in a particular way. Language use and its constructive power is a taken-for-granted aspect of social life (Gill, 1997). Burr (2003) differentiated between an individual’s reasoning for and the “social psychological consequences” of constructions (p. 61). Discourse analysis is typically focused on the social and linguistic elements of human interaction rather the individual’s internal reasoning (Augoustinos, Tuffin, & Sale, 1999; Tuffin, 2005). The assumption is that language is not neutral. It is used to present accounts of events, groups or issues for a particular purpose (Gill, 1997; Wilkinson, 2000). A journalist does not write an account of welfare without intending to present a particular idea, story or political agenda. They may however, be unconscious of the associated norms and practical implications that are attached to their account, and instead be using what appears to be natural language and taken-for-granted ideas in that context (Burr, 2003). The nature of discourse dictates that any spoken or written account will promote certain social interests. By focusing on the structure and significance of the language in texts, discourse analysis provides an interpretive analysis of the ideologies and social norms that underpin that language use (Burman, 1991; Fraser & Llewellyn, 2015).

Interpretative repertoires represent the sum of the linguistic phenomena from which an account may be formed (Lyons & Coyle, 2007). They are an inherently social resource, shared by everyone within a cultural or language group. Interpretative repertoires include the metaphors, tropes, figures of speech, terms and images that are common in that social and linguistic context (Burr, 2003). The use of different repertoires allows for variation in the construction of events, attributions of blame and justifications of positions. The use of other

resources would have resulted in a construction with a different purpose. Thus, by examining the interpretative repertoires in an account, an understanding of the function of the constructions present can be ascertained (Lyons & Coyle, 2007).

The object under enquiry will have multiple competing discourses associated with it due to the countless ways it could be constructed (Burr, 2003; Tuffin, 2005). The competition between discourses plays out in socio-political and institutional power dynamics, such as subject positions (Tuffin, 2005; Willig, 1999). Subject positions are the means by which individuals and groups are located within the socio-cultural hierarchy that is established by constructing the object in relation to dominant social and moral norms (Langdrige & Taylor, 2007). The linguistic resources used to construct an account help to reveal and differentiate between various subject positions (Lyons & Coyle, 2007). Dominant groups in society tend to have more symbolic power, which allows them have greater influence in constructing social reality and providing accounts of the needs and goals of individuals and groups in that society (Fraser & Gordon, 1994). Due to this power differential, examining discourse provides insight and resistance to dominant social structures and agendas (de Goede, 1996). Resistance to dominant discourse occurs through the examination of taken-for-granted constructions and critiquing them, and uncovering the social biases and ideologies that reinforce them (Hook, 2007). By shedding light on dominant discourses a space is opened up for alternative constructions of the problem.

### **The Current Project**

This project uses discourse analysis to examine two hundred newspaper articles gathered from the Newztext database for constructions of welfare recipients and the effect of those constructions on welfare policy in Aotearoa New Zealand. Newspaper media are a good source for examining media constructions due to the breadth of coverage they offer in comparison with other types of media, such as television news. Typically, television news



consists of short segments with a specific story or perspective related to the issue. Newspaper coverage of an issue, however, allows for journalists to draw from more sources in covering an issue, allowing them to present multiple and varied perspectives (Sotirovic, 2000). This allows for both the presentation of dominant constructions of welfare and alternative accounts that resist dominant discourse. The interaction between these different perspectives reveals the struggle between groups to define and shape welfare as an issue in the public consciousness and to promote social and political actions that perpetuate those meanings.

**Data collection.** Historically newspaper media was a form of print media, but in the modern configuration newspaper media increasingly exists in electronic form on the internet as well. This pattern of reliance on technology for media communication is increasing across the board, resulting from the rise in online and mobile forms of communication (Silverstone & Georgiou, 2005). This makes accessing and examining a wide variety of newspaper sources much easier. The Newztext database consists of the electronic copies of newspaper content from fifty-five current and former national and regional newspapers from across Aotearoa New Zealand. The newspapers covered came from the Stuff, Fairfax Media (Fairfax Media, 2015), and New Zealand Media and Entertainment (NZME Publishing Limited, 2015) suites of newspapers.

Articles were gathered using a keyword search, briefly checked for relevance, compiled into a file for each of the ten years covered in the research, from which twenty articles were randomly selected from each year, resulting in the final two hundred articles.

The keywords used in the initial keyword search were “welfare”, “beneficiary” and “beneficiaries”. These keywords were selected because they encompassed the general topic of the welfare state in Aotearoa New Zealand, and more specifically those who receive welfare: beneficiaries. Since one of the research goals was to examine policy responses to media constructions of welfare recipients, an explicitly policy-related keyword was not deemed to be

necessary. Other keywords, such as ‘benefit’, were excluded to minimise the inclusion of excess irrelevant material in the initial search due to the multiple meanings of the word. The keyword search was completed for each of the ten years between 2005 and 2014 and resulted in a vast amount of raw data that was briefly assessed for relevance.

The ten-year period from which the articles were drawn represented a period during which there was significant

**Reflexivity box.** “Beneficiary” is a word commonly used in Aotearoa New Zealand to reference a welfare recipient, and was initially used as such throughout this project. However, it is a term that has multiple interpretations associated with it - some that have positive connotations and some that are negative. Therefore, in order to avoid misinterpretation of my intended meaning, I opted to use the more neutral term ‘welfare recipient’ throughout the project instead.

welfare reform, economic change and political shift in Aotearoa New Zealand. In 2008 there was a period of economic recession that was worsened by the global financial crisis. That same year the government shifted from a Labour-led to a National-led government (The Treasury, 2010). As the economy recovered over the following years, significant welfare reforms were gradually implemented. During such a period of change, multiple and diverse constructions may be contested in public forums, such as media. Thus the ten-year period selected for this research reflected a recent period of negotiation and meaning making in both the public and political sphere of Aotearoa New Zealand regarding welfare. The ten-year period of interest allowed for a demonstration of how media constructions were used discursively to promote particular changes to the welfare system, and see the implementation of those changes in welfare policy.

In assessing the relevance of the newspaper articles, those that related to the receipt of social assistance through the Ministry of Social Development (MSD) were included, while

those from other agencies such as Accident Compensation Corporation (ACC) were excluded. ACC benefits are a form of no-fault personal injury insurance for everyone within Aotearoa New Zealand's borders, regardless of their status as a citizen. The insurance provided by ACC covers some of the costs incurred as a result of injury, such as healthcare and rehabilitation costs, as well as a portion of any lost earnings (Accident Compensation Corporation, 2015). Comparatively, benefits administered by the Ministry of Social Development are only available to those with New Zealand residency or citizenship in New Zealand or Australia, and focuses on employment and income support (Ministry of Social Development, Nature and scope of functions, n.d.). These services are delivered through Work and Income. The employment support provided by Work and Income primarily helps people to gain employment. This is done through running workshops and seminars, providing people with training or work experience, supporting clients in starting businesses, and providing financial support to employers and those starting new jobs through grants to offset some of their costs (Ministry of Social Development, Our services and standards, n.d.). Income support provided by Work and Income consists of the provision of benefits for those who are unable to participate in the workforce due to unemployment, caring for family members, sickness or disability. Financial support is also provided for people over sixty-five years of age and for students in tertiary study (Ministry of Social Development, Our services and standards, n.d.).

The focus of this research was on those individuals who were in receipt of a Work and Income benefit, of 'working-age' – that is, eighteen to sixty-four – and not in tertiary education or training. Articles related to the individuals and groups who did not meet these criteria were excluded due to their exemption from the social expectation to work. All newspaper articles relating to this group were considered to be relevant. This included individuals receiving the Unemployment Benefit, later renamed Jobseeker Support; the Domestic Purposes benefit,

renamed Sole Parent Support; Sickness and Invalids benefits, or Supported Living Payment; and various other short-term or supplementary benefits.

After briefly assessing the relevance of the data included in the initial keyword search, the articles were collected into files related to the year they were published and numbered. No distinction was made between different types of newspaper pieces. The data gathered included news stories, letters to the editor, editorials, news briefs, and so on. This lack of distinction was due to changes in the way news media has been presented and consumed in recent decades. Since the 1990's there has been a shift in news media around the globe from a focus on the presentation of news and information to one which more resembles entertainment (Franklin, 1999). Human interest rather than public interest has become the greater priority. The increase in competition between media sources has led to a preference by media outlets to present shorter, more entertaining stories to gain the attention of audiences rather than longer, analytic pieces that address social issues (Franklin, 1999). There has also been a shift in the hierarchy between journalists and columnists. In the past, journalists were valued for their dealing in facts, whereas columnists dealt in opinions. In the modern context, the opinions in columns and blogs have a greater position in news media due to the attention grabbing nature of hyperbole and polarised positions (Franklin, 1999). Therefore, differentiation between types of newspaper pieces was not warranted as they are all equally likely to contribute to the production of public discourse.

To obtain the final data-set of two hundred newspaper articles, twenty articles were randomly selected from each of the ten years covered in the study. The large sample size and random selection were due to the exploratory nature of the research. The projects pre-determined analytic focus was simply to examine media constructions of individuals who receive welfare, and the interaction between those constructions and policy changes. Therefore, a larger sample size was required in order to recognise the broader themes and constructions

(Lyons & Coyle, 2007). Similarly, random selection was used to provide a broad and representative sample of data from amongst the large number of newspaper articles related to the subject of welfare (Broome, 1984).

Random selection was done using the internet-based random selection tool 'Research Randomizer' (Urbaniak & Plous, 2016). For each year the total number of relevant articles was input into the randomizer, which then output a unique set of twenty numbers corresponding to the numbers assigned to the articles. These articles were then re-checked briefly to ensure their relevance, and where necessary alternate material was randomly selected to retain the twenty articles from each year. The final two hundred articles were then compiled and printed for multiple readings and analysis.

