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Understanding How the Discourses of Welfare Impact the Subjectivities of OW Participants

By

Michael Bratton

A Dissertation
submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies through Sociology in partial fulfillment
the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the
University of Windsor

Windsor, Ontario, Canada
2010
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Author's Declaration of Originality

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Abstract

In 1995 the Progressive Conservative (PC) party of Ontario carried out a series of welfare policy changes impacting the operating principles of social assistance. The PC campaign pledged to cut social assistance benefit levels, implement mandatory workfare, and crack down on welfare fraud. Using a qualitative methodology, this dissertation asks, ***"How does Ontario Works, the accompanying discourse and cultural logic of neoliberal welfare reform, impact the subjectivities of OW participants?"*** A governmentality framework informs this research by placing "focus on *how* we are governed and by what practices" (Cruikshank, 1999: 120). The investigation follows a theoretical tradition "direct[ing] us to attend to the practices of government that form the basis on which problematizations are made and what happens when we govern and are governed?" (Dean, 1999: 28).

From an analysis of 24 semi-structured interviews with OW participants in Oxford County, I argue that the "regimes of practice" (Foucault, 1991: 73-86) associated with Ontario Works and the public "words of welfare" (Schram, 1995) promoted by the "common sense revolution" operate on a "discursive field" (Foucault, 2006 [1969]: 30) facilitating a form of "prejudice" (Allport, 1954) called classism. By examining the "workings, effects, and the 'how?' of power" (Foucault, 2003: 274) I show that classism survives in the dominant public discourses of welfare reform by way of the "cultural categories that undergird the social order" (Schram, 2000: 1): namely, that of "the lazy welfare recipient" and "the exploited taxpayer." Consistent with Mullaly, I suggest that "Culture is not only received by people, it is produced and reproduced by the same people in everyday life" (Mullaly, 2002: 72). Paraphrasing Foucault's seminal insights on power, I will demonstrate that classism, via the mainstream discourses of personal responsibility and excessive taxation, “passes through the individuals it has constituted” (Foucault, 2003: 30).

Dedication

For Mom, who has spent her entire life “deferring gratification” so that my sister and I could have a better life than she ever had.

Acknowledgements

A prominent cultural myth that I have questioned throughout my academic, professional, and personal life is the common belief that people who excel and accomplish a great deal do so solely by virtue of how hard they work and how smart they are. I certainly don't want to trivialize the value of hard work or intelligence, for both of these qualities are critical ingredients for promoting progressive social change, but I would like to point out what is too often ignored: people who excel and accomplish a great deal are usually surrounded by supports and resources that play a role – often a very large role -- in facilitating those accomplishments.

I have many people to thank because although only one name of authorship goes on a PhD dissertation, the combined efforts of many people are required to make earning a doctorate possible. First and foremost, my Mother, who was deprived of an opportunity for formal education beyond public school, told my sister and myself many times during our formative years that "there is nothing like a good education." It is unlikely that a formally educated person could have delivered that message to us more powerfully and it would have been impossible for anyone to sell the value of formal schooling more consistently.

Secondly, my Father, who left school after grade 6 to enter the working world, never once abandoned my sister or myself after he and my Mother divorced during our childhood. Given the subject matter of this dissertation, that statement needs to be contextualized in that access to full time, manufacturing employment, that paid a living wage made keeping in regular contact with, and providing for us, much easier. Had my Father disappeared from our lives or neglected his paternal duties, I highly doubt that this dissertation would ever have had a chance to get started – let alone completed. On several occasions throughout my post-secondary education, when costs for students were going up and funding was going down, my Father and Step-Mother did what they could to lessen the number of hours I had to work (while in school) to fund my educational expenses. Thirdly, my sister has been a constant source of support to me throughout my life in virtually every way imaginable. On countless occasions and in countless ways, my sister has gone way over and above the normal responsibilities of sibling-hood. There is no chance whatsoever that I could have completed this work without her.

To my thesis supervisor, Dr. Barry Adam, I owe a number of thanks. First, I was consistently provided with written feedback turn-a-round times that were usually three times faster than what I was asking for. Second, Barry showed tremendous patience waiting for me to recognize, and apply, the merits of one of the theoretical paradigms that would eventually come to guide this research. Had Barry been less patient, this monograph would not exist. Thirdly, imitation truly is the sincerest form of flattery and Barry is cited countless times throughout this manuscript. My term “The Survival of Classism” is paraphrasing the title of the book that Barry published from his dissertation. The number of times Barry is referenced in my work is a direct reflection of what I think of his scholarship.

To my thesis committee . . . Dr. Arnold’s support during a comprehensive exam in social inequality turned me from someone who was a “quantiphobe” (having a fear of statistics) to someone who could have a workable understanding of structural equation modeling and path analysis. In editing the prose of earlier drafts of this work, Dr. Arnold helped the manuscript flow more smoothly, assisted me in sidestepping a number of debates that had me drifting away from the central argument, and offered sound advice and support regarding the graphic displays of demographic and caseload data. In addition, Dr. Arnold referred me to The Tyranny of Words (Chase, 1938) and An American Dilemma (Mydral, 1944) and these insightful sources made my analysis stronger. Dr. Arnold also recommended a modifying the title of this manuscript so that it became more concise and more descriptive. Dr. Cradock provided me copies of comprehensive exams he wrote during his PhD studies and this played a role in helping me see what I initially could not see with respect to the relevance of governmentality. In editing this manuscript, Dr. Cradock also referred me to several sources (most notably, Bowker and Star's Sorting Things Out: Classification and Its Consequences and the Ontario Hansard Debates) that brought the analysis to a higher level, and made the central argument more compelling. My outside reader, Dr. Anne Forrest, was the first to subtly and politely suggest to me at the proposal stage of my research that the focus of the study would have to be narrowed. This was valuable and necessary direction. Dr. Forrest also reminded me to not lose sight of the practical implications grounded in recent theorizing on intersectionality and pointed out that the application in the value added chapters needed to have a stronger fit with the theorizing in the lead in chapters. Dr. Forrest also advised that many of the key words of welfare discourse are much more gendered than my initial analysis suggested and, quite correctly, pointed out that some respondents were not as wholly consumed or taken in by neoliberal discourse as my earlier analysis had argued. As I near the end of my doctoral studies, I am acutely aware of how academics – like most people in virtually all areas of life – do not develop and make progress in an isolated vacuum.

Thoughtful scholars whom I have never met, but who have taken the time to assist students (who they have never met) by publishing monographs on how to write a doctoral level thesis, also played a notable role in getting me to the finish line. The insights provided by Authoring a PhD (Dunleavy, 2003), How to Write a Better Thesis (Evans and Gruba, 2005), The Reflexive Thesis (Ashmore, 1989), and Writing Your Doctoral Dissertation (Brause, 2000) proved absolutely indispensible. I would highly recommend all of these works to anyone writing a dissertation. They were all of immeasurable value to me.

Academically, I also cannot forget the lasting influences of my earlier years that were closer to home. During my MSW at Wilfrid Laurier University, I took a course in social policy from Anne Westhues. Anne told the class that if anyone was planning on being a policy advocate and they truly want to accomplish anything, they had better “be prepared to be a marathon runner – not a sprinter.” This metaphor’s vital importance has stuck with me, and I thank Dr. Westhues for inculcating her lasting wisdom. Secondly, to Dr. Peter Dunn who taught me courses in poverty and social work organizations: when I left WLU and our class was providing feedback on our program, I was being completely visceral and sincere when I spoke about Peter and advised that it is good to have role models who truly share concern about what has happened to our poorest and most vulnerable people – but who can use that anger constructively to heighten awareness, foster understanding, and bring about humane change. As an undergraduate in sociology at WLU, Dr. Peter Eglin (my undergrad thesis supervisor) earned my everlasting respect for the manner in which he boldly and brilliantly spoke out against the "common sense revolution."

To the sociology department and faculty of Graduate Studies at the University of Windsor: four years of internal scholarships, teaching assistantships, and tuition waivers kept my doctoral studies financially afloat when I otherwise would have sank. Alan Sears (now at Ryerson University) believed in me enough to offer me a sessional teaching position in the Labour Studies department at U of Windsor. My time teaching was a phenomenal experience and, very much, solidified my resolve to complete my studies so that I could one-day return to teaching on a full-time basis. The amazing documentary "Underemployment: Living in the Credential Gap" created by two of my students, Jessica Peters and Alice Saad, was the most rewarding highlight of my time teaching. A research assistantship under Dr. Alan Hall from Labour Studies, reviewing the literature on the municipal impacts of fair wage policies, was also a valuable learning experience.

Sandy Tyndale, from the social justice lab at U of W, was a constant and unfailing source of technical support on the many occasions (there were too many to count) when my computer and / or software problems were slowing me down. Sandy's seemingly innate helpful nature causes me to think that he should have been a social worker.

Oxford CAS, my employer, granted me a one year leave of absence from my social work position to ensure that I could meet the deadline for my degree. Without this LOA, I simply do not know what I would have done. I am indebted to Bruce Burbank, Paula Walton, and Dorothy Brown for making the human resource provisions that enabled me to complete this manuscript. My boss at Oxford CAS, Jennifer Van Haverbeke, was consistently supportive of both myself and the families I was trying to serve. This positive support enabled me to continue to move this manuscript forward during the two and a half years I was concurrently working full time.

Tony Orvidas at Ontario Works (OW) Oxford was exceptionally helpful in initially facilitating respondent recruitment for this study. Later, during the final stages of my write up, Lynn Chenier at OW was helpful in providing me with municipal demographic data to help contextualize my analysis. At the Provincial level Sylvie Guerreiro from the policy analysis branch of Ministry of Community and Social Services in Ontario provided me with the same support. A very reasonable obligation placed upon me (by the MCSS) as a condition for receipt of this data was that I explicitly state that the analysis and views expressed in this research are my own, and do not necessarily represent the position of the Ministry. As the reader will soon come to recognize, I maintain a serious concern with a program that ultimately reduces the problem of poverty and unemployment solely to the “deficits” of the poor and unemployed, but I would be a thoughtless (and dishonest) person to not recognize the helpfulness I received from OW Oxford and the MCSS in facilitating this study – particularly when several barriers easily could have been put in place to undercut my research.

I would also like to sincerely thank the 24 people who agreed to be interviewed for this study. It is not an easy task to tell one’s story to a stranger and I appreciate the efforts made which facilitated this research. I have known for many years now that I want to devote a large portion of my life participating in anti-poverty advocacy and hearing their 24 stories only solidified my resolve. I hope that this work does their stories as must justice as possible. I have made, and pledge to continue to make, every effort to that end.

Finally, as anyone who has ever undertaken an enormous challenge will recognize, there are times throughout an arduous task that one is tempted to throw in the towel. Although that temptation occasionally crossed my mind, the thought of quitting never lasted. The insights from the four epigraphs with which I began this monograph have had too strong of an impact on me, intellectually and affectively, for that to happen. Although I have only met one of these four supports, I owe all of these authors an enormous thank-you – particularly Jacqueline Homan who offered me frequent encouragement in the final phases of this work. To evidence the sincerity of this thank you, I ask that the reader take a moment, flip back a few pages, and note those epigraphs again. They are definitely worth re-reading and internalizing.

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“Since persons cannot be free from that about which they
are ignorant, liberation depends in the first instance on
recognition of that which imprisons the human mind or
dominates the human person”
-- Sabia and Wallulis (1983: 4)

“It is acceptable in our so called classless society to look
down on poor people, to berate them and belittle them and
tell them that their suffering of hardships is entirely their
own fault.”
-- Homan (2007: 56)

“Foucault suggests that, by naming something, by constituting
it in discourse, the possibilities for resistance are created”
-- McCormack (2002:42)

“I know that you are asking today ‘How long will it take?’
Somebody is asking ‘How long will prejudice blind the
visions of men?’ I come to say to you, however difficult
the moment, however frustrating the hour, it will not be
long. Because no lie can live forever”
-- Martin Luther King, Jr. (MPI Home Video, 1990)

Chapter 1
Introduction
Welfare Reform in Ontario: Political and Policy Background

"I am a firm believer in the principles of workfare. I'm a firm believer that individuals themselves will get far quicker entry back into the work force if they begin to feel better about themselves, get skills, which is part of workfare, get training, begin to contribute"
-- Former Ontario Premier Mike Harris, (Quaid, 2002: 183).