**Reflexivity box.** In examining the motivation behind the use of random selection in this study I found that the avoidance of bias was a key motivating factor: I was endeavouring to reduce my own “partiality and oppression” (Broome, 1984, p. 40). I chose this topic of study due to a personal and political interest. By randomly selecting articles I removed the option for the exclusion of articles based on their deviation from my political agenda. While the avoidance of bias is considered to be an impossible task by critical psychology researchers (Burr, 2003; Langdrige & Taylor, 2007), random selection was my way of ensuring the depth and rigour of the project, allowing a broad range of opinions to be present in the data.

**Analysis.** There are two dominant forms of discourse analysis commonly used within psychological research: Discursive Psychology and Foucauldian Discourse Analysis (FDA). Discursive Psychology focuses on language as a form of social action. This method of analysis examines the function of accounts and how that function is achieved (Lyons & Coyle, 2007). In Discursive Psychology, discourse is constructed by the speaker. It is a tool that is actively wielded by the speaker to construct accounts (Wertz, et al., 2011). In Foucauldian Discourse Analysis, discourse constructs the speaker (Wertz, et al., 2011). FDA examines the social

structures implicit in discourse: the structures that are played out in power relations, subject positions and how individuals understand and talk about the world (Lyons & Coyle, 2007). Accounts that reinforce existing social structures tend to be privileged over alternate accounts because they reinforce and perpetuate existing power relations (Lyons & Coyle, 2007).

The current project combines both forms of discourse analysis to examine the ways in which welfare recipients and welfare policies are constructed in newspaper media accounts. By combining both of these levels of analysis of the text, attention can be drawn to three important elements of discourse. Firstly, attention to how the discursive resources are used in the construction of welfare recipients. Secondly, it allows for the examination of the social actions implicated in those constructions, such as symbolic power and subject positions. Finally, it demonstrates the social and institutional frameworks that shape those discourses (Lyons, Madden, Chamberlain, & Carr, 2011; Wertz, et al., 2011; Wetherell, 1998). The discursive-level analysis, with its focus on interpretative repertoires, rhetorical devices, and their functions demonstrates what is happening ‘in’ the text. Power relations, subject positions and the social and institutional frameworks that shape them are what is happening ‘with’ the text (Brown, 1999).

The analytic process for this project involved repeated readings and interactions with the data and the existing literature. Through immersion in the data and intimate familiarity with its contents, discourse was revealed. During the immersion process each newspaper article was examined for the problem it focused on and how the problem was addressed (Gill, 1997). The problem and its proposed solution tended to address the Foucauldian concerns within the text, and how the argument was formulated highlighted the discursive and interpretative issues in the text. There was a process of moving from noting the common themes in the text to making discursive inferences (Barnett, et al., 2007). This required a search for patterns within the text,

variability between and within the articles, and a focus on the function of constructions (Wertz, et al., 2011).

The project began as a broad examination of the different constructions of welfare recipients and policy in newspaper articles without a specific analytic focus. Through immersion in the data, the relationship between work, welfare and neoliberalism became the specific area of focus. Work and welfare have come to be intimately linked in addressing welfare as a social issue (Marston, 2008). This area of focus came about due to the repeated construction of work as the only proposed alternative to welfare and dependence. Work was also used repeatedly within the data as a differentiating norm by which individuals were categorised into groups. By categorising groups using work as the norm, they were constructed and positioned in relation to each other and in relation to their involvement in the labour and economic markets. The construction of these groups promoted particular social practices and political policies that further reinforced work as a social norm (Suszycki, 2013).

The relationship between welfare recipients and work revealed three dominant discursive formations in the newspaper accounts: the culture of dependence, carrot-stick discourse and work as a panacea. Articles and excerpts that addressed each of these discursive formations were analysed, followed by accounts that addressed the policy responses to them. Articles and excerpts that presented alternative accounts that resisted the dominant discursive formations and policy responses were also examined. Analysis was focused on the three important elements of discourse: how discursive resources were used to construct welfare recipients, the social and political actions those constructions promoted, and the social and institutional frameworks that shaped discourse. The areas focused on during analysis included the use of stereotypes in the construction of welfare recipients; symbolic power, framing and deservingness; and the neoliberal underpinnings of discourse.

**Ethics.** This project was evaluated to be low risk due to the lack of human participants and privacy concerns. The research data for this project were published newspaper articles that are readily available within the public domain. Therefore, it was not necessary to receive approval for this project from one of Massey University's Human Ethics Committees. Instead, a Low Risk Notification was submitted to, and accepted by the Research Ethics Office.



### Chapter Three: Analysis

This chapter presents and discusses the three dominant discursive formations regarding work and welfare in the examined newspaper accounts. Each of the discursive formations is examined for the construction of welfare recipients, the social positions and practices those constructions promote the social and institutional framework underpinning them. Newspaper media accounts of proposed welfare policies related to the discursive formations are similarly analysed. The chapter concludes by examining media accounts that resist the dominant discursive formations and provide an alternative account of work, welfare, and policy.

#### Dependence as a Culture

In some media accounts, welfare dependence has come to be constructed as a kind of culture that has developed in and around the welfare state (Beddoe, 2014; de Goede, 1996; Schrecker & Bamba, 2015). In these formulations the availability of welfare support perpetuates ongoing unemployment and stereotypical behaviours that are outside of middle-class, neoliberal norms. The following accounts drew from constructions of dependence as a culture:

*Attacking the culture of dependency that had arisen around the welfare state, Dr Brash said a state handout had come to be seen by far too many as a birthright. “We are developing a culture where, when people leave a relationship, too many take it for granted that the first port of call is not their own savings or their family but the Work and Income office; on leaving a job, many don't look for another but simply head for the Winz office. “If Winz wants them to look for work, too many make a beeline for the doctor and use standover tactics (to get a sickness benefit)” (War on welfare, 2005).*

The phrase “handout” is a discursively powerful repertoire. It implies that there is a one-way relationship between the state and welfare recipients: the state provides welfare without condition or expectation of workforce participation. This one-way relationship creates

a culture where dependence is rewarded instead of encouraging individuals to be independent and self-reliant. The writer constructs welfare recipients as viewing a “state handout” to be a birthright. The use of language such as “birthright”, “we” and “take it for granted” constructs welfare as an ingrained part of the culture of Aotearoa New Zealand, and something people expect to be able to rely on whenever they want it.

This account demonstrates a reliance on stereotypical renderings of welfare recipients. It portrays welfare recipients as single parents, who choose to be unemployed and who engage in intimidating behaviour to maintain their dependence. The blame for this kind of family structure and behaviour is attributed to the ingrained culture of dependence in Aotearoa New Zealand. The welfare

**Reflexivity box.** In my analysis I refer to “the writer” rather than using names due to an acknowledgement of the socially contextual nature of discourse. Attributing a construction to an individual invisibilises this core principle of social constructionism. Instead, the focus is on the contextual function of the construction: the norms and practices being promoted and perpetuated.

system itself is constructed as the foundation on which the culture of dependence, stereotypical family structures and individual behaviours rest. However, welfare recipients are not without blame in this account. The state provides the system that creates dependence, and welfare recipients take advantage of that system.

The use of stereotypical portrayals of welfare recipients in this account promotes a moralistic account of welfare recipients that constructs them as undeserving of state support. They are portrayed as able but not willing to be self-sufficient; as scroungers who are an unnecessary burden on the taxpayer (Marston, 2008). The construction of welfare recipients as a burden on the taxpayer positions welfare recipients as lesser citizens due to the drain they

place on resources. This demonstrates a commodification of citizenship, whereby a good citizen is one who contributes to the market (Marston, 2008).

The writer's critique of the welfare system is that it should be more work-focused. If the state is work-focused instead of handout-focused, dependence is reduced. If individuals are encouraged to make more self-sufficient decisions when their situations change, dependence decreases further.

This critique demonstrates the neoliberal underpinning of the account. It draws from two aspects of neoliberalism: policy and ideology. The neoliberal policy goal is to reduce the size of the state and minimise welfare provisions (Schrecker & Bambra, 2015). The focus on work is intended to reduce dependence on the welfare system, thus reducing its size. The account actively resists the interdependence of the welfare system and promotes independence, self-sufficiency and market participation.

*In Blenheim last week, Social Development Minister Paula Bennett told a group of Marlborough social services and health staff changes to the system, coming in July, would target young beneficiaries, trying to get them into work sooner and stop them becoming dependent on the system (Fall in beneficiaries new sign of strength, 2013).*

This account constructs the culture of dependence differently. Rather than dependence being part of the culture in a society, in this account dependence is an ingrained aspect of the individual's culture. It constructs welfare dependence as a self-perpetuating cycle. Dependence creates greater dependence. The longer an individual relies on the state the more dependent they become on that system. Therefore, the earlier that intervention takes place in the individual's life, the easier the cycle is to break.

While dependence is ingrained in the individual rather than in society, in this account accountability is attributed to "the system". This readily understood repertoire enables the writer to separate individuals from the 'thing' that produces dependence. Welfare recipients

are positioned as victims of the system and of the dependence it produces. Thus “changes to the system” are the answer to changing the culture of dependence.

As in the previous excerpt, the critique of the welfare system is that it is not work-focused. The proposed changes to the system shift the focus from one that produces dependence to one that focuses on producing work. This is constructed to provide a catalyst for young welfare recipients to acculturate into a culture of social participation instead of a culture of dependence.

This account also draws from a neoliberal framework. The proposed changes to the welfare system demonstrate the neoliberal policy objective of reducing the size of the state. In order to achieve this objective, the account uses the social investment justification. Social investment allows for some welfare spending in the neoliberal economic programme where there is the promise of future profits (Schrecker & Bambra, 2015). By using welfare resources to change the culture of younger welfare recipients they are changed into taxpayers. The market participation and tax contributions across the lifetime of young welfare recipients has the potential to be greater than if the same intervention were to be applied to older welfare recipients. Therefore, an investment in younger welfare recipients is considered justifiable in this account, and young welfare recipients are constructed to be deserving of that investment.

*Just as problematic for Labour is the perception - regardless of the reality of life below the poverty line - that this flagship policy would only make life more comfortable for beneficiaries. It will be viewed across middle New Zealand as merely encouraging bludgers to breed excessively, perpetuating generational dependency on state handouts and a disincentive to self-sufficiency (Policy on poverty costly and deperate, 2011).*

This account ties the two previous accounts of the culture of dependence together. The phrase “state handout” is used in this context to construct welfare as a perpetuating factor in the culture of dependence. The provision of welfare and the state’s failure to motivate welfare

recipients to engage in the workforce perpetuates dependence by providing unconditional income for welfare recipients. Dependence and the stereotypical behaviours that welfare recipients are portrayed as exhibiting, are constructed as cultural by-products of the welfare system.

In this account welfare recipients are constructed using numerous common stereotypes: large family sizes, inherited dependence and a lack of work ethic. Such stereotypical behaviours are constructed as being caused by welfare dependence and as also acting to perpetuate dependence. In this account, the use of stereotypical constructions of welfare recipients operates to provide a justification for their exclusion.

The writer prefaces their highly stereotyped account of welfare dependence with the disclaimer that it might not reflect the reality of life for the poor. Discursively, a disclaimer detaches the portrayal being presented from the writer, providing them with a defence if they are challenged on the stereotypical nature of their construction (Wilkinson, 2000).

The disclaimer in this account also provides an implicit acknowledgment of symbolic power. It acknowledges that media accounts of welfare tend not to reflect the interests of welfare recipients, but those of “middle New Zealand”. The focus of media coverage on middle-class norms and concerns, ignores the existence of inter-group class and power differences, constructs the unemployed poor as being socially and morally flawed and positions them outside of the social norm (Bullock, et al., 2001). This reinforces a discursive good-bad binary between taxpayers and welfare recipients (Marston, 2008). In this account, middle New Zealand is positioned in a higher moral position than welfare recipients through their implicit construction in juxtaposition to welfare recipient stereotypes. The term “bludgers” acts discursively as a euphemistic term for welfare recipients, drawing from a scroungerphobic construction in which they are portrayed as wasteful of taxpayer funds and unwilling to participate in the workforce (Chauhan & Foster, 2014). Therefore, welfare recipients are

positioned as a separate and undesirable social category, in contrast with the privileged and preferred taxpaying “middle New Zealand”.

This account draws from neoliberal ideology to promote the use of disciplinary power to force welfare recipients’ compliance with neoliberal social norms (Schrecker & Bamba, 2015). Welfare recipients are constructed in this account in such a way that justifies their exclusion from benefitting from a particular social resource (Silverstone & Georgiou, 2005). “Making life more comfortable” for welfare recipients is to reward bad behaviour. Therefore, to deny that comfort is to demonstrate the social unacceptability of welfare dependence.

**Dependence in policy.** Media accounts promote some political agendas and undermine others (Fraser & Llewellyn, 2015). The construction of welfare and its recipients in media accounts plays a role in the development of welfare policy (Chamberlain & Hodgetts, 2008). The following accounts demonstrate how welfare policies draw on media constructions of dependence as a culture:

*Welfare is a perennial favourite for perk-busting party ACT, and National signalled its interest early on in leader Don Brash's Orewa II speech, which zeroed in on “entrenched welfare dependency”.*

*Dr Brash's speech advocated getting tough on beneficiaries, and endorsed adoption as an option for those on the dpb. National also promised to reintroduce work for the dole, though the scheme would be targeted at younger people and the long-term unemployed (Helping out, 2005).*

In this account “entrenched welfare dependency” is an alternative metaphor to “culture of dependence”. Both metaphors construct welfare as ingrained. “Entrenched” dependence evokes a militaristic account of the welfare system where battles are fought and ground is not conceded easily.

In advocating for “getting tough on beneficiaries” the welfare system is constructed in this account as being too lenient on welfare recipients. That toughness means addressing welfare stereotypes in policy.

The policy of endorsing adoption addresses the stereotype of women on the DPB having extra children in order to maintain their access to welfare. In this formulation there is a problematic link between the reproductive capacity of women and welfare dependence. Women who choose to have children that they cannot support through self-sufficient means are constructed as bad mothers (Fraser & Llewellyn, 2015), calling into question whether they should retain custody of their children (Croghan & Miell, 1998). Here, in determining whether these women are deserving of welfare support, a judgment is also being made about whether they deserve to have children. The proposed policy to endorse adoption would suggest that in this account dependence on the state disqualifies women on the DPB from the right to be a parent, and instead prioritises their availability for work.

Targeting the “work for the dole” scheme at young welfare recipients and the long-term unemployed singles these groups out as problematic in the welfare system. They are constructed as a potential source of long-term dependence if there is no intervention. Therefore, measures such as work-for-the-dole are suggested as a means by which the culture of dependence can be replaced by a culture of work.

The policies proposed in this account demonstrate a neoliberal underpinning. Not only is there an intent toward reducing dependence and the size of the welfare system, but the interests of the market are prioritised over other, social concerns – such as keeping families together.

*The Kahui case has prompted Mr Benson-Pope to order Work and Income to prepare dossiers of households where large numbers of people are on a benefit to address intergenerational dependency.*

*These “welfare clusters” will be checked to ensure children are being properly cared for and going to school and that everyone on a benefit is entitled and undergoing work tests (Smart cards to stop benefit misuse, 2006).*

This account contains a clear case of the CNN effect (Barnett, et al., 2007), whereby media coverage of the tragic deaths of the Kahui twins in 2006 prompted policy changes. The writer constructs welfare recipients using negative stereotypes. They are constructed as bad parents (Fraser & Llewellyn, 2015) who live in overcrowded conditions and do not adequately take care of their children. Welfare recipients are portrayed as fraudulently using the welfare system to avoid of work. The use of these stereotypes constructs welfare recipients as scroungers who are misusing taxpayer funds and whose dependence is the cause of greater social problems, like as child abuse. Using such an account of welfare recipients provides a justification for the closer scrutiny of ‘at risk families’ to prevent further tragedies (Brown, 2011).

The purpose of this scrutiny is formulated as care for vulnerable groups. However, such well-intentioned policies can also be a source of oppression when used to enforce the social norms of one group onto another (Brown, 2011). Ensuring children attend school promotes the well-being and success of children, but ensuring adults meet their work obligations enforces neoliberal citizenship norms, such as independence, self-sufficiency and market participation (Coombes & Morgan, 2015).

**Summary.** The construction of the culture of dependence in these media accounts portrays welfare recipients using common stereotypes. These stereotypical constructions act to justify the lower social position of welfare recipients and promote social practices that exclude them from access to particular rights and resources.

In these constructions of the culture of dependence, blame is primarily attributed to the welfare system itself. However, welfare recipients are not constructed using the liberal frame. In the liberal frame social and economic factors are viewed as the cause of dependence (Barnett,



et al., 2007). Instead, in these accounts welfare recipients are constructed as having some responsibility for their dependence: they are constructed as taking advantage of the welfare system and engaging in behaviour that perpetuates dependence. In light of this attribution of blame, these accounts largely construct welfare recipients as undeserving of welfare support except in circumstances where that support can be justified as a social investment.

The construction of the culture of dependence in these accounts come from a neoliberal social framework. By attempting to reduce the size of the welfare state these accounts are drawing from a neoliberal economic agenda. In order to achieve this goal, these accounts promote neoliberal ideals such as the prioritisation of the market's interests and the use of disciplinary power to produce independence, self-sufficiency, and market participation.

### **Carrots and Sticks**

Discourses that promote work as the answer to welfare, such as constructions of dependence as a culture, often contain an account of welfare recipients where they need to be encouraged to 'do the right thing'. This may either occur in the form of a reward for compliance or a punishment for non-compliance (Beddoe, 2014); carrots or sticks. The carrot and stick metaphor is based on the best way to drive a donkey: by holding out a carrot as a lure, or to whip the donkey with a stick and cause the donkey to attempt to move away from the source of pain (Castonguay, 2009). The carrot-stick metaphor is a common idiom in the English language, particularly with regards to how best to motivate individuals and groups to engage in desirable behaviours, activities and practices. Carrots and sticks are identifiable by the language used to construct them. Incentives encourage and support individuals to engage in the desired behaviour. Disincentives force people to change their behaviour. In the media accounts of welfare and work in the current study this interpretative repertoire is used often to describe how best to encourage welfare recipients to move from welfare to work.

**The incentivisation of work.** Carrots incentivise work by offering rewards that act to “pull” welfare recipients away from unemployment (Castonguay, 2009). Incentives can be financial, such as an increase in income or an in-work government payment like Working for Families (hereafter WFF). Other common incentives are initiatives that reduce social or familial barriers that limit participation in the workforce. The following excerpts discuss welfare recipients being incentivised to work:

*When Helen Clark and Michael Cullen introduced Working For Families six years ago, it was promoted as a tax credit-based incentive to encourage parent beneficiaries back into the workforce. (Policy on poverty costly and deperate, 2011)*

The writer’s use of the phrase “encourage parent beneficiaries...” frames WFF as a carrot that entices welfare recipients into work. The word “encourage” constructs welfare recipients as lacking in work ethic and in need of some kind of motivation to engage in the workforce. Thus welfare recipients must be offered a carrot to pull them toward employment.

This account positions “parent beneficiaries” in relation to their children and evokes the issues of child poverty and intergenerational dependence. Welfare recipient parents are constructed according to the conservative frame. They are considered to be blameworthy for their dependence and their children’s poverty. Therefore, they must be encouraged off welfare and into work.

By presenting WFF as “tax credit-based incentive” the writer demonstrates that the intent of WFF is not to extend the welfare system but to assist the deserving, working poor. In this account, the poor who participate in the labour market are constructed as deserving extra financial support due to their compliance with the social norm. Those who do not participate in the workforce are constructed as undeserving and their exclusion from WFF payments operates as a form of disciplinary power. Therefore, the incentivisation of work using financial rewards also operates as a penalty for those who do not conform.