In 1995, the Progressive Conservative (PC) Party of Ontario successfully campaigned on, and proceeded to carry out, a series of neoliberal social policy changes impacting the operating principles of social assistance. The conservative party's political campaign, promising a "common sense revolution", secured political popularity (in part) by pledging to cut social assistance benefits, implement mandatory workfare as a condition of eligibility for benefits, "crack down" on welfare fraud, and reduce personal income taxes by thirty percent. The eventual 21.6% reduction in social assistance benefit levels, enacted in October of 1995, were accompanied by publicly proclaimed advice from David Tsubouchi, then Minister of Community and Social Services, on how poor people should cope with becoming poorer: buying food in bulk, bartering with grocers, shopping for dented cans of tuna and living on a "welfare diet" of $3.00 per day (Dare, 1997: 21). The inference, here, seemed pretty clear: people on social assistance, at least while they were on social assistance, should be doing a better job living leaner and managing their personal budgets.

During political debate within the provincial legislature, Tsubouchi (1995) posited an argument emblematic of the problematizing parameters that were successfully sold as the "common sense" of the "common sense revolution" as it pertained to social assistance,

> For the past ten years people have had the opportunity to address the real problem. The Premier [Mike Harris] indicated before, and I understand this is the case, that over

> $40 billion was spent in the social assistance area over the last ten years, and the caseloads have gone up over 300%. Isn't this the real problem we're looking at? This is why we are in the middle of transforming this system from one of a cycle of dependency to one of self sufficiency (Ontario Hansard Issue, 1995: LO17[1]).

One of the most important, and profound, expressions of power is the power to define the problem. "Ending the cycle of welfare dependency" became a mantra upon which much of the political logic (within and beyond Ontario) of welfare reform rested. Like the term "personal responsibility", the term "dependency" only makes sense according to what it distinguishes itself from. Much of the nomenclature in welfare discourse creates dominant conceptual oppositions: responsible / irresponsible, dependent / independent, taxpayer / welfare recipient, worker / 'welfare queen'. While a detailed review of term "dependency", and its culturally encoded meanings, is presented in chapter two, for present purposes it is crucial to understand this term likens welfare receipt to an addiction requiring therapeutic (and character building) treatment in order to habilitate people so that they can make the transition from being irresponsible and dependent to responsible and self-sufficient.

While much of my analysis in this manuscript will focus on making visible the class based antipathies embedded within the symbols of welfare discourse, on numerous occasions throughout this dissertation my argument about classism will be supplemented by insights from the well established body of gender scholarship (Gordon, 1994; Hays, 2003; Lessa, 1999; Swift, 1995; Bezanson, 2006; Fraser and Gordon, 1997; Schram, 2006: 43-69) showing that, in various ways, "welfare states note only ameliorate social inequalities, but also act to produce and reinforce them" (Haney and Rogers-Dillon, 2005: 327) along more than just one axis of domination. The popular code words of neoliberal welfare reform – i.e. "dependency", "hard working taxpayer", "self-sufficiency" and (in its most patriarchal form) "welfare queen" -- are highly gendered and justify an income security system with a patently two-tiered logic (Gordon, 1994) that implicitly defines what is considered to be "real work" and thus a "contribution to society." As Gordon (1994) argues, income security programs largely utilized by men (i.e. worker's compensation and employment insurance) are considered "contributory" and thus have larger benefit levels and fewer stigmas. Recipients of these programs are generally considered entitled citizens. Social assistance, disproportionately utilized by women, provides lesser support and more stigmas. Neoliberalism is fundamentally about the primacy of the market: because the caring labour of reproduction (Bezanson, 2006) does not take place in a market context, it does not entitle one to full citizenship.

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[1] All citations utilized in this manuscript from hansard debate within the Legislative assembly of Ontario were retrieved electroncically from http://hansardindex.ontla.on.ca.

My qualitative data analysis will highlight select insights posited by some of the caregivers in the sample that remained subjugated in the voices of non-caregivers. For the most part, it should be noted, the cultural devaluation of caring labour was not questioned (and in most cases, not even mentioned) by most respondents. This is a cultural silence within welfare discourse that is in need of interrogation. At various stages throughout this manuscript, a gender analysis is a necessary supplement to my examination of the class based antipathies embedded in welfare discourse precisely because "The Ontario Conservative government's neoliberal policies exacerbated the tension between social reproduction and paid work" (Bezanson, 2006: 4). A paternalistic prejudice about the insignificance and limited value of reproduction – which badly obscures the realities of who is dependent on whom and for what -- is intertwined with class based antipathies.

The political logic espoused by Tsubouchi – valorizing “self sufficiency” and decrying “dependency” -- was not at all unique to Ontario. There was clearly an international context underlying policy shifts. Among western industrialized countries there has been a widespread move in recent years from so-called “passive” to “active” social assistance programmes (Herd, Mitchell, and Lightman, 2005: 96). In her doctoral dissertation from Yale University, Bertram concisely details the “welfare to workfare” shift in the logic informing American social policy,

> Through the 1970’s debates over welfare reform were focused on significant measure on the question of how to reduce poverty levels. Even as work requirements were added in the 1960’s, concern over poverty continued to guide the policy debate. By the mid-1990’s, however, liberals and conservatives alike had shifted their focus to a different goal. Poverty received remarkably little attention in congressional floor debates, and the debate instead focused on the best way to move people off of welfare and into work. In short, welfare was no longer seen as the policy response to the social problem of poverty: it had become the problem itself (Bertram, 2005: 18).

In “Social Economy and the Government of Poverty” Procacci (1991: 159) asks rhetorically, “Why does poverty itself, as the effect of social inequality, the existence in society of rich and poor, not become the object of attack for this discourse?” The compelling answer posited by Procacci is that eliminating inequality is not the purpose of discourse on poverty. Schram (2006) suggests that welfare discourse is fundamentally are re-encoding the poor as the marginal “Other”.

Again, this mainstream problematization of impoverishment clearly transcends borders. Irrespective of geographic or political jurisdiction, social policy invariably defines what is problematic by virtue of policy initiatives espoused as solutions. "The Blue Book", an Ontario PC party publication, summarized a key argument epitomizing much of the mainstream logic and public discourse that brought the Conservative party into power,

> You have told us that you want to replace welfare with a work, education and training social policy that rewards individual initiative and demands responsible behaviour from recipients of social assistance.
>
> We should prepare welfare recipients to return to the workforce by requiring all able bodied recipients – with the exception of single parents with young children – either to work or to be retrained for their benefits.
> (Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario, 1994: 9-10)

While previous governments had purportedly been too generous to people on welfare, in now "demand[ing] responsible behaviour from recipients of social assistance" it was clearly inferred that individual irresponsibility was a character ailment that new welfare policies needed to cure. The Tories persuasively argued that workfare -- now possible because the Canada Assistance Plan (Federal policy discouraging work requirements by the possibility of withholding federal funding should a province permit workfare) had been replaced with the Canadian Health and Social Transfer[2] (permitting workfare) -- would "break the 'cycle of dependency' created by the previous administration" (Moscovitch, 1997: 89). Clearly, the new CHST meant there were strong Federal influences – most notably pertaining to decreased cost-sharing funding -- impacting provincial decisions. But as Linda Moreau from 'End Legislated Poverty' explains by making reference to the discussions at the Permiers Forum following the CHST, the provinces did not have to adopt the "there is no alternative" logic the way that they ultimately did,

---

[2] While an extensive historical review of the transition from CAP to the CHST is beyond the scope of this manuscript, it is crucial understand that the CAP, at least on paper, accepted the redistributive and collectivist principles of the welfare state. The CHST rejuvenated a spirit of anti-collectivism and personal responsibility. Swanson (2001: 108) argues, "CAP put into law five economic rights: the right to welfare when in need, the right to an amount of welfare that meets basic requirements, the right to appeal welfare decisions you disagree with, the right to not to have to work or train for welfare, and the right to not be denied welfare because you are from another province. The CHST abolished the first four of these rights and cut billions of dollars from federal grants to the provinces for health, education and welfare."

> The whole premise was that there was nothing we could do about the federal cuts to the provinces for health, education, and social assistance. There was a huge range of responses the [provincial] government[s] could have taken in terms of how to deal with the federal cuts. But the first and only solution was to cut the very poorest (Swanson, 2001: 13).

The end result of federal and provincial policy decisions had both class and gender implications. While the passage above from the campaign literature of the common sense revolution suggests that the Conservatives did, in fact, place the "welfare Mom" in a (somewhat) separate category from the "welfare bum", the caring working that is disproportionately carried out by women in the private sphere remains largely invisible (Gordon, 1994; Hays, 2003; Bezanson, 2006), and even caring work done in the public domain is devalued (Swift, 1995: 30). The emphasis on "work" glosses over the importance of care, and ignores the extent to which care beyond the labour market can seriously impede sustained attachment to the labour force. Class inequalities often intersect with both gender inequalities and other axes of domination. Yet the cultural logic of neoliberalism, with its emphasis on the primacy of individualism, not only ignores intersections of inequality, but sees inequality as stemming from the natural outcome of fair and equal opportunity. In chapters 5 and 6, we will explore how research respondents, in sometimes enigmatic ways, both accommodated and resisted this logic of meritocracy.

The Communitarian Aspects of the Common Sense Revolution

To be sure, there were also communitarian aspects to the PC logic,

> We believe that for every life we get back on track we are avoiding further costly programs down the road. In the next few months, we will be asking charitable groups and other community organizations to meet with us and talk about ways in which this vision [of workfare / welfare reform] could be realized (Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario, 1994: 9).

Similarly, in political debate at Queen's Park, MPP Janet Ecker would frequently stress the communitarian view that,

> We have a responsibility to people in need and to the taxpayers of this province to fix the [welfare] system. It's time to provide people with the opportunities they need to become self-sufficient (Ontario Hansard Issue, 1997: LO1350).

If communitarianism is a perspective on welfare issues that stresses the common interest and common values emanating from communal bonds, then there were clearly communitarian elements to the common sense revolution. For the most part, however, the primacy of individualism would supersede an emphasis on communitarianism and this reality becomes noticeable in hearing the cultural traces of personal responsibility in the views posited by the twenty four respondents of this research. Paradoxically, the strongest common value promoted by the rhetoric of welfare reform is the value of personal responsibility. This logic suggests that a common interest is served – and we are all better off – when people take charge of their own lives. Cloaked in subsidiary notions of the community helping people take personal responsibility, this is simply classic liberalism with a minor variation.

"A Hand Up, Not a Hand-out"

"As culturally encoded, personal responsibility encourages individualistic explanations for poverty" (Schram, 2000: 34).

Notably, the common sense revolution was politically successful in reducing the structural problems of poverty and unemployment to the individual and moral shortcomings of the poor and unemployed. The popular, and frequently cited catch-phrase, that people on welfare should be “given a hand-up, not a hand-out[3]” (Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario, 1994) seemed to resonate with the electorate who voted the Progressive Conservatives into power with a majority government in 1995 and returned the Tories to Queen’s Park with another majority in 1999.

The Ontario Works Act (OWA) was officially enacted by the provincial legislature in 1997 with the explicit purposes of recognizing “personal responsibility” promoting “self reliance through employment” and being “accountable to the tax payers of Ontario” (OWA, 1997, sec.1). Clearly, much of the political reasoning that brought the PC party into power was written directly into welfare policy by what was indirectly suggested by the purposes of the OWA. As Quaid (2002) reminds us, any social program operates with some theoretical notion of cause and effect. Looking closely at the directives of the OWA, in conjunction with the political climate in which it was passed, personal irresponsibility had been deemed a cause creating the effect of excessive taxation. Foucault, whose work we will explore extensively in chapter 3, has argued that important insights can be revealed “on the basis of what the documents say or sometimes merely hint at” (Foucault, 2006:7). During her tenure as the Minister of Community and Social Services, Janet Ecker repeatedly argued, from both within and beyond the Provincial legislature, that “we owe it to the taxpayers to ensure that the dollars they give us are going to help those truly in need” (Ontario Hansard Issue, 1997: LO1350). The widely accepted inference, here, was that social assistance was going to those who didn’t really need it and that taxpayers were unduly paying the price.

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[3] In addition to facilitating symbolic imagery conducive to classism, this statement is also highly gendered in that it implicitly suggests, among other things, that the work of production within the labour market is worthy of a paycheck, while the remuneration for caring work outside of the labour market (however inadequate that remuneration is) is pejoratively lablelled a “hand out.” In chapter 4, I will present empirical data that shows, very clearly, that as children get older and the demands of caregiving lessen, people overwhelmingly return to the labour market. If this data was made more accessible it would assist in debunking some of the gender based stereotypes associated with welfare receipt.

Notably, the OWA overturned several policy principles recommended by the Social Assistance Review Committee (1988) which had begun to impact Ontario welfare policy, in a manner that strengthened the minimum standard provided by the provincial social safety net, under the previous New Democratic and Liberal administrations (Moscovitch, 1997) (although both the NDP and Liberals would later come to embrace much of the logic of workfare and this observation is consistent with Jordan’s (2008) international claim that a leaner and meaner welfare state is not the sole province of right wing parties).