This account demonstrates a neoliberal social framework. By encouraging welfare recipients to participate in the workforce, the size of the welfare system is reduced. The differentiation between the deserving and undeserving poor in this account endorses adherence with neoliberal norms and uses disciplinary power to enforce them.

*It argues that a key to lifting children out of poverty is to help their parents into paid work, and that the best way to do this is to overcome barriers such as the cost of preschool and after-school childcare (Poverty plan pushes help for sole parents, 2008).*

In this account, welfare recipient parents are constructed as needing help to engage in the workforce. Parents' childcare responsibilities are constructed as an 'unemployment mire' from which the provision of preschool and after-school care will pull them, allowing them to participate in the workforce. In such an account, social and economic factors are portrayed as the cause of dependence, constructing welfare recipients according to the liberal frame. Their lack of access to resources perpetuates their dependence. Once welfare recipients gain access to those resources they will become more independent, more self-sufficient through participation in the market.

Within the neoliberal framework of this account, the reduction of barriers to work is justified as a social investment. Incentivising parents to participate in the workforce increases their income and decreases their dependence on the welfare system in accordance with a neoliberal economic agenda, and promises future profits for the state in taxes and a lower welfare bill (Schrecker & Bamba, 2015).

**Policies incentivising work.** Following constructions of welfare recipients as needing to be motivated to engage in the workforce, these media accounts demonstrate the kinds of 'carrot policies' that were proposed:

*On the carrot side National said it would increase the amount beneficiaries could earn from \$80 to \$100 without affecting their benefit.*

*Beneficiaries with a part-time job now lose 70c in every dollar they earn over \$80 a week, and that would increase to \$100 to encourage beneficiaries to work (Welfare debated as slump eases, 2009).*

This account directly constructs the outlined policy as an incentive for work. The financial incentive makes work more financially rewarding than subsisting on welfare. The financial improvement welfare recipients experience when they participate in the workforce part-time is constructed to create a self-reinforcing pattern, that promotes the idea of more work for more reward in an effort to reduce welfare dependence.

The policy in this account demonstrates a neoliberal underpinning. The ultimate intent of the policy is to reduce welfare dependence and promote neoliberal citizenship ideals. Rewarding welfare recipients for participating in the workforce creates greater market participation, and allows the size of the state to be reduced. The financial benefit of greater workforce participation allows citizens to be able to innovate and consume more freely in the market (Simpson & Envy, 2015).

*Ms Bennett did say the scheme provides grants up \$1500, that the average grant is \$363 a week, and the ministry has made more than 500,000 of them. Some are for clothing costs, to help dress people when they apply for jobs; some are for childcare costs while beneficiaries go for job interviews (Ardern on wrong track, 2012).*

The policy outlined in this account addresses the practical barriers that people face during the job search process. This policy demonstrates a liberal framing of welfare recipients, in which their dependence is constructed to be caused by social and economic factors – such as being unable to access resources that make workforce participation possible. Therefore, this policy helps welfare recipients to overcome the barriers that inhibit their participation in the workforce.

The policy discussed in this account is justified in the neoliberal framework as a social investment. It encourages greater workforce participation, and enables welfare recipients to

become contributing taxpayers. The writer constructs the recipients of this grant as deserving as they are attempting to improve their circumstances, engage in the normative practice of work, and increase their level of self-sufficiency and autonomy.

**The disincentivisation of welfare.** In carrot-stick discourse, sticks disincentivise ongoing subsistence on welfare by using punitive measures to “push” welfare recipients toward employment (Castonguay, 2009). Sticks can take the form of punitive or intrusive welfare policies, or policies that require particular groups of welfare recipients to engage in job-seeking as a condition of their ongoing eligibility for welfare. Disciplinary power is used to make welfare recipients adhere to middle-class, neoliberal norms. Increases in eligibility requirements such as job-seeking and social obligations promote the neoliberal restructure of the welfare state (Schrecker & Bamba, 2015). Constructions of welfare recipients that promote the disincentivisation of welfare are demonstrated in the following accounts:

*Unemployment beneficiaries face the strictest regime, with Social Development Minister Paula Bennett saying the “dream is over” for those who cannot show an honest attempt to find work after a year.*

*“If a real, demonstrable effort has been made, their benefit will be reinstated. If not, well, I'm afraid the dream is over” (64,000 face work tests on benefits, 2010).*

This account constructs welfare as a “dream”: a pleasant arrangement where welfare recipients are given benefits with no obligation to find work. The “dream” repertoire and the phrase “honest attempt to find work...” demonstrates a scroungerphobic construction of unemployment benefit recipients in which they are portrayed as acting fraudulently in their ongoing dependence on the welfare system (Crow, 2014). Therefore, they need to be disincentivised from ongoing dependence and pushed into work (Castonguay, 2009).

The writer’s critique in this account is that unemployment benefit recipients have not been work-focused. That failing has perpetuated welfare dependence. Thus they are constructed in this account according to the conservative frame. They have caused their own

dependence by failing to find work and to continue to do so makes them ineligible for continued financial support. Only those who meet the obligations placed on them are deserving of support. By constructing welfare recipients as failing to uphold the social norm of workforce participation, they are unfavourably compared with those who have met this norm and are positioned in a lower social standing.

The construction of welfare recipients in this account demonstrates a neoliberal social framework. The shift away from providing an obligation-free income to welfare recipients demonstrates a move toward the neoliberal policy of reducing the size of the state. In order to achieve this goal, disciplinary power is used to enforce compliance with the neoliberal norms of independence and workforce participation by making it the only legitimate, permanent source of income.

*Business Roundtable executive director Roger Kerr sees the welfare system as a safety net, but believes obligations on beneficiaries should be tougher. For instance, parents on the dpb should have to work when their children are five, he believes (Helping out, 2005).*

The writer uses the “safety net” repertoire as a disclaimer to soften their account before constructing welfare recipients as overly dependent. This disclaimer acts to demonstrate their objectivity in acknowledging that there are two sides to the welfare argument (Augoustinos, et al., 1999): that some people need assistance from the state, but that ongoing dependence can be a trap. There are circumstances in which welfare recipients are deserving of support, but there are some who should be discouraged from ongoing dependence.

The writer provides an account where the “tougher” obligations for welfare recipients come in the form of a stick. Work obligations and the loss of benefits for not meeting work obligations constitute a stick by making welfare uncomfortable and an uncertain source of income in order to push welfare recipients off welfare and into work.

The “should” in the statement “parents on the DPB should have to...” indicates a moral imperative (Augoustinos, et al., 2005). This moral imperative acts to position the individuals and groups within this account. The writer positions taxpayers participating in the marketplace as the higher moral authority. Welfare recipients are positioned as lacking in morality due to their failure to work (Marston, 2008). Work is constructed as an issue of morality, indicating a neoliberal social framework in which market participation is the individual’s primary and essential social responsibility (de Goede, 1996). Therefore, those who “should” be in work are constructed in this account as undeserving of ongoing welfare support, and those only those who truly need the “safety net” deserve welfare support.

**Disincentivisation policies.** The following media accounts are examples of how policy responses draw on the construction of welfare recipients needing to be disincentivised from ongoing welfare dependence:

*Beneficiaries must tell Work and Income if they plan to leave New Zealand; they must enrol children with a doctor, a preschool from the age of 3 and a school from the age of 5; and ensure health checks are up to date.*

*They must undergo a drug test when required on the Jobseeker benefit and turn themselves in if there is a warrant out for their arrest (Benefit reform greeted with mixed response, 2013).*

The obligations outlined in this account draw from stereotypical portrayals of welfare recipients in which they fail to look after their children adequately, use drugs, and are criminals. The repeated use of the word “must” in this account highlights a low moral positioning of welfare recipients.

The policies outlined in this account act to enforce the more moral middle-class norms (Marston, 2008). Only by meeting the moral obligations can welfare recipients be considered deserving of welfare. Individuals who are not willing to meet these standards do not deserve to have their immoral lifestyle subsidised by the taxpayer.

The policies outlined in this account disempower welfare recipient parents from being able to make personal decisions regarding their children's health and education, and shift that power to the state. Such policies are reminiscent of punitive workhouse policies that provided state support at the cost of the recipients' personal freedom (Berend, 2005). In the modern context this translates to limiting welfare recipients' freedom of choice when it comes to their family.

These policies demonstrate the neoliberal phenomenon whereby the intent is to reduce the size of the state, but instead the state is repurposed to monitor and discipline its citizens (Schrecker & Bamba, 2015). In this account, the use of disciplinary power within the welfare system to enforce adherence with middle-class, neoliberal norms means more monitoring of welfare recipients to ensure compliance (Marston, 2008).

*Unemployment beneficiaries must reapply for the unemployment benefit every year and show what they've done to find work.*

*New graduated sanctions for failure to comply with job search requirements.*

*New work tests for domestic purposes benefit (DPB) once youngest child is six.*

*New work tests for sickness beneficiaries deemed fit to work 15 hours or more a week (64,000 face work tests on benefits, 2010)*

The policies outlined in this account are drawn from a construction in which welfare needs to be disincentivised from dependence in order to avoid them lingering too long on benefits due to the lack of work obligations being placed on them. A lack of obligations is constructed to incentivise scrounging. These policies address those concerns by increasing the number of obligations on welfare recipients.

The policy requiring welfare recipients to reapply for their benefits annually addresses the stereotype in which welfare recipients are portrayed as lacking motivation. This policy uses bureaucratic processes to disincentivise unmotivated welfare recipients from maintaining their dependence. Those who demonstrate that they are motivated by meeting all the obligations



placed on them, and reapply when required are deserving of support. Those who fail to meet the obligations placed on them are constructed as undeserving of taxpayer's funds.

The policies outlined in this account demonstrate a neoliberal social framework in their promotion of the ideal neoliberal citizen. The ideal neoliberal citizen is self-motivating, autonomous, adaptable, responsible and work-focused (Coombes & Morgan, 2015). These policies use disciplinary power to ensure that welfare recipients demonstrate these traits, creating greater social autonomy and market participation.

**Summary.** The construction of carrot-stick discourse in these media accounts portrays welfare recipients using common stereotypes. These stereotypical constructions act to justify the lower social position of welfare recipients and promote the use of disciplinary power to enforce adherence with middle-class, neoliberal norms.

In these media accounts using carrot-stick discourse, blame is attributed differently according to the construction of welfare recipients. Primarily, in these accounts welfare recipients are constructed according to the conservative frame and blame for dependence and poverty is attributed to the individual. In these cases, welfare recipients need to be pushed or pulled into employment. Carrot policies pull welfare recipients into employment using financial rewards to create a self-reinforcing pattern of more work for more reward. Stick policies push welfare recipients away from welfare dependence using disciplinary power to enforce compliance with social norms and make work more preferable than dependence.

However, in some accounts welfare recipients are constructed as unable to access the resources they need to participate in market, and blame for their dependence is attributed to social and economic factors. In such accounts, a social investment is justifiable in order to promote greater social and market participation and future independence from the welfare system.

The construction of carrot-stick discourses in these accounts come from a neoliberal social framework. Attempting to reduce the size of the welfare state draws from a neoliberal economic agenda. In order to achieve this goal, these accounts promote neoliberal ideals such as the use of disciplinary power to produce ideal neoliberal citizens. However, the use of social obligations as a requirement for continued eligibility risks failing to reduce the size of the state due to the level of monitoring required to ensure welfare recipients' compliance.

### **Work as a Panacea**

Media accounts of welfare often promote work as a kind of cure-all or panacea for the 'ailment' of unemployment and its associated symptoms: poverty, mental health issues and intergenerational dependence. Such constructions take on one of two different configurations in the data: the health configuration, and the social ills configuration.

**The health configuration.** In the health configuration of work as a panacea, work is constructed as a literal cure for mental and physical health issues. The following accounts discuss this construction:

*“(A sickness benefit) is not a healthy option long term. If I could prescribe a job, I would. It is far better for people than prescribing medication” (Resistance to 'stress capital' tag, 2006).*

In this account, a sickness benefit is constructed as an unhealthy option in the long-term for stressed sickness benefit recipients. Work is constructed as a cure for stress in this account by describing it as “far better for people than...medication”. By constructing work as a panacea the quoted GP in this account attempts to shift the blame (Nelson, 2016) for dependence from doctors to welfare recipients. Work is not something a doctor can prescribe, despite its benefits. To shift blame, a “If I could I would” repertoire is used construct the quoted individual as powerless to prescribe the best cure for stressed sickness benefit recipients. Blame is attributed to welfare recipients for their ongoing mental health problems if they are not in work. This attribution of blame constructs welfare recipients according to the conservative frame (Barnett,

et al., 2007). In the conservative frame welfare recipients are constructed as having the power to enact changes in their life to improve their circumstances.

The construction of work as a cure in this account draws from a neoliberal framework. It relies on the neoliberal assumption that market participation is central to social life (de Goede, 1996). Prolonged absence from the workforce is bad for an individual's mental health due to their exclusion from this 'central' part of social life. Thus returning to the workforce is constructed to improve the health of those individuals.

*At one stage, she talks about how work can help beneficiaries with depression. "And it's actually a road to recovery for them, it actually helps them get better," she says. "So it's not actually all penalties, this is actually what I believe is helping people get well and actually work is a big part of that" (The Diary, 2010).*

The individual quoted in this account defends welfare reforms that place greater work requirements on welfare recipients in light of the positive effect work is constructed to have on individuals. The continual use of the word "actually" is discursively powerful. In this context it acts a form of 'evoking the facts', that legitimates an argument and the expertise of the speaker (Augoustinos, et al., 2005). Each use of the word "actually" resists critique and presents an expert account in its place.

Work is constructed as a cure using the "road to recovery" metaphor. This metaphor recognisably describes the process of an individual becoming healthier. Constructing work in this way resists the idea that the welfare reforms penalise welfare recipients and presents an account where the focus on work helps welfare recipients to improve their health and outlook on life.

In this formulation unemployment causes some welfare recipients to become depressed, and work is constructed as the anti-depressant. This rendering of unemployment as the cause of depression draws from the neoliberal idea that market participation is central to social life, whereby absence from work is also absence from a central element of life. This is the cause of

depression. If welfare recipients do not take their medicine, they are responsible for their own poor mental health. This constructs welfare recipients according to the conservative frame and places responsibility on them for their own situations. In such a construction welfare recipients have the power to change their health and financial circumstances by participating in the workforce.

*She said support from the business community was crucial to the success of the programme and necessary to break the cycle of dependency some beneficiaries found themselves in.*

*“If somebody has depression a job could in fact be just the thing to get them out of what can be a stressful situation” (Help for beneficiaries looking for employment, 2005).*

This account links depression with dependency. Unemployment and dependency are constructed as stressors for depressed individuals, and work is the cure. Without work depressed individuals are trapped in a “cycle of dependency”. The cycle of dependency metaphor constructs welfare dependence as self-perpetuating: unemployment is the cause of depression, and depression is a barrier to work, causing further reliance on welfare.

This portrayal differs from the previous two accounts in that it does not attribute blame to welfare recipients. Instead, in this account, welfare recipients are constructed according to the liberal frame, in which blame is attributed to social and economic circumstances rather than the individual’s choices (Barnett, et al., 2007). Therefore, welfare recipients are deserving of assistance that helps to break the cycle of depression and dependence.

This account draws from a neoliberal social framework to position market participation as central to social life. This construction of work as a panacea also draws from the neoliberal concept of supply and demand to describe the relationship between welfare recipients and the business community. Welfare recipients’ depression creates a demand for work that the business community can supply (Dewey, 2015). Meanwhile welfare recipients supply the

labour needs of those businesses. In this account, this symbiotic relationship is vital for enabling depressed individuals to escape the cycle of dependence and improve their mental health.

**Health in policy.** Changes to welfare policy as a result of the health configuration of constructions of work as a panacea are exhibited in the following newspaper media accounts:

*These strategies include the Paths scheme, which pays for health treatment for beneficiaries to help them get back into work. It is a prime example of Labour's "investing in people" policy and is a new approach by the Government.*

*"Until a couple of years ago, if you were in a wheelchair, you weren't expected to work," Professor Stephens says (Helping out, 2005).*

This account highlights a shift in mind-sets about the ability and expectation for sick and disabled individuals to work. While work will not cure a permanent physical disability, work is constructed to be beneficial for the well-being of the individual and disability no longer precludes them from the expectation of work. This change in mindset draws from a construction where an individual's level of impairment reflects their level of employability. Using this measurement, the kind of disability and how much independence the individual has corresponds to their ability or inability to work (Crow, 2014). Such policies are a response to scroungerphobic constructions of sick and disabled welfare recipients, in which they are portrayed as unwilling to participate in the workforce despite being able to participate in particular kinds of work (Crow, 2014).

The "investing in people" policy reflects social investment within the neoliberal economic programme and the justification of some welfare spending in expectation of future profits. Thus by spending money on the treatment of welfare recipients' health issues, the future welfare bill can be reduced and tax revenue increased when those individuals participate in the workforce. Therefore, programmes such as the Paths scheme are justified in this account as

they are encouraging welfare recipients to engage in the market, increase their health and well-being and reduce the size of the state.

*From May 2011, sickness beneficiaries assessed as able to work part-time (15 to 29 hours a week) will be obliged to look for suitable work ...*

*Invalids likely to be able to work part-time in the next two years will receive the sickness rather than invalid's benefit, meaning they will face more frequent reviews of their condition and a "strong expectation" they will get back into work ('Few jobs' for beneficiaries, 2010).*

This account demonstrates a shift from an 'assistance' focus in policies aimed at getting the sick and disabled into work to an "obligation" focus. The phrase "suitable work" demonstrates an acknowledgment that welfare recipients who are sick or disabled may be limited in the kinds of work they may be able to do. While this account does not preclude sickness and invalid benefit recipient from the expectation to participate in the workforce, it acknowledges that the kinds of work these individuals are able to participate in depend on their particular needs.

The policies outlined in this account draw from a neoliberal social framework to reduce the size of the state and to promote neoliberal social norms. Constructing work as a panacea justifies moving the sick and disabled off benefits and into work, thus reducing the size of the welfare state.

**The social ills configuration** of work as a panacea constructs work as a cure for broader, unemployment-related social issues than the specifically health-focused configuration. This more general construction of work as a panacea is demonstrated in the following accounts:

*They are retired, stay-at-home mums and beneficiaries, who are allowed to earn a certain amount above their benefit. Giving a chance to people others may see as unemployable means the world to Mrs Hunt. "I've always had a passion to create*

*jobs for people ... I always thought I was given the ideas to give someone else some work," she said. "Some [outworkers] you see blossom ... it's quite exciting to see the change in people" (Kitchen craft ideas turn into full-blown industry for mum, 2014).*

In this account work is constructed as a panacea by the "blossoming" that occurs in welfare recipients when they are able to work part-time. Work is constructed to cure the welfare recipients in this account of their former 'unemployability', causing them to blossom into productive, socially engaged, taxpaying citizens.

The outworkers in this account are constructed according to the liberal frame and the blame for their circumstances is attributed to social and economic factors. Their age, having children at home or a lack of skills precludes them from being unable to engage in a typical workplace. Therefore, they need an atypical work arrangement (de Goede, 1996) such as the one discussed in this account to encourage them to participate in the workforce.

This account of work causing welfare recipients to blossom drew from a neoliberal social framework, reinforcing the idea that market participation is central to social life.

*The impact of an unemployed person getting a job is "life changing", he says. "Not just for the individual, but the effect on the whole family" (Life off the dole, 2007).*

This account constructs work as a cure for intergenerational poverty. Work is constructed to benefit not only the individual but also their family. In accounts of intergenerational dependence, intergenerational work is often an implicit counterpoint. A parent's participation in the workforce is constructed to set a precedent for the next generation to also work, just as dependence is often constructed as being passed on to successive generations. Thus work is constructed in this account as the cure for intergenerational dependence.