Social Assistance Review Committee

The Social Assistance Review Committee was assembled by Premier David Peterson in 1986 to review social assistance in Ontario. Over the course of two years, the committee heard submissions from over 1500 individuals and groups, including people on social assistance, on how to improve welfare services. The primary recommendations culminated in promoting a strong sense of collective responsibility as can be seen in SARC’s statements regarding eligibility, adequacy, and accessibility. Regarding eligibility, SARC asserted that “All members of the community have a presumptive right to social assistance based on need” (SARC, 1988: 5). With respect to adequacy, the same report recommended that “All residents of Ontario who are in need must receive a fair and equitable level of social assistance, adequate to meet their basic needs for shelter, food, clothing, and personal health care” (SARC, 1988: 5). In reference to accessibility, SARC suggested that “Social assistance must be readily available to all those in need within the community” (SARC, 1988: 6).

Not only did PC reforms not follow the SARC (1988) recommendations, the welfare shifts enacted ran directly counter to what had been recommended: benefit levels became even more inadequate and access even more restrictive. Part of the political logic informing cuts to benefit levels and restricting eligibility was that people should be working, government generosity saps the work ethic, and “the simple fact of the matter is we can’t afford it” (Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario, 1994: 11). The need for social assistance was portrayed as a drain on the competitiveness of the Ontario economy, and taxpayers, rather than the effect of a global economy that was going from bad to worse in terms of producing adequate employment opportunities (Laxer, 1996). Separate legislation was passed, the Taxpayer Protection Act of Ontario (1999), in an attempt to protect the “hard working taxpayer” from individuals and governments who were exploiting them.

In the political discussion of welfare shifts, very little attention was given to the economic reality that “the most obvious failure of globalization has been its incapacity to maintain employment” (Saul, 2005: 46). The unemployed, it seemed, were simply work-shy and something obviously needed to be done about this. Further, the inordinate focus on welfare fraud was justified by the claim that “Every penny that is paid to the wrong person through mistake or fraud is food taken from the needy. Fraud and overpayments must be stopped” (Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario, 1994: 5). So while there was an indirect acknowledgement, here, that the needy were going without food this problem was attributed to others who were shamelessly scamming the welfare system. While the extent and prevalence of fraudulence in the welfare system was grossly overstated, the grounded insights from the Social Assistance Review Committee (1988) – that more adequate benefit levels would go a long way toward minimizing the fraudulence that did exist – were, again, completely ignored.

The opening lines in the inaugural document of the common sense revolution, released more than a full year prior to the 1995 election, claimed "The people of Ontario have a message for their politicians – government isn't working anymore. The system is broken" (Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario, 1994: 1). Politically, the populist rhetoric was a resounding success. "We need a revolution in this province", Harris asserted, "a common sense revolution" (Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario, 1994: 8).

The Research Question

This dissertation asks ***"How does Ontario Works, the accompanying discourse and cultural logic of neoliberal welfare reform, impact the subjectivities of OW participants?"*** My inquiry is grounded in a governmentality framework, placing "focus on *how* we are governed and by what practices" (Cruikshank, 1999: 120). The framing of this investigation follows a theoretical tradition that "directs us to attend to the practices of government that form the basis on which problematizations are made and what happens when we govern and are governed?" (Dean, 1999: 28). The theorizing from a governmentality perspective will be alloyed with social psychological theory on The Nature of Prejudice (Allport, 1954) to explore the cultural impacts of welfare policy.

Subjectivity, it should be noted, is a generic and open ended term in that the "perspective of the person" is applicable to many different issues. In addressing the present research question, I will explore the perspectives of people on social assistance as they relate to several issues that were explored during semi-structured interviews:

coming to social assistance, life on the system, attempting to exit social assistance, the causes of impoverishment, taxes, disability and care giving demands. There are cultural messages implicit in welfare reforms that are emphasized (and in some cases de-emphasized) on all these matters: coming to social assistance is irresponsible, life on the system is too easy, people could get off of welfare if they just wanted to, poverty is attributable to some kind of personal deficiency (usually laziness), taxes are too high and the taxpayer is getting 'screwed over', if a person is truly disabled they should be considered worthy of some support, and caring labour does not count for anything (or at least not very much). In addressing the issues respondents deemed important, and in exploring the complex ways that respondents both resisted and accommodated the discourse of neoliberalism, I will attempt to accomplish the following.

The Purposes of this Study:

The three purposes of this study are,

- First, to examine the impacts that widespread cultural beliefs embedded in the public discourses of welfare reform and taxation have on the subjectivities of social assistance recipients in Ontario. I will explore "the question of the nexus between power and subjectivity [that] has been a central preoccupation of philosophy and social theory for a very long time" (Adam, 2002: 100-114).

- Second, to make the counter discourses of respondents (who are consistently marginalized in the policy making process) visible and connect their voices to others who have written about, and understand, poverty from a grounded experiential knowledge base – in other words, to promote "an understanding of poverty from those who are poor" (Baker – Collins, 2005). In so doing, I will take up Foucault's (2003: 7) call for an "insurrection of subjugated knowledges."

- Third, to critically examine and explain the disjuncture between respondents' counter discursive accounts of "self"

> and the acceptance of many of the negative stereotypes associated with "other" welfare recipients.

The Social Theory Informing This Research

The first purpose of this monograph -- examining the impact of dominant discourse on subjectivity -- is grounded in, and will expand upon, the postmodern policy analyses and cultural critiques of American welfare provided by Schram (1995, 2000, and 2006). Subjectivity, as I use the term, is tantamount to "the perspective of the person." Applying a critical insight of Karen Swift's Manufacturing Bad Mothers, "the subjectivity of individuals is not seen as a private matter but rather is viewed in its relation to society" (Swift, 1995: 19). Just as Schram was standing on the proverbial shoulders of Foucault (1980, 2003, 2006, 2007a, 2007b) in understanding the latent meaning-making power of mainstream discourse to emphasize certain contexts, while subjugating others, this work will stand on the intellectual shoulders of Schram and explore the insightful relevance of Schram's American welfare policy scholarship to the Ontario scene. Schram gives a powerful summation of the theory informing his work,

> My particular approach emphasizes the importance of examining the power of discourse to invoke contexts that make some actions seem appropriate and others not. Discourse situates isolated actions in context so as to give them a meaning they would not otherwise have. Discourse invokes context in the way it frames, narrates, and positions policy makers, their policies, and the effects those policies have on people (Schram, 2006: xi).

I seek not only to utilize, but extend, the theorizing of Foucault and the applications of Schram. Specifically, I will accomplish this by introducing the term "classism" into my welfare policy analysis and by pointing out what the increased emphasis on 'personal responsibility', and the subjugation of notions of collective responsibility, ultimately amount to.

The second purpose of this study -- making the embodied counter discourses of respondents visible -- is propelled by Foucault's call to take up an insurrection of subjugated knowledges and, similarly, impelled by the interpretive interactionist project (Denzin, 1989: 7) that "attempts to make the world of problematic lived experience directly available to the reader." This endeavour is motivated by the concern that,

> With few exceptions, governmentality scholars have ignored the direct effects of government as it is experienced by, taken up, or resisted by its objects – real people in their everyday lives. Though they have used empirical data in the form of texts in their analyses, they have remained aloof from the lives of those to whom rule is directed (Power, 2005: 645).

Emphasizing what has been silenced in welfare discourse can partially help to counter the harsh reality that "most of what has been said or written [about poverty] has come from those who have never personally experienced the negative effects of classism and the social injustice of poverty" (Homan, 2007: 4). Similarly, Schram (1995: xxii) points out that "the real world [is] a place where social scientists need to visit with greater frequency." In light of these concerns, as recommended by Copeland (2005: 6), "this research [will examine] the counter discourses of welfare formulated in the wake of these shifts toward conservatism in social welfare policy."

The third purpose of this study – understanding and explaining the frequent disjuncture between respondents' accounts of "self" and "other" – will expand upon both the existing literature on welfare discourse and adopt insights on the perpetuation of oppression (Adam, 1978; Mullaly, 2002) to better understand, what I am calling here, "the survival of classism."[4] In understanding and explaining the often enigmatic disjuncture between respondents' embodied selves and the disembodied "other", I will: i.) review and expand upon the existing definitions of prejudice and classism as a necessary prelude to, ii.) analyzing the latent existence of these phenomena in Ontario welfare policy, political commentaries, and the qualitative data provided by respondents, and iii.) show that classism survives in, and is reproduced by, the mainstream discourses respondents utilize to discuss various topics related to social assistance, and in particular to explain why "other" poor people are poor and why the tax system is unfair to the "taxpayer".

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[4] This term is paraphrasing Adam's (1978) The Survival of Domination: Inferioriztion and Everyday Life

My central argument about welfare discourse and the "survival of classism" will invoke classic social psychological insights from The Nature of Prejudice (Allport, 1954). I commend Kenneth Clark's assertion (from the preface to 25th anniversary edition of The Nature of Prejudice) that "the basic outline for the understanding of this overall problem remains essentially the same as it was presented by Allport" (Allport, 1979 [1954]: xi) with the important caveat that Allport was writing decades before "the complexity of intersectionality" (McCall, 2005) had been seriously addressed in the academy. All twenty four respondents in this study were disadvantaged by their lack of material resources and the accompanying cultural beliefs and attributions about the reasons why people live in conditions of material deprivation. But for many, this material disadvantage was not experienced as a singular or discrete barrier to employment.

Notwithstanding this important caveat, Allport's (1954) theorizing remains invaluable for understanding the cultural impacts of welfare reform and explaining why the disadvantages directly experienced by respondents rarely were at the forefront of the discussion when they spoke of "Others." Specifically, The Nature of Prejudice remains particularly useful for analyzing: 1) the formation and categorization of in-groups (i.e.

‘the taxpayer’) and the concurrent rejection of out-groups (i.e. ‘the welfare bum’ or ‘welfare mom’; 2) the linguistic factors of prejudice including “nouns that cut slices,” “labels of primary potency,” and “emotionally toned labels”; and 3.) the resultant “scapegoats for special occasions.” There is intriguing work on categorization and linguistics that predates Allport showing that “demagogues thrive on semantic illiteracy” (Chase, 1938: 27). In short, demagogy thrives when the populace uncritically accepts a fictional homogeneity inscribed by certain categorical labels and concurrently ignores the heterogeneity that is badly obscured by classification. Abstract but powerful semantics, terms with no actual referents (i.e. ‘dependency’), usually accompany these categories to valorize some group and concurrently vilify another. Adding to an already compelling body of knowledge, there is also contemporary work on categorization post-dating Allport suggesting that “each category valorizes some point of view and silences another” (Bowker and Starr, 1999: 5). Swift (1995: 12) has noted persuasively that, “Among their more insidious purposes, categories effectively hide the reproduction of social divisions such as racism and sexism.” The categories of welfare discourse, I contend, effectively hide the reproduction of classism (in conjunction with other axes of domination).

Perhaps the most profound insight that Allport’s direct legacy provides for purposes of this study is concisely stated thus,

> Most people are unaware of this basic law of language – that every label applied to a given person refers properly to only one aspect of his nature. . . . Thus each label we use, especially those of primary potency distracts our attention from concrete reality. The living, breathing complex individual – the ultimate unit of human nature – is lost to sight. (Allport 1979 [1954]: 179).

This pivotal insight about “the ultimate unit of human nature” being “lost to sight” will be linked to later poststructural theorizing about the latent power of discourse, and subjugated discourse, to arrive at what will be the central argument of this treatise. Prior to examining the principle findings of this research, it is necessary to provide a brief background contextualizing the politics behind the transition from welfare to workfare and empirically document the outcomes of two key changes in Ontario welfare policy: benefit levels and accessibility to support.

The Transition from Welfare to Workfare

"The Ontario Works Act would overhaul a welfare system that is 30 years out of date. It would restore welfare to its original purpose: a transitional program of last resort that will provide people on welfare with a stepping stone back into the workforce. The legislation I am introducing today will ensure that this objective remains paramount."
--Janet Ecker, 1997 (Ontario Hansard Issue, 1997: LO1340)

The Conservative standpoint on the original purpose of the welfare state, in addition to overlooking that the fact that the monumental Marsh report was clear that income security had to be coupled with a governmental commitment to full employment in order to be sustainable (Guest, 1997: 112), is not consistent with the standpoints posited by other policy analysts. For thirty years the Canada Assistance Plan (CAP) regulated several conditions of provincial welfare and entailed a 50% federal provincial cost sharing agreement (Quaid, 2002: 46). The federal share of provincial social assistance in Ontario was reduced from 50% to 28% (Quaid, 2002: 47) so harsh provincial changes for poor people were operating under national and international contexts.