This account constructs welfare recipients according to the conservative frame. Welfare recipient parents are not only responsible for their own dependence, but also the ongoing

circumstances of their children. The responsibility and power to affect change for their family rests on the individual.

The curative effects of work on families implicitly draws from a normative, middle-class construction of parents as the guarantors of their children's future skills and life possibilities (Fraser & Llewellyn, 2015; Hollekim, et al., 2016). In constructing work as a panacea for whole families, the parents are positioned as having the power to do something "life changing" for their children by working. This rendering of intergenerational work promotes the idea that parents are required to provide more than their children's material needs, they are also required to equip them to become neoliberal citizens. Working parents model self-reliant, self-sufficient behaviour and encourage their children to enter the workforce themselves once they reach adulthood (Simpson & Envy, 2015). Parents who are in work are constructed as good parents, and unemployed parents are bad parents who can be socially disciplined for failing their children (Hollekim, et al., 2016).

**Social ills in policy.** The following media accounts demonstrate how policy draws on the social ills configuration of work as a panacea:

*Long-term beneficiaries work intensively, one-on-one, with Work and Income case workers, and are also often sent to courses to learn basic skills, some as simple as punctuality, arriving at 8am and leaving at 3pm. It is about changing attitudes and helping give confidence to get a job after years of not working (Life off the dole, 2007).*

This account demonstrates a policy response to the stereotypical construction of welfare recipients. Welfare recipients are portrayed in this account as lacking even the most basic life skills, like punctuality. In this account unemployment is constructed as an issue of attitude and a lack of confidence (Marston, 2008), constructing welfare recipients according to the conservative frame where the responsibility for unemployment ultimately rests on the individual.



This policy draws from a neoliberal social framework that places market participation as the central component of social life. Therefore, any improvement to the individual's ability to engage in the workforce is constructed to have a positive effect on the individual.

*The Labour Party is contemplating expanding the range and number of “positive parenting” programmes for teenage mothers and fathers to try to break the cycle of poverty in which second and sometimes third generations of families rely on welfare payments (Labour looking to 'positive parenting' as way out of welfare, 2010).*

The policy in this account addresses the stereotypical construction of teenage welfare recipients as bad parents who perpetuate intergenerational dependence (Fraser & Llewellyn, 2015). Therefore, “positive parenting” programmes are the solution.

This account constructs welfare recipients according to the conservative frame: they are responsible for “the cycle of poverty in which second and sometimes third generations of families rely on welfare payments”. In this account, teenage parents create future teenage parents, perpetuating dependence down the generations. This policy demonstrates a discursive link between welfare dependence and the quality of parenting. It draws from the idea that working parents are good parents and welfare recipient parents are bad parents. By providing teenage parents with parenting skills, their children will have better social outcomes and be more likely to participate effectively in the workforce, breaking the cycle of intergenerational dependence and creating future generations of good, neoliberal citizens.

**Summary.** In the construction of work as a panacea in these media accounts, regardless of the construction of welfare recipients and the attribution of blame, work is the solution. Each account places market participation and work at the centre of social life, demonstrating the neoliberal underpinning of these accounts. Work is proposed as a cure intergenerational dependence, which in turn will create future generations of independent, self-sufficient neoliberal citizens.

## Alternative Accounts

The accounts analysed thus far represent dominant discourses related to work and welfare in Aotearoa New Zealand. However, different accounts do different things. While the more prevalent discourses can be seen to be promoting normative practices and behaviour, alternative accounts can provide resistance to, or contradict and reformulate existing discourses according to the perspective of another social group or ideological perspective. The following newspaper media accounts demonstrate that resistance, providing alternative constructions of work and welfare recipients:

*Child Poverty Action Group member and Massey University associate professor Mike O'Brien is concerned about the effect of United States-style punitive welfare policies, including work for the dole, which have been promised by some parties. He says these policies are grounded in the belief that beneficiaries lack motivation, a theory not supported by research (Helping out, 2005).*

This account critiques the “United States-style punitive welfare policies” proposed by some political parties on the basis that the stereotypical construction of welfare recipients they are based on does not reflect research. Those policies draw from culture of dependence and carrot-stick discourse to construct welfare recipients as needing to be disincentivised from ongoing dependence. However, that construction lacks evidence. The writer uses the lack of evidence to solidify their argument against policies such as “work for the dole” in an ‘appeal to the facts’ (Fozdar, 2008, p. 532). In appealing to the facts the writer resists the attribution of blame to welfare recipients in portrayals of welfare recipients lacking motivation. Instead, the writer provides an implicit alternative construction in which welfare recipients are constructed according to the liberal frame, where dependence was not caused by a personal lack of motivation, but could be attributed to circumstances external to the individual. Therefore, “punitive” policies, such as work for the dole are unwarranted.

*First, the decision takes at face value that jobs are out there waiting to lift beneficiaries out of their dire poverty, if only they would get off their backsides and take them up, and a monetary incentive is the best way of spurring them on to do so.*

*Lack of jobs, or barriers to accessing them, are invisible in this formulation. If it was that simple then we would have, one assumes, very small numbers of beneficiaries, so motivated would they be to take up the surfeit of appropriate jobs. Instead it's clear that incentivisation can work only if there are jobs to be had, and people can do them. If there are no jobs, not the right kind of jobs, or people cannot work for money because of childcare commitments, then it's perverse to retain an inequity designed to create a lever into employment that is either nonexistent or unachievable (When carrots are actually sticks, 2013).*

This account focuses on the limitations of incentivisation policies, and resists the ideas that welfare recipients need to be motivated into work and that there are jobs available for those who want them. The phrase “takes at face value...” casts doubt on the existence of those jobs, and constructs individuals who think they do exist as naïve and unknowledgeable about the job market. The discursive power of that phrase also sows doubt into the idea that a “monetary incentive is the best way” to prompt welfare recipients to “get off their backsides” and take up the available jobs.

Highlighting the lack of available jobs and the challenges faced in accessing work acts to discredit the whole principle of WFF’s role as an incentive for welfare recipients to participate in the workforce (Fozdar, 2008). According to the writer’s account, if monetary incentives were effective and there were enough jobs, then there would be few welfare recipients left in the welfare system. Implicitly, the large numbers of welfare recipients relying on the welfare system demonstrates that incentive policies are not effective, and a lack of jobs plays a key role in that failure.

The writer's alternative account of the incentive-argument is positioned as more accurate by appealing to the facts through the phrase "it's clear...". The writer uses the self-evident statement "incentivisation can work only if there are jobs to be had, and people can do them" to delegitimise the Court of Appeal decision and its discursive formulation (Fozdar, 2008). The decision is constructed by the writer as "perverse" and a means by which "inequity" is perpetuated. Welfare recipients are constructed in this account according to the liberal frame. Their dependence is attributed to social and economic conditions, rather than personal choices. The writer portrays welfare recipients as living in "dire poverty" as a result of those social and economic inequities. Therefore, the Court of Appeal decision to deny the in-work components of WFF to welfare recipients is constructed as unwarranted and welfare recipients are deserving of those payments.

**The workforce-in-waiting.** There is an often invisible formulation of unemployment in current media accounts in which the unemployed are constructed as a latent workforce, waiting to meet the labour demands of the market economy when needed. This construction is often ignored in media accounts in favour of placing the blame for unemployment on the individuals themselves (Simpson & Envy, 2015). There is, however, an explicit reference to the construction of the unemployed as a latent workforce in the following account:

*"The natural rate of unemployment is between 4 and 5 per cent," he says. "It's regarded as a nice balance. You don't want to go much over 5 per cent and if it is under 4 per cent then enjoy the good times while you can" (Life off the dole, 2007).*

The phrase "natural rate of unemployment" constructs unemployment as inevitable and necessary for some individuals. The individual quoted in this account demonstrates a preference for a higher rate of employment using the phrase "you don't want to go much over 5 per cent". The "you" in that phrase positions the audience as an unbiased other to make the statement more reliable (Dasli, 2014) and promotes that position to the audience. However, unemployment is constructed as serving an economic purpose. The health of the economy is

constructed as relying on the right “balance” between the level of employment and unemployment. Too much unemployment and there is a problem; too little and the economy is constructed as doing well but at an unsustainable level, as demonstrated by the phrase “enjoy the good times while you can”. Therefore, this account constructs welfare recipients according to the liberal frame, whereby economic circumstances are the cause of unemployment, rather than individual’s choices.

This account demonstrates a neoliberal underpinning. It focuses on the neoliberal economic programme, promoting the needs of the market over the needs of individuals. While the employed ninety-five percent of the population are encouraged to be self-sufficient, the ‘necessarily unemployed’ are constructed in this account as an important exception in neoliberal economics. They are constructed as a workforce-in-waiting.

**Atypical work arrangements.** The accounts of dominant discourse in this chapter construct and position the category of ‘welfare recipient’ as completely distinct from the categories of ‘taxpayer’ and ‘employed’. Primarily, welfare recipients are framed in such a way that they are imagined to not be participating in work of any kind (de Goede, 1996). However, the portrayal of welfare recipients as completely separate from work invisibilises non-normative and alternative constructions of work. For example, welfare recipients regularly engage in part-time, seasonal or volunteer work (de Goede, 1996). Such atypical work arrangements have increased in recent years and normative, full-time employment arrangements have decreased. Low paid, low skilled jobs have become less secure and those who rely on them increasingly move in and out of jobs. This has affected their earning potential and their ability to be self-sufficient according to neoliberal standards (Schrecker & Bamba, 2015). Therefore, accounts where welfare recipients are generally constructed as being ‘out of work’ draw from a stereotype about welfare recipients that likely conflicts with the reality of

their lives. The following accounts demonstrate the involvement of welfare recipients in such atypical work arrangements:

*Volunteer Wellington records for the year to date show 735 applications for volunteering from people not currently in work, and 177 in part-time paid work. Of these, 259 were registered with Work and Income.*

*More and more unemployed people recognise how volunteering offers work experience, skill development, an active routine, and socialisation, with a range of ages and ethnic backgrounds. They understand the value of volunteering, the personal gains and the benefits to their communities (Volunteering can't be compulsory, 2013).*

In this account the writer provides evidentiary statistics that resist the stereotype of non-contributing welfare recipients (Fozdar, 2008). The statistics drawn on in this account provide an alternative construction of welfare recipients in which they are contributing, working members of society who benefit society and themselves through their involvement in volunteer work.

This account also resists carrot-stick discourse and the portrayal of welfare recipients as needing financial incentives to be motivated to work. As volunteer work is unpaid, such a construction does not hold. Instead this account demonstrates that the welfare recipients are as invested in their communities as other groups, and are willing to work for the benefit of their community without needing a financial motivation to do so.

*Byl, busy lopping horns off cattle while he talked to the Star-Times, said one of his workers from Tinui had been earning \$22 an hour, but occasionally needed top-ups on the benefit between seasonal work.*

*Work and Income forced the worker to move with his young family to Rotorua to take up fulltime work as a painter, Byl says. But that job fell through after a few months and the man is returning to Tinui to work*

*(Tinui won't lie down and play 'dead', 2005).*

This account demonstrates the reliance on atypical work arrangements such as seasonal and casual work. The welfare recipient described is not avoidant of work. Despite his occasional use of welfare, he is constructed primarily as a worker rather than a welfare recipient. The writer uses the phrases “occasionally” and “top ups” to describe the worker’s welfare use as infrequent and only by necessity. By referencing the worker’s wage level, he is constructed as a valuable worker who is self-sufficient so long as there is work available. This account does not fit with stereotypical constructions of welfare recipients in which they have few skills, a low work ethic and are overly dependent on the state.

The worker is constructed in this account according to the liberal frame. His main source of work being seasonal means that he is not blameworthy for his occasional need for assistance from Work and Income. He is constructed as deserving of the welfare support he does use of due to his willingness to participate in work when it is available.

These accounts demonstrate that being a welfare recipient does not necessarily mean that an individual is avoidant of work, or unwilling to participate in their community. Instead these accounts demonstrate that welfare recipients are willing to make use of the opportunities available to them, whether they are voluntary positions in which they can develop skills and connections within their communities, or seasonal work that provides income if only for part of the year.

The problem with atypical work arrangements is that they can have a negative impact on the well-being of those reliant on them. The health configuration of constructions of work as a panacea draws from the idea that work is ultimately beneficial for the health of the unemployed, regardless of what that work is. What such accounts fail to recognise is the effect that insecure work arrangements can have on the mental and physical health of those reliant on them.

*A breakdown of what was causing the stress could indicate why the region was so high, but the high amount of seasonal work - which was often very physical - could be one of the reasons, he said (Resistance to 'stress capital' tag, 2006).*

This account demonstrates an acknowledgement that the kind of work available to an individual may have an ill effect on their health. This account drew from studies that have suggested that jobs low in stability and marketability, and high in pressure can have a negative impact on health in comparison to jobs that are more consistent and prestigious (Schrecker & Bambra, 2015). Thus, the kinds of work that welfare recipients may be able to participate in on a seasonal or part-time basis could also be a cause of stress and depression. As these kinds of employment have increased under neoliberalism, neoliberal policies that attempt to move more welfare recipients off welfare and into work may perpetuate poor health outcomes for low-income individuals and perpetuate the welfare dependence such policies are intended to prevent. Therefore, welfare recipients are stuck between the social expectation of work and the potential ill-effects of the kinds of work available to them.

**Care as work.** Media accounts that ignore the engagement of welfare recipients in the volunteer, seasonal and casual workforce demonstrate that different kinds of work are often invisible in constructions of work and welfare. Similarly, the provision of care of children and disabled relatives, and the work done around the home is often invisible in accounts of welfare.

The formulation of socially recognised work has shifted and changed over time. For example, during the Industrial Age waged labour became the major source of work. The economic policies of the 1930s provided another example of the social recognition of different kinds of work in the promotion of a gendered division of labour. In that construction of work, it was recognised that men worked away from the home and women did the work within the home (Belgrave, 2012). Under such a system, the care of children and the work involved in keeping the home was socially recognised as work.



In the modern context this division of labour is less clearly gendered, but the necessity for work both in and out of the home remains. When there is only one parent there is no division of labour between partners and work obligations and family commitments rest on one individual. The following accounts resist the invisibilisation of work done in the home and family, and demonstrate the challenges faced by single parents in balancing the obligation to participate in paid work and to care for their families:

*Motueka solo mother Anita Evans is on the domestic purposes benefit. She thought the 15-hour work expectation for the DPB was "quite sad" because suitable jobs were not available. She works three jobs for a total of 12 hours a week and said it was difficult to find part-time work in school hours.*

*She has had to turn work down because employers wanted her to work hours when she had to be caring for her daughter, 7, "who comes first".*

*('Few jobs' for beneficiaries, 2010)*

This account demonstrates the challenges single parents face in meeting the work obligations placed on them by Work and Income in conjunction with meeting their obligation to their children. The mother quoted in the excerpt demonstrates a reliance on atypical work arrangements that belies the trope of the non-working welfare recipient. This account resists the construction of 'working parents as good parents' and reformulates it so that a good parent works, but only once they have met their obligations of care to their children. Paid employment outside of the home is constructed as desirable, but lower in importance than caring for one's children. In this account, instead of the needs of the market taking precedence, the needs of children are the priority. When single parents struggle to find jobs that fit around their children's needs they are justified in choosing their children.

*However I know that being a parent, even with a partner, is tough going. Times get tense, especially when one child is sick. I think that under the scheme there does need to be a degree of flexibility around a child being sick and an understanding*

*that the need of the kid comes first. Whether these are considerations employers are willing to make, one suspects that most employers in the lower paid jobs may not be so accommodating (Benefit reform will only work if there are jobs to go to, 2010)*

In this account the writer draws from their own personal experience to demonstrate the challenges involved with balancing working and parenting, even as a couple (Augoustinos, et al., 2005). In their account a sick child is all that it takes to upset the care-work balance. The writer states that “the need [sic] of the kid comes first”. This statement promotes parenting as a priority over paid employment. By prioritising parenting this statement resists the neoliberal construction of a good parent being one who models paid employment to their children. This statement does not dismiss paid employment, only minimises its importance in relation to meeting the non-financial needs of children.

Employers are portrayed in this account as unsympathetic to the demand for welfare recipients to be available to meet their children’s needs. Welfare recipients are constructed as likely to be participating in low-paid, atypical work arrangements that are inflexible and difficult to maintain while also caring for children as a single parent. This account constructs welfare recipients as stuck between the neoliberal norm of workforce participation, the requirements of their part-time jobs and fulfilling their obligations as parents. Welfare recipients are constructed according to the liberal frame and blame for their dependence is attributed to social circumstances rather the individual. Therefore, they are constructed in this account as deserving of support.

*The “right kind” issue is especially important for single parents. Many factors impinge on their ability to take up other employment, including the age and number of children, the lack of appropriate part-time work, children's needs, and the fact that single parents do the exhausting work of two parents in the home when there is only one of them. To take up paid work is possible only with family-friendly hours, low costs of work (such as transport, clothes, childcare) and good informal*

*supports, such as the grandparent or neighbour who can cover for emergencies.*

*Without these, paid work is impossible, factors no amount of "incentivising" will improve (When carrots are actually sticks, 2013).*

This account resists the invisibilisation of work in the home and family by referring to paid employment as "other employment", thus turning the norm on its head. In this account the work done by parents in the home and family is the norm, and all other forms of work are secondary.

This construction resists the neoliberal ideal of market participation as central to social life. Instead, family is constructed as the key component. Thus, work done by a single parent in the home, caring for their children or elderly family members is rendered as a social service that warrants social and financial support from the state (Allen, et al., 2014).

The major critique in this account is the unavailability of the "right kind" of work for single parents. According to this account the "right kind" balances the costs and benefits of work in terms of finances and the needs of the family. This account portrays the incentivisation of work as an inadequate policy without considering these factors.

**Summary.** These alternative media accounts of welfare and work resist the dominant discursive formations examined earlier in the chapter. These accounts address those discursive formations by offering another story, one in which welfare recipients are contributing to society by engaging in atypical work arrangements and providing care for their children.

This alternative story shifts the social position of welfare recipients onto common ground with taxpayers employed in more normative work arrangements. Primarily welfare recipients are constructed according to the liberal frame and their dependence is attributed to social and economic causes. This framing, along with their social participation constructs welfare recipients as deserving of the support they receive from state.

These accounts resist the neoliberal social framework. Though work still has its role in society, family is constructed as central to social life not the market.

## **Chapter Four: Discussion**

The analysis of media accounts of welfare in the previous chapter demonstrates a heavy reliance on stereotypical constructions of welfare recipients in the three dominant discursive formations identified for analysis. The constructions of welfare recipients in those accounts are underpinned by a neoliberal framework that promotes middle-class norms and practices centred around workforce participation. The construction of welfare recipients in media accounts prompts the development of welfare policies in response to those stereotypes and the neoliberal concerns with the welfare system.

### **Constructions of Welfare Recipients**

In the dominant discursive formations under examination, constructions of welfare recipients draw heavily from negative stereotypes. In those accounts welfare recipients are portrayed as sick, depressed drug users and criminals who lack basic life skills. They are portrayed as engaging in negative behaviours to maintain their dependence, such as intimidation, fraud and continuous procreation. Welfare recipients are also constructed as bad parents who do not look after their children adequately and pass on their dependence, making welfare a multi-generational issue. This formulation of welfare recipients is in stark contrast to that of taxpaying “middle New Zealand” who represent the social and moral norm (Bullock, et al., 2001). By comparing welfare recipients against this norm they are constructed as an undesirable and undeserving group. The contrast between these two groups acts to justify the lower social position of welfare recipients, promote their exclusion from access to particular rights and resources (Silverstone & Georgiou, 2005), and justify the use of disciplinary power to enforce compliance with middle-class, neoliberal norms.