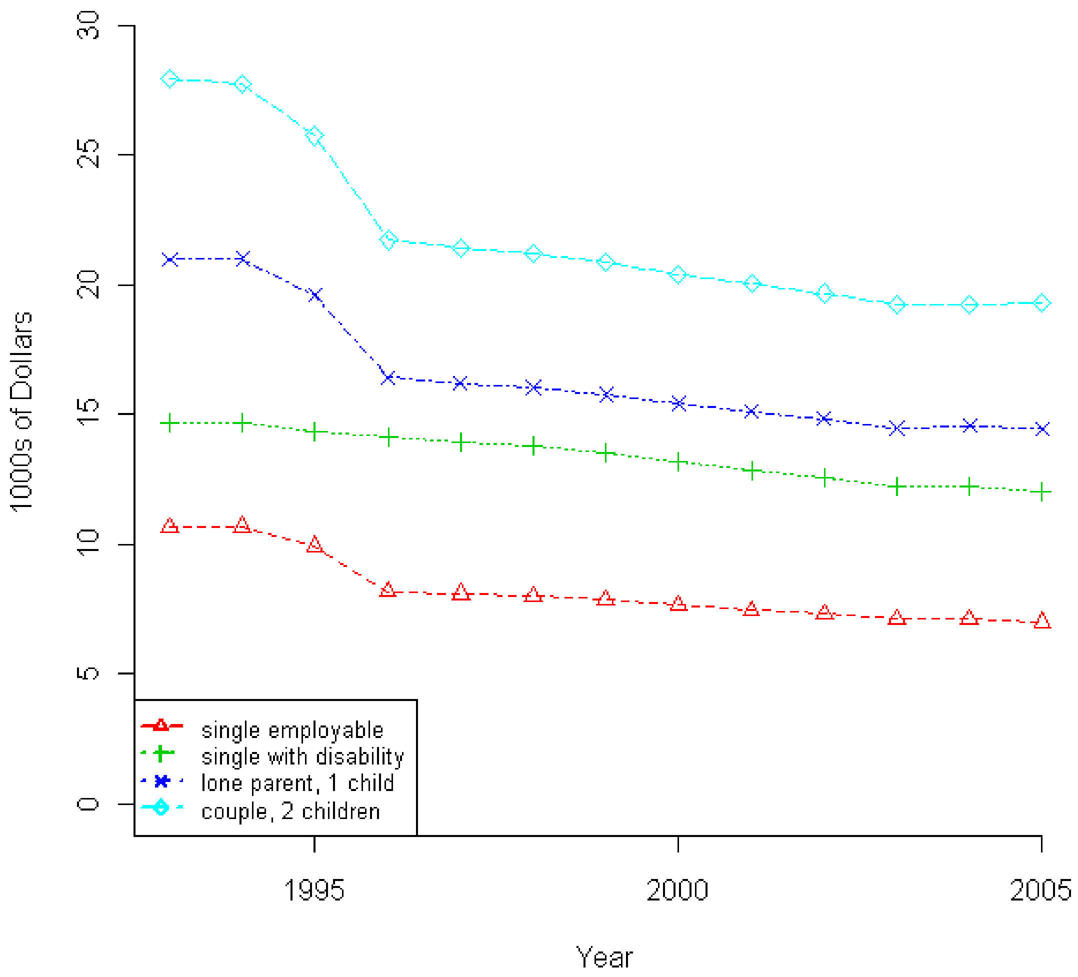
Morrison summarizes some of the notable features of CAP,

> With its emphasis on the provision of adequate assistance to all persons in need in the context of an overarching social goal of eliminating the conditions giving rise to poverty, its prohibition of residency requirements and workfare and its insistence on the creation of a formal appeals process in social assistance legislation, CAP signalled a major shift in the Canadian welfare state towards an entitlement model of social assistance (Morrison, 1998: 2).

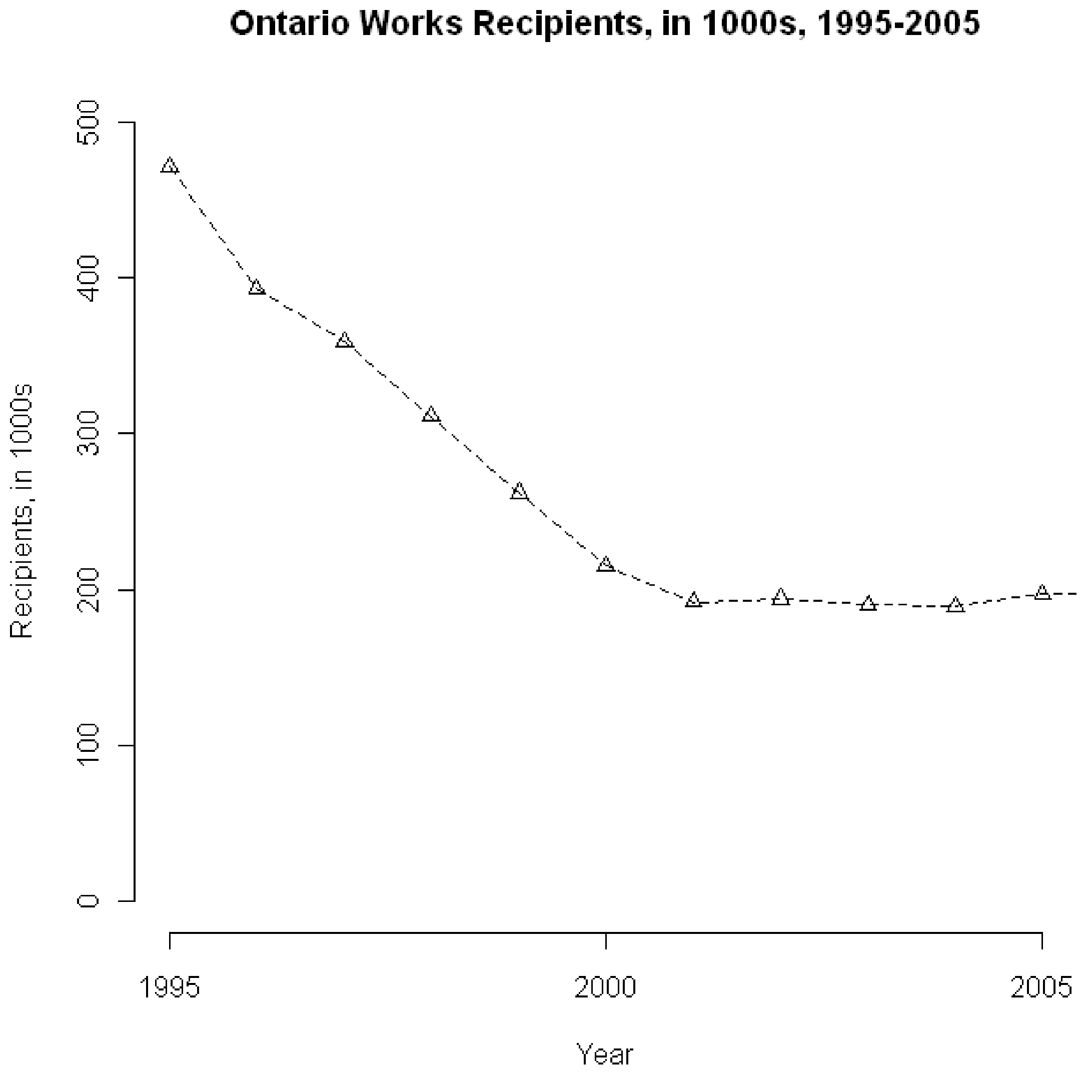
In short, “CAP clearly dictated that the only condition for welfare eligibility was financial need” (Quaid, 2002: 45-46). It must also be noted that “under the provisions of CAP [provincial governments] were not permitted to require employable recipients to work as a condition of assistance” (Moscovitch, 1997: 81). While the CAP directives regarding eligibility, adequate assistance, and prohibiting workfare were not stringently followed (economic disenfranchisement certainly existed, even in the most generous years of the Canadian welfare state) the succeeding federal legislation took a notably draconian turn. The Canadian Health and Social Transfer came into effect on April 1, 1996 and replaced CAP. The provinces were provided with more discretion on how to manage welfare programs and the prohibition against mandatory workfare was removed. Ontario moved quickly enacting welfare policy changes. Part of the rationale was that benefit levels had become too generous. Clearly, this rationale ignored the reality that benefit levels, even at their highest, never came close to the poverty line for any recipient (National Council of Welfare, 2006).

The following chart shows social assistance benefit levels in Ontario for four different categories of recipients. The time period chosen for display is intended to concretely evidence the impacts of reforms and thus includes two years immediately prior to policy shifts when the NDP was still in power in Ontario, the period of PC welfare transition, and covers the first two years of the Liberal government’s tenure. While the initial cuts to benefit levels were notable in 1995, the immediate years that followed saw minimal change in that benefit levels would remain constant while the cost of living would raise approximately 2-3% / annum. The Liberal government did not reverse the Harris cuts but did allow a cost of living increase in social assistance rates to ensure that benefit levels would keep pace with inflation. The graph below details this data.

Ontario Welfare Rates, 1993-2005,
In 1000s of 1994 Dollars



Regarding eligibility, a number of bureaucratic restrictions account for a significant part of decreasing caseloads (Quaid, 2002). Here is a chart revealing welfare caseloads from 1995 to 2005. The declining caseloads graphed below were portrayed as a resounding success resulting from OW.



Notwithstanding the reality that circumstances frequently did not improve for those exiting welfare (Lightman, Mitchell, and Herd: 2005: 98) PC reforms did not seem to lose popularity with the public in Ontario.

The successful 1999 re-election campaign of Conservative Premier Mike Harris portrayed declining welfare caseload statistics as a resounding success which had restored an eroded work ethic in the province, further pledged to implement mandatory drug testing for welfare recipients, and promised another series of regressive tax cuts to continue to restore what was termed fairness in taxation. The campaign brought the Progressive Conservatives back to Queens Park with another majority government. A shift in provincial government occurred in 2003, but the centerpiece of welfare policy shifts (the Ontario Works Act) remains intact today.

Central Argument:

"The notion that the poor themselves, through their deviance, are responsible for the problem of poverty has a long history" (Hays, 2003: 124).

It is a central contention of this dissertation that the "regimes of practice" (Foucault, 1991: 73-86) associated with Ontario Works and the public "words of welfare" (Schram, 1995) that were integral to the success of the conservative "common sense revolution" operate on a "discursive field" (Foucault, 2006 [1969]: 30) reinvigorating a latent and institutional form of "prejudice" (Allport, 1954) called classism. This central contention will be supplemented by insights from a well established body of gender scholarship (Gordon, 1994; Hays, 2003; Lessa, 1999; Swift, 1995; Bezanson, 2006; Fraser and Gordon, 1997; Schram, 2006: 43-69) showing the patriarchal power effects of neoliberalism in general and welfare reform in particular. By examining the "workings, effects, and the 'how?' of power" (Foucault, 2003: 274) I will show that both overt and covert classism survive in, and are reproduced by, the dominant public discourses of welfare reform which create uncritically accepted binary and disembodied "cultural categories that undergird the [neoliberal] social order" (Schram, 2000: 1) namely, that of "the lazy and immoral welfare recipient" and "the hard working and exploited taxpayer." Adopting, and paraphrasing Foucault's seminal insights on power, I will show in this research that classism, via discourses of personal responsibility and over-taxation, insidiously "passes through the individuals it has constituted" (Foucault, 2003: 30). In other words, I will demonstrate that culture – specifically, the cultural phenomenon of classism as it is embedded in welfare discourse -- was frequently received, internalized, and reproduced by the people who participated in this study.

The verisimilitude (Denzin, 1997: 10) of my central argument hinges on empirically demonstrating a notable and pronounced disjuncture between the "subjugated knowledges" (Foucault, 2003: 7) respondents utilized to articulate their embodied experiences about coming to, living on, and attempting to exit social assistance, and the cultural influences of the mainstream public discourses that were invoked to describe the poverty and unemployment of disembodied "other" welfare recipients. In sum, the numerous challenges in the daily living realities embodied in the experiential knowledge of research respondents – that I will suggest "have a profoundly honest ring, for they rest on experiences too deep for deception" (Frankl, 1985: 10) – would rarely rise to the level of visibility when those same respondents spoke of the disembodied "other" coming to, living on, and "*not"* attempting to exit social assistance.