The reliance on stereotypical constructions of welfare recipients in the examined media accounts demonstrates that they come primarily from the perspective of middle class groups.

The politicians, academics, experts and journalists whose accumulated perspectives are reproduced in these accounts belong to the group around whom the social norm is constructed (Tsai, 2016).

The construction of welfare recipients by those with greater symbolic power positions them as “mere spectators to the

**Reflexivity box.** As young, Pākehā academic discussing symbolic power and the production of accounts, I acknowledge that I too belong to a privileged group and that my own account of welfare comes from a position of social power that has the potential to reproduce existing power structures.

definition of their own needs” (Marston, 2008, p. 362). While some of the examined media accounts are constructed using discursive resources that acknowledge a disparity between the reality and perception of welfare, on the whole little effort is made to acknowledge the lived experience of welfare recipients. Welfare is shaped in these media accounts in a way that perpetuates the social and economic advantage of the middle class and promotes programmes that supported their interests (Silverstone & Georgiou, 2005).

The attribution of blame for dependence in these accounts varies according to the construction of welfare recipients. In constructions of the culture of dependence, blame is primarily attributed to the welfare system itself. Welfare recipients take advantage of the welfare system and engage in behaviour that perpetuates dependence, therefore they are also constructed as culpable. In constructions of carrot-stick discourse and work as a panacea, welfare recipients are primarily constructed according to the conservative frame and blame for dependence and poverty is attributed to the individual (Beddoe, 2014). In some accounts welfare recipients are constructed as unable to access the resources they need to participate in the workforce, and blame for their dependence is attributed to social and economic factors (Chauhan & Foster, 2014).

The attribution of blame for welfare dependence contributes to the construction of welfare recipients as deserving or undeserving of various forms of state assistance (Marston, 2008). Welfare recipients constructed according to the conservative frame are typically considered undeserving of assistance as they are the cause of their own dependence. Those constructed according to the liberal frame are considered to be deserving if blame is attributed to social or economic factors. However, in accounts of welfare where blame is attributed to the welfare system itself, financial support is considered to perpetuate the problems within the system and is considered to be unjustifiable.

Regardless of the construction of welfare recipients and the attribution of blame, these accounts propose that work is the solution to all of the problems in the welfare system, placing market participation at the centre of social life (de Goede, 1996). This focus on work demonstrates the neoliberal framework from which these accounts are drawn. The neoliberal policy and economic agenda to reduce the size of the state by reducing the number of welfare recipients is a major driving force in these accounts (Schrecker & Bamba, 2015). In order to achieve this goal, these accounts promote neoliberal ideals such as the prioritisation of the market's interests and the use of disciplinary power to produce independent, self-sufficient neoliberal citizens.

**Alternative constructions of welfare recipients.** The examined alternative accounts of welfare and work resist the dominant discursive formations and offer a different construction of welfare recipients. They are constructed as contributing members of society who are participating in atypical work arrangements to provide for themselves, their families and to benefit their communities (de Goede, 1996). Their involvement in work belies the notion that reliance on welfare and workforce participation are mutually exclusive. The alternative construction in these accounts also resists the stereotype of welfare parents being bad parents.

Instead, they are constructed as prioritising the care of their children, placing family at the centre of social life rather than the market.

This alternative construction of welfare recipients positions them more equally with individuals who are employed in normative work arrangements. Welfare recipients are constructed according to the liberal frame. Their dependence is attributed to social and economic causes (Chauhan & Foster, 2014), such as a lack of jobs or being a part of the ‘necessary unemployed’. This framing, along with welfare recipients’ participation in atypical work arrangements constructs welfare recipients as deserving of the support they receive from state.

### **Policy Responses**

Welfare policies draw from the stereotypical portrayal of welfare recipients in media accounts (Franklin, 1999). The examined media accounts demonstrate proposed welfare policies in which the sick and disabled are increasingly expected to work to prevent scrounging, long-term welfare recipients are sent to training programmes to learn the basic work-skills they are believed to be lacking, and parenting programmes are proposed as a solution for intergenerational dependence. Adoption is proposed as a solution to prevent recurrent fecundity amongst DPB recipients, and increased monitoring is proposed to assist those living in households with multiple welfare recipients to meet their work obligations and prevent child abuse. These proposed policies demonstrate that the use of stereotypes in media accounts plays no small part in informing the landscape of how welfare policies are constructed in Aotearoa New Zealand (Fraser & Llewellyn, 2015).

The attribution of blame and deservingness contributes to the promotion of particular policies. Constructions of welfare recipients that draw from the conservative frame tend to promote ‘stick’ policies that increase work and social obligations. Such policies are considered to disincentivise welfare and incentivise work. The prevalence of the conservative frame in the

construction of welfare recipients and the resulting policies demonstrates Jensen's premise (as cited in Allen, et al., 2014) that it is often used during periods of welfare reform to promote cuts to welfare spending.

The liberal framing of welfare recipients tends to promote policies that incentivise work. In such instances, social investment is justifiable (Schrecker & Bambra, 2015) due to the cause of dependence being external to the individual. Such policies tend to be focused on reducing circumstances that limit participation in the workforce and increase welfare recipients' motivation to do so through financial incentives.

**Alternative accounts of welfare policy.** The analysis also identifies a range of alternative accounts in the media content which resists and critiques welfare policies. Policies resulting from an ideological stance that welfare recipients lack motivation lack evidence to support that standpoint. Incentive policies fail to make any real difference to the number of welfare recipients because there are not the right kind of jobs available for single parents and financial incentives are not an effective motivator. Atypical work arrangements can have a negative effect on the health and well-being of the individuals doing them (Schrecker & Bambra, 2015), suggesting that any job will not do when it comes to shifting welfare recipients off welfare into work (Bullock, et al., 2001). These critiques demonstrate that welfare recipients' lack of symbolic power in constructing themselves in media accounts can lead to silencing and invisibilisation of accounts from this perspective and to the production of ineffectual and inequity-producing welfare policies. This demonstrates that policy draws more heavily from media accounts than the lived experience of welfare recipients, leading to policies based on stereotypical assumptions and the existing moral hierarchy (Marston, 2008).

### **Neoliberalism**

The media accounts and discursive formations examined in this project draw heavily from a neoliberal social framework. These accounts take neoliberalism for granted as a



concrete idea in society (Hodgetts, et al., 2010). Social constructionism is critical of the taken-for-granted and calls it into question, opening it up for scrutiny and critique (Burr, 2003; Gergen, 1985). Neoliberalism, the social positions and practices it promotes in media accounts of welfare and welfare policy now become the object of inquiry (Willig, 1999).

In the examined media accounts the neoliberal policy and economic agenda (Schrecker & Bamba, 2015) is constructed as the means by which workforce participation will be increased and the size of the welfare system reduced. Welfare is constructed as a problem because of its effect on the size of the state, the number of people who are not contributing to market processes, and the cost to taxpayers. The size of the welfare state causes the market to suffer, but welfare recipients also suffer because they are absent from the central component of social life: the market (de Goede, 1996). In order to reduce the effects of the welfare system, workforce participation needs to increase.

This construction of the neoliberal policy and economic agenda positions those who adhere to the neoliberal norm of the ideal citizen in higher stead than those who are unable to achieve that norm (Coombes & Morgan, 2015). Those who cannot are constructed according to the conservative frame, and blame for their dependence is attributed to their personal failings (Marston, 2008). Focusing blame on welfare recipients in media accounts operates as a scapegoating tactic that legitimates welfare reform (Marston, 2008; Wenzelburger & Hörisch, 2016). It is a common strategy that policy-makers use to construct the reform in a positive light (Wenzelburger & Hörisch, 2016). Portraying welfare recipients in media accounts using negative stereotypes highlights the negative aspects of the welfare system and constructs the issue of welfare as a social problem (Chauhan & Foster, 2014). This justifies the implementation of policies that mitigates the perceived problem in particular ways and promotes the interests of the middle-class (Marston, 2008; Nelson, 2016).

However, to construct welfare recipients as responsible for their dependence and poverty is to excuse economic and political institutions for their part in the equation (Marston, 2008). The alternative accounts examined in this project demonstrate that there are a range of social and economic explanations for welfare dependence in Aotearoa New Zealand. These accounts attribute the cause of welfare dependence to the lack of adequate jobs and the market's need for limited unemployment. This demonstrates that scapegoating welfare recipients shifts the blame for dependence off a system that produces inequality (Fraser & Gordon, 1994) to a relatively small segment of society with limited symbolic power and political influence (Nelson, 2016). It highlights that the focus in welfare policy reform is not on how to make paid work more accessible and equitable for more citizens, but on how to move welfare recipients off welfare and into work (Marston, 2008).

### **Future Research**

This project demonstrates that welfare recipients are lacking in symbolic power in media accounts. As a result, the constructions in those accounts and the resultant policies represent the interests of more powerful groups in society, such as the middle-class. Research focused on welfare recipients' experiences of navigating work, welfare and policy changes will help to raise their symbolic power, continue to provide resistance to inaccurate and stereotypical constructions and provide a research-based source from which media can draw.

To gain a richer, broader understanding of the stereotyping of welfare recipients in media accounts, future research could examine different media types such as talk-back radio and internet sources. These media types would allow for the analysis of audience interactions with constructions of welfare and its recipients. Media sources aimed at different cultural and socio-economic groups could be an important source of resistance to the constructions present in mainstream media accounts.

## **Conclusion**

This project demonstrates the effect of welfare recipients' limited symbolic power on the construction of media accounts. The negative stereotypical construction of welfare recipients in media accounts is informed by the interests of the dominant middle-class. This shifts blame off an unequal society and economic structure and places it on the personal decisions and habits of the individuals who are disadvantaged by those structures. Focusing blame on welfare recipients operates to legitimate welfare policies that enforce neoliberal norms such as independence and self-sufficiency through workforce participation. These findings demonstrate a need to increase the representation of welfare recipients' interests in media accounts of welfare through the exploration of their lived experiences of dependence and the persistent critique of existing social and power structures.

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