Frequently, when discussing the impoverishment of "Others", respondents would ignore the numerous barriers to employment – related to factors such as ill health, child care, and the incapacitating realities of impoverishment -- that they detailed with compelling clarity when discussing their personal circumstances. In ways that were complex, and often confounding, respondents would sometimes legitimize the neoliberal model of a lean and punitive welfare policy (usually when making a disembodied reference to "Others"). At other times the same respondents would make exceptions to the neoliberal harshness to infer that issues related to the daily living realities of disability (and episodic disability), mothering, and other employment barriers needed more attention in policy formation. When respondents presented views contrary to the dominant neoliberal model of welfare, these perspectives was usually accompanied by embodied stories from their personal experience.

In analyzing qualitative data from twenty four respondents subsisting on social assistance, I critically examine what I am calling "the survival of classism" and suggest that this form of prejudice is a cultural phenomenon that is constituted, and reproduced, by dominant discourses and the resulting 'cultural software' (Schram, 2000: 3) that is critical in shaping the subjectivities of respondents**.** I conclude by suggesting that naming classism is an important strategic endeavour given that this form of prejudice and bigotry survives by stealth and remains, to borrow the words of Schram (2000: 28) "hidden in plain sight."

It is worth reiterating, strongly, that my argument about classism being insidiously embedded in neoliberal welfare policy is necessarily accompanied by the complicated proviso that amid the accommodation that could be heard in the voices of research respondents, there were also moments of resistance whereby respondents noted that there are times when it should be considered acceptable to be in receipt of public assistance and rejected other derogatory assumptions implied by neoliberalism. Like most forms of prejudice, the phenomenon of classism is rarely absolute or all encompassing: most people do not possess a single subject position[5]. Examining the resistance amid the accommodation can offer clues about strengthening resistance.

Welfare Policy and Discourse in the Era of Neoliberal Globalization

"I call this way of framing welfare policy deliberations 'globalization discourse'"
(Schram, 2006: 2)

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[5] I am indebted to committee member Dr. Gerald Cradock for pointing out that "most people do not possess a single subject position."

While Schram's insights on "welfare discipline" (punishing people into accepting the logic of the market) from an American context will be examined extensively in chapter 3, it should be noted at the outset that the cultural dimensions of globalization clearly transcends borders. Swanson (2001: 81) has suggested that welfare "trap language has spread around the globe" and suggests that welfare state provisions don't help the poor, but rather has the effect of trapping them in an unnatural state of dependence. This global transcendence also includes the diffusion of neoliberal welfare policy and discourse constituting a significant taxpayer (in-group) / welfare recipient (out-group) binary. Within this binary of classification are cultural meanings and assumptions about what it means to be a taxpayer and welfare recipient. Perhaps the most crucial aspect of Allport's theorizing lies in understanding that prejudice is entirely contingent upon ingroup formation and the natural corollary of outgroup rejection. The scapegoating (Allport, 1954: 243-259) of welfare recipients, whereby they are blamed for excessive taxation and slowing the economy, is facilitated by neoliberal dependency discourse of the "new right".

Defining Neoliberalism, Neoconservatism, and the 'New Right'

"[Neoliberalism] *represents the ideological and economic canvas upon which the vast changes to welfare states, and indeed to governance, have taken place over the 1990's"* (Bezanson, 2006: 7).

While an extensive historical review of liberalism becoming neoliberalism, and conservatism becoming neoconservatism, is beyond the scope of this manuscript it is necessary to clarify what is meant by the terms that are used throughout this dissertation. According to David Harvey,

> Neoliberalism is in the first instance a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial

> freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade. The role of the state is to create and preserve an institutional framework appropriate to such practices (Harvey, 2005: 2).

Bezanson (2006: 3) shows that the Harris "government imposed major changes based on neoliberal [logic and] policies." While Harvey's definition of what neoliberalism is "in the first instance" is certainly consistent with Bezanson's claim, it must also be noted that other theoreticians emphasize the governing technology inherent in neoliberalism. In Governmentality: Power and Rule in Modern Society it is suggested that,

> Several different governmental rationalities might be described as variants of neoliberalism. They are modes of problematization of the welfare state and its features such as bureaucracy, rigidity, and dependency formation. They recommend the reform of the individual and institutional conduct so that it becomes more competitive and efficient. They seek to affect this reform by the extension of market rationality to all spheres, by the focus on choices of individuals and collectives, and by the establishment of a culture of enterprise and responsible autonomy (Dean, 1999: 210).

In short, neoliberalism can also be seen as a form of governmental technology (Rose, 2004) designed to have people govern themselves. It should be noted that mainstream use of the term 'liberal'-- inferring progressivity (Lightman, 2003: 275) – clearly has a much different meaning.

When I use the term "conservative" throughout this manuscript, I am usually referring to the Progressive Conservative (PC) party of Ontario. But conservatism, as a theoretical concept, also warrants definition because conservative theorizing has largely informed PC policies and practice. The term "conservative" is traditionally associated with a protection and maintenance of the status quo with respect to both social and economic issues. Socially, tradition is desired and economic inequality is seen as necessary and legitimate, in part, because “distributive justice” (Nozick, 1974) suggests that re-distribution / taxation violates peoples’ individual private property rights.

On economic issues, anti-collectivist (Mishra, 1984) neoconservatism now goes a step further than traditional conservatives and proposes regressive tax policies, and an even leaner social support system, so that the status quo of inequality is not maintained – it is exacerbated. As can be seen in Harris’s assertion, examined earlier, suggesting that Ontario was in need of a common sense revolution, the “new right” is no longer satisfied with simply maintaining the status quo and has developed a more activist stance traditionally associated with the political left. Neoconservative activism, from groups like the Canadian Taxpayers Federation, has played an integral part in shaping how taxation is perceived and the symbolic meanings, and identities, evoked when the term “taxpayer” is used.

The term “new right” (Mishra, 1984: 26-84) can be applied to the ideologies and groups espousing laisser-faire / free market promotion and anti-welfarist views about government interference in the market. The new anti-collectivism, opposing welfare state provisions, has rekindled old notions about the desired primacy of individualism purportedly being unleashed to create wealth. To understand this, it is necessary to review the views espoused by some of the most prominent leaders of the new right so that we can appreciate where the cultural diffusion that made its way to Ontario, and translated itself into social policy, originated.

Reaganomics and the Conservative Welfare Scholarship of Murray

“The discussion is about how to help the disadvantaged, not about how to help the advantaged cut their taxes, to which arguments for personal freedom somehow always get diverted” (Murray, 1994: 232).

Ronald Reagan was instrumental in advocating the belief that government could *not* be the solution to people's problems, but rather that excessive welfare state government was often the problem that plagued most hard working people (Obama, 2006). Reagan's populism espoused the "trickle down" theory of economics, suggesting that massive tax cuts would put more money in peoples' pockets, stimulate the economy, and that wealth would trickle down to benefit everyone. Given that a rising economic tide was purportedly able to lift all boats, the logic of redistributive government intervention was called into question. Murray (1994: 183) argued that the cultural logic of welfare state – the belief that "It's [impoverishment] not your fault" (Murray, 1994: 191) -- was discriminating against the affluent,

> 'Elite' was fast becoming a dirty word in the mid-1960's among whites; "elitism" would soon be a form of bigotry to rank with racism and, later, sexism and ageism.

The American welfare scholarship of Murray (1994) supported Regan's politics. Murray (1994: 146) detailed his own premises analyzing welfare reform,

> Premise #1: People respond to incentives and disincentives. Sticks and carrots work.
>
> Premise #2: People are not inherently hard working or moral. In the absence of countervailing influences, people will avoid work and be amoral.
>
> Premise # 3: People must be held responsible for their actions. Whether they are responsible in some ultimate philosophical or biochemical sense cannot be the issue if society is to function.

The central thesis of Murray's seminal, Losing Ground (1994) is that welfare state policies irresponsibly ignored these premises and thus rich and poor alike have suffered: the former by being excessively taxed and the latter by unduly being made 'dependent'. The arguments, as we shall see, were not unique to America. Schram (2006: xiv) correctly argues "that there is indeed an Americanization of welfare discourse afoot" in most industrialized nations.

On the ten year anniversary of Losing Ground (Murray, 1994 [1984]: xvi) wrote,

> In 1984 *Losing Ground's* argument that a growing number of poor people were engaged in self destructive personal behaviour that would keep them at the bottom of society provoked angry retorts that I was blaming the victim. Today, no major figure in either academia or public life argues against the existence of such a group. It even has an accepted, uncontroversial name: the underclass.

Indeed, the images invoked by the term "underclass" create very different meanings than would be perceived had the term "underprivileged" remained in vogue. As we will come to see, signifiers matter because they determine what is, and is not, given to representation (Foucault, 2007a: 107).

A quarter century after Murray's seminal work, he weighed in on the Nadia Suleman[6] situation, invoking the taxpayer / unworthy recipient binary,

> It's my opinion that a woman's right to reproduce should be limited to a number which the parents can pay for. Why should my wife and I, as taxpayers, pay child support for 14 Suleman kids? (Associated Press, 02 /12 / 09).

The Suleman case, despite the fact that it was in quite anomalous, was publicly headlined for several months in early 2009, and held to be the quintessential example of what was wrong with "the culture of entitlement" that was purportedly underlying a "culture of poverty". The caring labour (Swift, 1995) required to raise children, because it does not take place in a market context (Bezanson, 2006) is not considered to be of much value in

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Several months after giving birth to octuplets, when public contempt was still at a very high level, Nadia Suleman appeared on the Dr. Phil show. Suleman stated that her decision to have more children was made more with emotion (because she loves her kids) than with logic. While I will not probe into the cultural influences informing Suleman's views, it is worth noting that the public audience was much more receptive to Suleman after hearing her story and realizing that she was not the villainous person she appeared to be when she was headlined and labelled with monikers such as "Octomom." Allport was clear that labels and categories tend to make us lose sight of the person.

the public narrative. Labour that does not take place within the market is not seen as making a contribution to society (Gordon, 1994). If raising one or two children is not considered real work, then raising fourteen children shouldn't really count for much either. Murray was certainly not alone in his perspectives or in his anger. Suleman's spokesperson had to resign amid anonymous public death threats (Associated Press, 02 / 12 / 09). While most peoples' hostility did not extend beyond antilocution (Allport, 1954: 49) public contempt had been effectively pre-figured during the formative years of neoliberalism.

Thatcherism

"*Thatcherism's 'populism' signals its unexpected ability to harness to its project certain popular discontents, to cut across and between different divisions in society*" (Hall, 1988: 6)

Margaret Thatcher's (in)famous dictum that "there is no such thing as society" coincided with,

> the end of the social democratic consensus around the welfare state under the onslaught of neo-liberal individualism [and] the subordination of every aspect of social life to market forces (Browne, 1997: 37).

The faith instilled in the distributive fairness of the market is justified by the cultural belief that people "succeed or fail on the basis of their own abilities, initiative, risk taking and hard work" (Browne, 1997: 38). Producing disenchantment with "big government" purportedly catering to those who seemingly would not show initiative or work hard was the political lifeline of neoliberal politics,

> We underestimate the degree to which Thatcherism has succeeded in representing itself as 'on the side of the little people against the big battalions' [of government] (Hall, 1988: 6).

Nikolas Rose (2004: 138-139), in Powers of Freedom: Reframing Political Thought astutely characterizes the salient features of Thatcherism by quoting Thatcher,

> the first principle of this government . . . is to revive a sense of individual responsibility. It is to reinvigorate not just the economy and industry but the whole body of voluntary associations, loyalties and activities which give society its richness and diversity, and hence its real strength . . . [We] need a strong state to preserve both liberty and order . . . [But we] should not expect the State to appear in the guise of an extravagant good fairy at every christening, a loquacious and tedious companion at every stage of life's journey, the unknown mourner at every funeral.

Thatcher was clear that the neoliberal project she was carrying out had a strong moral and redemptive dimension, "Economics are the method" she argued, "but the object is to change the soul" (Harvey, 2005: 23). Cultural logic in general, policy and taxation specifics in particular, were remarkably similar when comparing Thatcher's reign in Great Britain, Reagan's Presidency in the United States, and Harris's tenure in Ontario. Browne (1997: 37) writes,

> To assess Mike Harris's Common Sense Revolution, it is constructive to compare it to examples of conservative ideology and government in the countries to which Ontario is most closely affiliated in terms of history, trade and cultural influence, namely the United States and Great Britain.

While one could find minor variations in the different locales of neoliberalism, the underlying discourse, cultural and policy logistics of advanced liberalism, entailed the following commonalities: a) the problems of poverty and unemployment were reduced to the individual and moral characteristics of the poor and unemployed who purportedly had been permitted to live too extravagantly; b) the increased emphasis on personal responsibility abandoned earlier welfare state policy notions of collective responsibility as the myth of equal opportunity and meritocracy reigned; c) the grounded insights on impoverishment from those living in poverty were thoroughly subjugated; d) the cultural categorization of “the taxpayer” portrayed this group as the “exploited victim” (Capponi, 1997: 72) and the binary moral opposite of the undesirable “welfare recipient.” Throughout this manuscript, excerpts from social assistance legislation, debate from within the provincial legislature of Ontario, political campaign literature, and selected political commentaries from the most outspoken proponents of welfare reform will evidence these recurring themes. Understanding the prominence of these themes leads into an analysis of what classism, how it operates, and how it survives. The monograph is organized in the following manner.

Overview of the Chapters

The second chapter opens with a review of the foundational social psychological work on the nature of prejudice (Allport, 1954) and examines how contemporary scholarship assesses the merits of Allport’s seminal insights (Dovidio, Glick, and Rudman, 2005). Understanding prejudice as an antipathy grounded in a categorical group membership is pivotal to understanding the central contention of this monograph. A brief review of semantic work on classification that predates (Chase, 1938) and post-dates (Bowker and Starr, 1999) the work of Allport is also included. Next, I review several existing definitions of classism (Power, 2006; Langhout, Roselli, and Feinstein 2006; Homan, 2007) and will draw a conceptual distinction between overt, covert, and institutional classism. The next section of this chapter will provide several empirical illustrations of classism. These illustrations will be taken directly from the Ontario Works Act and from excerpts posited by the most outspoken proponents of welfare reform. These examples of mainstream political discourse will set the stage for examining the way many respondents of this study took up – and thus reproduced -- those public narratives while simultaneously distancing their personal lives from the negative moral meanings associated with welfare receipt. I then suggest that naming and conceptualizing classism is a worthwhile strategic endeavour given that “Foucault suggests that, by naming something, by constituting it in discourse, the possibilities for resistance are created” (McCormack, 2002: 42). The final section of this chapter acknowledges that classism is certainly not the only form of prejudice and bigotry that has illegitimately reached an institutional status. The notion of intersectionality – “the relationships among multiple dimensions and modalities of social relations and subject formations” (McCall, 2005: 1771) -- is introduced with the caveat that although my analysis is grounded in understanding one form of oppression, there are clearly multiple forms in daily operation that interact with one another. Scholarship examining the gendered nature of welfare discourse (Fraser and Gordon, 1997; Evans and Swift, 2000; Swift and Birmingham, 2000; Lessa, 1999; Hays, 2003) creating meanings that sustain, not only class inequalities, but also a patriarchal system will be reviewed concisely in chapter 2.

The third chapter opens by detailing the cornerstone assumptions of Foucault’s theorizing and specifically examines the central concepts upon which Foucault’s intellectual legacy was built: discourse, subjugated knowledge, and power. I will review, from The Archaeology of Knowledge (2006 [1969]: 27-28) the most significant theoretical contribution Foucault has made to the present analysis,

> All manifest discourse is secretly based on an ‘already said’; and this ‘already said’ is not merely a phrase that has already been spoken, or a text that has already been written, but a ‘never said’, an incorporeal discourse, a voice as silent as breath, a writing that is merely a hollow of its own mark . . . The manifest discourse, therefore, is really no more than the repressive presence of what it does not say; and this ‘not said’ is a hollow that undermines from within all that is said.

In other words, our standard ways of communicating emphasize certain aspects of social life and de-emphasize others. I join Foucault (2006 [1969: 24) in suggesting that the “facts of [cultural] transmission and communication are amenable to analysis.” Understanding these facts of transmission can assist in the “description of cultural influences” (2006 [1969]: 5) that latently foster an institutionalized “inertia of mental attitudes[7]” (2006 [1969]: 10). Next, I review the American welfare scholarship of Schram to uncover some very insightful applications of Foucault’s seminal theorizing. I present Schram’s (2000:3) critical conceptualizations of “culture” and “cultural software” to lay the theoretical groundwork for understanding the qualitative data analysis that will follow. I conclude this chapter by arguing that although Kurt Lewin was quite correct in asserting that “There is nothing so practical as a good theory”, Karl Popper was equally correct in suggesting that “There is no theory that is not beset with problems” (Robbins and Chaterjee, 1998: i). I briefly suggest what a class analysis of welfare reform could reveal, what gender based analyses have revealed (Copeland, 2005; McCormack, 2002) and point out that there are certainly valuable insights that could be gained from different theoretical orientations.

Chapter 4 details the qualitative methodology employed to answer the central research question examining how Ontario Works, and the accompanying discourse and cultural logic, impacts subjectivities. The specifics of the recruitment strategy, questionnaire, interview process, coding, and data analysis are all made explicit. The demographics of the 24 respondents are provided and compared to the larger demographic of OW recipients for both Oxford County and Ontario as a whole. This background sets the stage for discussing the methodological strengths and limitations of this study and subsequently assessing the verisimilitude of the central conclusions that are being drawn. While it is acknowledged that the sample is not representative of the larger demographic, and this does present some methodological limitations, it must also be noted that the openness of the recruitment strategy gave all social assistance recipients in Oxford County an equal opportunity to participate in this study. Perhaps more importantly, the conclusions drawn by this study will have an authority that is grounded in the interpretive ethnographic view articulated by Denzin,

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[7] Swanson (2001: 88) argues that welfare policy “imposes a mental attitude that the poor are to blame for their poverty.” In chapter 6 we will explore the poverty attributions from the twenty four respondents from this study.

> These understandings are based on glimpses and slices of the culture in action. Any given practice that is studied is significant because it is an instance of a cultural practice that happened in a particular time and place . . . its importance lies in the fact that it instantiates a cultural practice (Denzin, 1997: 8).

The qualitative methods utilized in this research will concretely instantiate the cultural practices of classism. Denzin (1989: 56) points out “Precisely because any text can be read in different ways, it must be established that a particular interpretation is valid.” According to Denzin, validity[8] “has been replaced with the words authority and legitimation” (Denzin, 1997: 9). I will explain why this manuscript takes the form of an autoethnography – linking the “personal to the cultural” (Ellis and Bochner, 2000: 739) -- and is presented as a “confessional tale” (Van Maanen, 1988: 73-100). In short, the heightened awareness of self via open reflexivity leads to a heightened understanding of others and, ultimately, a more thorough grasp on the cultural context in which lives are lived (Ellis and Bochner, 2000: 733-768).

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[8] If validity, in conventional usage, means that one is measuring what one intends to measure, then one could argue that the term should not be abandoned.

Chapter 5 details the interpretive phenomenological insights provided by respondents in relation to how they explain their own experiences and involvement with Ontario Works. Much of the 'organic intellect[9]' provided by respondents in reference to their own circumstances is – notably -- very congruent with the profound Nobel prize winning insights provided by Amartya Sen (1992). Sen distinguishes between the common cultural perception of people maximizing their capabilities through sheer individual will and determination, and the critically important insight lost in mainstream policy and discourse: having the primary goods and means that are absolutely necessary to fulfill one's capabilities. According to Sen (1992) and my respondents, poverty is not just about living with limited material resources – it is about the incapacity to move forward and pursue a better life precisely because of the limited material means to do so. With this insight in mind I then adopt the concept of "privileged irresponsibility" (Tronto, 1993) and mirror the work of McIntosh (1988) and Homan (2007) to detail and unpack the neglected class based aspects of "The Invisible Knapsack of Privilege" that are made invisible by a discourse conducive to facilitating "privileged irresponsibility." The chapter concludes by pointing out that there frequently was a shift in discourse when many respondents articulated their views about others on welfare: remarkably, it was common for many underprivileged respondents to accommodate harsh sentiments and antipathies towards others in a similar plight and invoke a discourse of privileged irresponsibility.

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[9] This term was originally coined by Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci and was meant to convey the belief that thinking can be informed from a material / experiential basis.

Chapter 6 will examine how conversational partners drew upon a discursive field to articulate their views of the welfare system and others who are impacted by it. Notwithstanding the concerns articulated by respondents in reference to their own circumstances, in this chapter I present illustrations of manifest discourse – and specifically the assumptions replete within that discourse -- when respondents discuss matters that transcend their own embodied experience. Specifically, the data analysis identifies concrete examples of overt and covert classism that have become institutionalized in the culturally sanctioned explanations for why "others" come to, are able to "live high" on, and not prepared to exit social assistance. Overt classism among research respondents manifested itself in outright in group hostility in a way that, in many cases, was quite remarkable. This hostility, in part, may be attributable not only to "the nature of hatred" (Allport, 1954: 363-366) but to the belief on the part of respondents that "others" on welfare "are giving us a bad name."

Covert classism drew upon the dominant cultural beliefs about the causes of poverty and was readily prominent when respondents were asked, "Why do you think poor people are poor?" By analyzing the responses to this question, I will make manifest what I suggest has been made latent: that is, the way that classism is constituted on the discursive field and the manner by which it survives. Like Power (2005: 643) I found that there are "messy actualities of how subjects take up neoliberal discourse" because the acceptance of new right logic was also intertwined with moments of resistance. While virtually all respondents were unapologetic and forthright about why they were legitimately in need, a few respondents went further than a defence of self and spoke out against the vilification and stereotypes of other poor people (while usually adding the caveat that some people do in fact fit the caricatures of the 'lazy bum'). Most people, it must be noted, do not possess a single subject position. Many respondents in this study would shift between an acceptance of, and resistance to, the dominant neoliberal rationales underlying welfare reform.

Notably, some questions produced much less resistance than others. My argument about classism being embedded in neoliberal welfare discourse is derived largely from a critical analysis of respondents' individualized attributions for the impoverishment of others and their understandings of "excessive" taxation. Notwithstanding a few anomalies, subjectivities on these matters were overwhelmingly impacted by neoliberal discourse and it seemed clear that many respondents were picking up, and repeating, the arguments posited by the most prominent leaders of the new right when they spoke about "Others". This pivotal insight leads into the synthesis of the final chapter.

In the final chapter I attempt to account for and explain the notable disjuncture between the embodied "self" and the disembodied "other" that was a common theme among the qualitative data provided by my research respondents. I conclude that this disjuncture bears the indelible imprint of the cultural meanings associated with poverty, unemployment, taxation and welfare receipt that emanate from the Ontario Works act and the public "words of welfare". I return to my central argument to suggest that welfare policy and welfare discourse are replete with assumptions and misconceptions that are both prejudicial and classist. Classism survives, I contend, when these policies and accustomed discourses are uncritically accepted and taken up by those who are most harmed by them.

Chapter 2

A Problem With No Name: Conceptualizing and Re-conceptualizing Classism

"*My worker told me that if he had his way 'every person on welfare would have to account for every piece of toilet paper that they use.*'" -- Dorothy (research respondent)

"*It required years of labour and billions of dollars to gain the secret of the atom. It will take a still greater investment to gain the secrets of man's [sic] irrational nature. It is easier, someone has said, to smash an atom than a prejudice*." (Allport, 1954: xvii)

In his classic work on poverty, The Other America: Poverty in the United States (1962) Michael Harrington demonstrated that "There are misconceptions [about the poor] that literally blind the eyes" (Harrington, 1993 [1962]: 14). Harrington elaborates,

> Here is the most familiar version of the social blindness: 'The poor are that way because they are afraid of work. And anyway, they all have big cars. If they were like me or my Father and Grandfather, they could pay their own way. But they prefer to live on the dole and cheat the taxpayers.' (Harrington, 1993 [1962]: 14).

Prejudice toward the poor has not changed much, if at all, since Harrington's time. From within the Provincial legislature, Janet Ecker (1997) has argued, "The Ontario Works Act would strengthen our ability to prevent fraud and abuse to protect the welfare system for those who really need it" (Ontario Hansard Issue, 1997: LO1360). The frequently cited message, here, was that the current system was being abused by people who didn't really need it. Of the 52 582 investigations of welfare fraud carried out over the tenure of Harris's Premiership, a total of 430 criminal convictions were laid: a 122 to 1 investigation to criminal charge ratio (htpp://dawn.thot.net/Kimberly_rogers/wb-qa.html).

Typifications and stereotypes regarding social assistance recipients usually mean that,

> Whenever the issue of welfare comes up, there are always some who say that recipients need a push to get them off the system. The push, in this context, usually means less money to live on so welfare won't be too comfortable, and some form of compulsory work-for-welfare or workfare (Interfaith Social Assistance Reform Coalition, 1998: 35).

This argument presupposes that the support provided by social assistance makes life comfortable for recipients and assumes that work is readily available if people would just take the time to get training. One of the defining hallmarks of prejudicial thinking, as we will come to see, is that it patently ignores corrigible evidence that would invalidate its erroneous conclusions. Regarding benefit levels, at their highest peak, in 1992, social assistance rates in Ontario reached only 62% of the low income cut off poverty line (for a single employable). In 2007, social assistance rates in Ontario (for the same category of recipient) totalled a meagre 33% of the median after-tax income in the province (National Council of Welfare, 2008). Regarding the logic that training is the solution to impoverishment, this reasoning overlooks the economic reality that we are now living in the first generation where, for many, completing university-level training does not necessarily translate into secure, living-wage, employment (Livingstone, 1996).

Writing in an American context, in Women and the Politics of Class, Johanna Brenner observes that, “The myths, stereotypes, and just plain lies that circulate around welfare reform are outrageous; yet they seem to be impervious to reasoned argument” (Brenner, 2000: 155). The phenomenon of classism, as we will observe from analyzing Ontario welfare policy and qualitative interview data from twenty four social assistance respondents, clearly transcends the borders of America. While there has not been much change since The Other America, hope for change is enhanced with a better understanding of what exactly prejudice is and an increasing awareness of how it operates.

This chapter opens with a review of foundational social psychological work on The Nature of Prejudice (Allport, 1954) supplemented by a critical analysis of the contemporary merits of Allport's intellectual legacy as detailed in On the Nature of Prejudice: Fifty Years After Allport (Dovidio, Glick, and Rudman, 2005). Next, I review several existing definitions of classism (Power, 2006; Langhout, Roselli, and Feinstein 2006; Homan, 2007) and detail the specific tenets of this form of prejudice (Homan, 2007: 57-58). I then will draw a conceptual distinction between overt and covert classism and critically examine the cultural phenomenon of institutionalization as posited by prominent welfare policy analysts Quaid (2002: 7) and Kingfisher (1996: 8). Next, I present several empirical illustrations of overt and covert classism from welfare policy and select political commentaries dealing with welfare and homelessness including verbatim excerpts from political debate within the provincial legislature. These examples set the stage for later examining the qualitative data provided by 24 people on social assistance and understanding the manner by which the common cultural meanings that play on the discursive field impact subjectivities. In examining the origins of the words of welfare, and later how they are taken up by respondents, I suggest that the terms "welfare dependency" and "personal responsibility" have the power of what Allport (1954) called "nouns that cut slices." The chapter closes with a caveat on single issue advocacy, draws attention to the numerous prejudicial discursive constructions endemic to identity politics, and discusses the significance of understanding intersectionality (Brenner, 2002).

"The Nature of Prejudice": Allport's Timeless Perspectives

Allport's (1954) work examining the social psychological dynamics and multiple manifestations of prejudice is widely considered to be a timeless classic (Dovidio, Glick, and Rudman, 2005). For present purposes, the most germane aspect of Allport's seminal work are his definitions of prejudice, critical conceptualization of "a stereotype as an exaggerated belief associated with a category" (Allport, 1954: 191) and analysis of linguistic factors fostering the normality of prejudgment. These normative prejudgments – and this is crucial – are spawned by linguistic tags and ultimately translate into categorically grounded ingroup formation and outgroup rejection. In theory and in practice (as we will come to see very clearly examining the "words of welfare') for prejudice to thrive, an enemy, replete with all their supposedly undesirable and immoral traits, must be clearly and categorically defined. Allport's conceptualizations and analyses of the linguistic factors of prejudice are crucial ingredients to understanding my central argument about the "survival of classism" and will assist us in coming to see how "outside [sociocultural] influences shape the attitude of the individual" (Allport, 1954: 221). These invaluable aspects of a seminal intellectual legacy, then, warrant close examination.

Prejudice Defined

Allport (1954: 6-9) assessed the merits of several compelling definitions of prejudice. Tracing the roots of this conceptualization, he shows,

> The word prejudice, derived from the Latin noun praejudicium, has, like most words undergone a change of meaning since classical times. There are three stages in the transformation.
>
> 1.) To the ancients, *praejudicium* meant a *precedent* – a judgment based on previous decisions and experiences.
>
> 2.) Later, the term, in English, acquired the meaning of a judgment formed before due examination and consideration of the facts – a premature or hasty judgment.
>
> 3.) Finally the term acquired also its present emotional flavour of favourableness or unfavourableness that accompanies such a prior and unsupported judgment.

> Perhaps the briefest of all definitions of prejudice is: *thinking ill of others without sufficient warrant*. This crisp phrasing contains the two essential ingredients of all definitions – reference to unfounded judgment and to a feeling tone.

This conceptualization is then extended with the explicit rationale it is too brief for complete clarity; there is clearly more to understand about the nature of prejudice. Allport (1954: 6) goes on to argue that,

> People may be prejudiced in favour of others; they may think well of them without sufficient warrant. The wording offered by the New English Dictionary recognizes positive as well as negative prejudice:
>
> *A feeling, favourable or unfavourable, toward a person or thing, prior to, or not based on, actual experience.*

The term "without sufficient warrant" is examined further and it is suggested that "a judgment is unwarranted whenever it lacks basis in fact" or when facts are imbalanced "scanty and strained" (Allport, 1954: 7). Allport points out that prejudiced people often feel that their perspectives are not prejudicial but are sufficiently warranted. The targets of antipathy purportedly have "a well deserved reputation" and this thinking is accompanied by the assertions expressed like, "Just look at them. Don't you see that they are different in an objectionable way" (Allport, 1954: 87). While stereotypes sometimes originate in a "kernel of truth" (Allport, 1954: 19), in many cases the incomplete facts that inform prejudicial thinking are "scanty and strained." People "resort to a selective sorting of [their] own few memories, mix them up with hearsay, and over generalize" (Allport, 1954: 7). While it is sometimes difficult to make a concrete distinction between what constitutes sufficient (or insufficient) warrant for a generalization, a sure sign of prejudicial thinking is that it is not amenable to change even presented with corrigible evidence.

Allport further suggests – and this, I propose, is at the very practical heart of his work -- that when antipathies are grounded in essentialist categorical generalizations, prejudice is in action. Another definition is posited which is perhaps the most relevant to this study,

> An aversive or hostile attitude toward a person who belongs to a group, simply because he belongs to that group, and is therefore presumed to have the objectionable qualities ascribed to the group (Allport, 1954: 7).

Allport (1954: 8) goes on to suggest what I will later proceed to empirically evidence by examining the "words of welfare" (Schram, 1995): that is, "Overcategorization is perhaps the commonest trick of the human mind." Further, it is suggested that "Given a thimbleful of facts we rush to make generalizations as large as a tub" (Allport, 1954: 8). Allport (1954: 178-187) later conceptualizes what it meant by a "stereotype" and details "the linguistic factors of prejudice" that latently predispose the human mind toward overcategorization. It is to these aspects of The Nature of Prejudice that we now turn.

Understanding "Stereotypes" and their Functions

Allport writes, "Whether favourable or unfavourable, *a stereotype is an exaggerated belief associated with a category*. Its *function* is to justify (rationalize) our conduct in relation to that category" (Allport, 1954: 191). A stereotype could not exist without "a linguistic tag that designates our categories," (Allport, 1954: 191) and this reality is pivotal to understanding how the meaning making linguistic factors of prejudice symbolically function. Culturally sanctioned images are invariably spawned by linguistic tags – i.e. "welfare recipient," "poor person," "homeless," or "taxpayer" -- that are insidiously replete with meanings creating what Walter Lippman simply called "pictures in our heads" (Allport, 1954: 191). Yet, "a stereotype is not identical with a category; it is rather a fixed idea that accompanies the category" (Allport, 1954: 191). Those fixed ideas act in such a way as to preclude differentiated thinking about a given category (i.e. that many people on social assistance do have a work history, even while on social assistance, and do pay taxes every time they make a purchase) and equally significant, to leave entirely unquestioned the finite limits and often tenuous bases of categorization. A stereotype shares some common features with a typification given that the latter can be defined as a conceptual process by which people organize their understanding of the world, not in terms of the unique qualities of persons, events, or things but in terms of what is presumed to be the typical features of these (Schutz, 1966).

Notably, The Tyranny of Words (Chase, 1938) predates Allport in suggesting that there is something in the structure of language (and categories) that checks communication, and thus perception. In studying semantics – matters having to do with communication and meaning – Chase (1938: 20) arrived at the conclusion that "abstract terms are personified to become burning, fighting realities." Chase then suggests an abstract term entails a label with no actual referent. Applied to the subject matter of this dissertation, the term "dependency" is an abstraction without a concrete referent but very few people are aware of this. Demagogues thrive, Chase (1938) argues, on semantic illiteracy. Abstractions, in the form of powerful buzzwords, come to be associated with categories of people, and "categories have a close and immediate tie with what we see, how we judge, and what we do" (Allport, 1954: 21).

There is also notable work on categorization post-dating Allport suggesting that "our lives are hedged round with systems of classification" (Bowker and Star, 1999: 1) and that "these standards and classifications, however imbricated in our lives, are ordinarily invisible" (Bowker and Star, 1999: 2). It is suggested that,

> Remarkably, for such a central part of our lives, we stand for most part in formal ignorance of the social and moral order created by these invisible, potent entities. Their impact is indisputable, and as Foucault[10] reminds us, inescapable (Bowker and Starr, 1999: 3).

A cross cultural comparison can help to illuminate the power of categorization as it relates to the subject matter of this research. Lessa (1999) begins her doctoral dissertation, "Restaging the Welfare Diva: Case Studies of Single Motherhood and Social Policy", with the following observation,

> In Brazil there are no single mothers. There we find many, maybe millions of women with their children and no fathers. We hear endless stories about how fathers faded away in search of work in the city, in another city, anywhere. We also find widows, divorced and separated women and unwed mothers. The variety of descriptions is very vast since nobody ever thought of grouping them together under any general denomination or category such as mothers of one sort or another. What purpose would that accomplish? All have to fend for themselves, and if you need to ask for help from family, friends, or relatives what counts is the whole story, not a label. There is no doubt that there is a stigma against the unwed mother, the only one of these denominations which can be said to refer to something close to a category and, as well, to be definitely associated with motherhood. But nobody would ever imagine that all women raising children alone could be the same one thing (Lessa, 1999: 1).

This powerful excerpt shows, by the revealing jolt of a cross cultural comparison, that categories are not as pre-given as they usually appear. A careful reading of this passage also shows that the very nature of classification creates an illusory homogeneity whereby it seems that everyone falling within a given category is "the same one thing." In Allport's terms, this means that the individual is lost to sight. This critically important insight leads us back to Allport's work on the nature of stereotypes.

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[10] Foucault's theorizing will be examined extensively in the following chapter.

A stereotype is not entirely tantamount to a prejudice, but rather functions to legitimate and rationalize prejudicial thinking. In sum, Allport's work on stereotyping posited two central propositions: 1.) categorization is a necessary pre-requisite that spawns stereotyping and prejudice; and 2.) the contents of stereotypes produce unfounded but widely shared cultural meanings. Allport empirically details his case by examining "stereotypes concerning the Jew" and "stereotypes concerning the Negro." This monograph will later apply these foundational insights to concretely detail stereotypes concerning the welfare recipient that legitimate and rationalize classism.

The Linguistic Factors of Prejudice

Within an examination of "the linguistic factors of prejudice" (Allport, 1954: 178-88) three profound conceptualizations are drawn: 1) "nouns that cut slices" (Allport, 1954: 178) are considered to be 2) "labels of primary potency" that are tantamount to 3) "emotionally toned labels". These conceptualizations can assist in making manifest the latent cultural impact that uncritically accepted mainstream discourse has on subjectivity.

Allport (1954: 178) cites novelist William James in suggesting that without words the world would be an "empirical sand-heap." For a generalization to exist and be held in mind it must be fixed in words. Allport (1954: 178) writes, "In the empirical world of human beings there are some two and a half billion grains of sand [In 1954 there were 2.5 billion "grains of sand" -- there are now 6 billion] corresponding to our category 'the human race." Allport explains that it would be impossible to deal with such vast and separate entities in our thoughts and thus we use language to group people and form clusters. We welcome names that assist in this clustering process. Nouns invariably facilitate this clustering process. Allport (1954: 178) ingeniously proceeds to clearly make manifest a latent linguistic reality,

> The most important property of a noun is that it brings many grains of sand into a single pail, disregarding the fact that the same grains might have fitted just as appropriately into another pail. To state the matter technically, a noun abstracts from concrete reality some one feature and assembles different concrete realities only with respect to this one feature. The very act of classifying forces us to overlook all other features, many of which might offer a sounder basis for the rubric we select.

As we have already established, Allport was not the first, or last, analyst to question the tenuous nature of classification. The Nature of Prejudice, however, remains invaluable for pointing out that some labels, in the form of nouns "are exceedingly salient and powerful" and "tend to prevent alternative classification or even cross-classification" (Allport, 1954: 179). These powerful "nouns that cut slices" (Allport, 1954: 178) can legitimately be referred to as "labels of primary potency" precisely because "these symbols act like shrieking sirens, deafening us to all finer discriminations that we might otherwise perceive." In other words, if a person becomes labelled with a label of primary potency – there is a dehumanizing tendency to see that person as nothing but the label. This manuscript will later assess the merits of Allport's theorizing by examining the slice cutting power of nouns in the form of persons ("welfare recipient," "homeless," "taxpayer") and things ("personal responsibility" and "dependency").

"On the Nature of Prejudice: Fifty Years After Allport"

Classic scholarly works, for good reason, have a tendency to be revisited for many years after their initial impact. Allport's work is no exception. On the fifty year anniversary of The Nature of Prejudice, some of the most renowned researchers who have analyzed the various facets of the dynamics and manifestations of prejudice revisited the groundbreaking concepts and assertions initially laid out by Allport and assembled an update on the contemporary merits of his work, On the Nature of Prejudice: Fifty Years

After Allport (2005). While there have been heightened understandings regarding some areas of prejudice that were initially missed by Allport, and minor revisionism in other areas, it is clear that his timeless "ideas have [positively] influenced scholars in the field as much over the past 25 years as they did in the book' first 25 years" (Dovidio, Glick, and Rudman, 2005: xiii).

Contemporary scholarship has critiqued, and expanded, the particular aspects of Allport's foundational work that I will be adopting: defining prejudice, understanding the nature and functions of stereotypes, and apprehending the linguistic factors fostering the normality of prejudgment. In assessing the merits of Allport's work, and the revisionism and critiques that came after, we can begin to draw some grounded conclusions about the merits of his legacy – a legacy that will prove invaluable analyzing the qualitative data in this monograph.

Prejudice Re-examined

Dovidio et al argue that "Allport's most fundamental blind spot concerns his definition of prejudice 'as an antipathy based on a faulty or inflexible generalization'" (Dovidio, Glick, and Rudman, 2005: 10). Within the Fifty Years After Allport review (2005), Eagly and Diekman (p19-35), Jackman (p.89-105), and Rudman (106-120) -- concur that this 'antipathy' based definition has neglected important aspects of prejudice and suggested that prejudice does not always entail antipathy but can also manifest itself in affectionate paternalism. Rudman in particular suggests that Allport overlooked the ordinariness of gender prejudice and that only two pages of his classic work were devoted to analyzing sexism.

There are undoubtedly merits to this critique. If Allport were alive today, one could reasonably posit that he would openly acknowledge the legitimate merits of better understanding the paternalistic manifestations of prejudice. Specifically, there is a strong patriarchal paternalism that ascribes little value to the importance of caring labour. That said, it must also be noted that Allport guarded, very strongly, against attributing prejudice to a single taproot and openly acknowledged that prejudgment had various categorically bound foundations and translated into numerous manifestations – an astute observation I will take up to conclude this chapter. Allport clearly and explicitly noted that, "The problem [of prejudice] as a whole is many sided, and the reader is asked, while examining one facet, to hold in mind the simultaneous existence of many other facets" (Allport, 1954: 17). Although Allport's work still reigns as the most detailed and comprehensive examination of prejudice, it says something about the multifaceted nature of the phenomenon of prejudicial thinking that not all of aspects of prejudgment were examined in The Nature of Prejudice.

The critiques regarding Allport's definition of prejudice seem to sidestep the reality that Allport proposed and utilized several conceptualizations of prejudice. Further, Allport made it clear: i.) that prejudice can have both favourable and unfavourable dimensions, and ii.) the two defining traits of prejudice are unfounded categorical judgment and a feeling tone. One cannot deny that Allport certainly did not discuss prejudice manifested as affectionate paternalism and this is an area which later scholars duly rectified. For present purposes, however, it must not be overlooked that prejudice often can, and usually does, engender antipathy and that many of Allport's enduring contributions have endured for very good reason. In the context of this investigation, when gender based prejudice is combined with classism in welfare policy and discourse, there is nothing affectionate about the outcome. There is, however, a high level of paternalism with respect to what forms of labour are valued and deeply inscribed cultural prejudices presupposing expectations about who is responsible for what work. There can be no doubt that antipathy manifests itself in the form of prejudice under investigation in this monograph.

Allport's Enduring Contributions to Understanding Stereotypes and Their Functions

"*The stereotype does not justify or legitimate welfare practices; rather, those practices justify the stereotypes*" (Cruikshank, 1999: 106).

Jost and Hamilton (2005: 208-224) argue that Allport's impact on understanding prejudice has not only stood the test of time, but even more significantly, has increased over time, "especially with regard to the structure and function of stereotypes" (P.208). A half century after Allport, we can assert with as much certainty as social analyses permits,

> that categorization is a necessary but not sufficient cause of prejudicial attitudes [and reaffirm that] the cultural context is crucial, for stereotypes operate in relation to societal and ideological systems (Jost and Hamilton, 2005: 208-224).

There have been extensive developments furthering Allport's work on stereotypes. These developments have analyzed the perceptions of people as members of social categories and perceptively noted,

> The central idea is that stereotypes are belief structures that influence the processing information about stereotyped groups and their members (Jost and Hamilton, 2005: 210).

Jost and Hamilton suggest that the impact of stereotypes on social cognition, and thus subjectivity, is probably even more profound than even Allport himself knew. It is suggested that the last two decades of research have shown that stereotypes,

> a.) direct attention to certain aspects of the available information.
>
> b.) color the interpretation of that information.
>
> c.) influence the way information is retained in memory.

> d.) shape judgments and subsequent actions, and
>
> e.) Serve as hypothesis that are tested and disproportionately favoured in the interpretation of new information. (Jost and Hamilton, 2005: 210)

In short, in reviewing how contemporary scholarship views Allport's seminal work on stereotypes we can reasonably draw two conclusions,

> 1.) Allport had an 'uncanny ability to meaningfully link societal and cultural levels of analysis to a psychological investigation of the thoughts, feelings, and behaviours of individuals and groups. This is perhaps the most important achievement of *The Nature of Prejudice,* although it is underappreciated';
>
> Notwithstanding Allport's genius he,
>
> 2.) did not recognize that system justification (in addition to ego justification and group justification) is an important motive for individuals . . . In retrospect, we can say that the justification function of stereotyping was incomplete [because] stereotypes are used – implicitly and explicitly – to justify much more that 'love prejudice' and 'hate prejudice'. They imbue existing forms of social arrangements with meaning and legitimacy; they preserve and bolster the status quo' (Jost and Hamilton, 2005: 220).

Applying this profound insight, we can begin to understand how class and gender inequalities have become exacerbated by the legitimating stereotypes that resonate through the words of welfare. The qualitative data analysis of this monograph will utilize the strengths of Allport's theorizing while subsequently accounting for the blind spots perceptively noted by later scholars. Allport's work has a practical utility in understanding "the rituals of degradation" (Herd et al, 2005) that have become a part of welfare discourse, but there are undoubtedly more insights to be gained in understanding how stereotypes do, in fact, "imbue existing forms of social arrangements with meaning and legitimacy."

The Enduring Linguistic Factors Fostering the Normality of Prejudgment

Mullen and Leader (2005: 192-207) suggest subsequent research has confirmed that ingroups and outgroups are defined by clear social categorizations and that these categorizations are invariably a pre-requisite for prejudicial thinking. Allport's work has been re-affirmed and in particular has been pivotal in understanding "how the use of language both reflects and perpetuates bias" (Mullen and Leader, 2005: 198). Specifically, Allport's signature phrase "nouns that cut slices" has been shown to have an empirical grounding: "Typing [a member of a social category] by nouns fixates the other person as a typical instance of a social category" (Graumann and Wintermantel, 1989: 192). Ontario welfare policy, as we shall see, types by nouns.

It has been shown that ethnophaulisms (the prefix "ethno" meaning "of the people" and the suffix "phaulism" meaning "to disparage") "probably constitute the most direct and effective expression of prejudice in everyday discourse" (Greenberg, Kirkland, and Pyszczynski 1988: 75). I will later come to demonstrate the ethnophalocentric components of welfare discourse, and show that ethnophaulisms "are not merely symptoms of prejudice but carriers of the disease as well" (Greenberg and Pyszczynski, 1985: 70). Understanding this, we are well on our way to understanding how the "survival of classism" is discursively transmitted. Many of Allport's perspectives have received considerable support informing this understanding. We now turn our attention toward examining a particular form of prejudice.

Classism as a Form of Prejudice

"*Classism is the elephant in the room that everyone wants to pretend doesn't exist*" (Homan, 2007: 55).

Power (2006: viii) shows that "considerable research has examined prejudice and stereotyping with particular attention to racism and sexism. Little of this research focuses on classism." Similarly, Langhout, Rosselli, and Feinstein (2006: 145) argue that "although gaining more attention recently, classism is an area that has historically lacked consideration in psychological literature." This sociological treatise will join a small but growing body of literature attempting to fill this notable void. Prior to doing this, however, I would like to add an important qualification to Power's (2006) assertion that racism and sexism have received more scholarly attention than classism. Recent scholarship on intersectionality reminds us of the finite limits of any single analytic category, and as Anne Bishop astutely observes,

> When I see people competing, claiming their own oppression as the "worst" or "most worthy of support," I see us all running on a treadmill. As long as we try to end our oppression by rising above others, we are reinforcing each other's oppression, and eventually our own (Bishop, 1994: 10).

That said prejudice towards the economically disenfranchised does require close examination. Prior to examining and assessing the merits of the existing academic definitions of classism, it must be noted that this term (while being new to the academe) still does not exist in everyday mainstream parlance. Classism is a problem with no name that has remained problematic, in part, precisely because it has not been named in mainstream discourse. Just as Homan asserted in the epigraph above, Power's (2006: 5) doctoral dissertation from the University of Michigan reaffirms that society,

> makes endless class judgments without naming them as such. Social class can be described as being 'the elephant in the room' of American society. That is, there are obvious disparities of income and opportunity yet people are careful not to discuss class explicitly.

Only very recently has classism begun to be defined in mainstream dictionaries. This reality, I suggest, is quite remarkable given how long prejudice toward the poor has existed. From the Elizabethan Poor Laws up to present day welfare policy, classism has a very long historical lineage that shows contemporary cultural remnants. Prosperity, because it typically is presumed to have resulted from hard work and perseverance, has been associated with morality. Poverty, usually seen as a reflection of a poor work ethic and an inability to defer gratification, is linked with personal shortcomings and immorality. These cultural beliefs have a long historical lineage with contemporary cultural remnants. In fact, in contemporary consumer society, one's social status is largely derived by what they consume and those unable to meet a desirable material standard of living pay a price in terms of their social status.

The reality that there is no linguistic tag in mainstream discourse to articulate negative prejudice toward the poor and prejudicial reverence toward the affluent has very real implications. Although virtually all respondents in my research spoke of being harshly treated by others as a result of their poverty, no one used the term classism to articulate this phenomenon. In almost a quarter century of regularly reading newspapers and watching broadcast news, I have never observed the term "classism" utilized in mainstream media. Although anecdotal, I believe that this observation is quite significant. I join Homan (1997: 210 – 211) in suggesting that it is time "to bring the injustice of classism out of America's collective closet and into the light of day because it cannot be ignored anymore." Step one is to define exactly what classism is.

Classism Defined

"Taxpayers have told us they won't tolerate fraud and they won't tolerate abuse of the system. Our government won't either" --Frank Klees, 1997 (Ontario Hansard Issue, 1997: LO1840.)

Classism has been defined as "acting on stereotypes and negative attitudes in ways that separate, exclude, devalue, discount, and define [the economically disenfranchised] as 'other'" (Langhout, Rosselli, and Feinstein, 2006: 148). This definition is crucial for highlighting the “Othering” aspect of prejudice that manifests itself generally in a powerful, and often moralizing, “us / them” or “ingroup / outgroup” binary division. In the context of our examination of the words of welfare, this distinction translates into a “taxpayer / welfare recipient” dichotomy that has both material and social status implications. The “othering” aspect of prejudice, and the status evaluations it invokes, is crucial: “classism would not be possible if Americans did not make social distinctions between class groups, valuing some over others” (Power, 2006: 5). This realization by Power leads into her insightful conceptualization.

Power (2006: 5) suggests that classism is composed of three components: 1) stereotypical thinking that entails a set of beliefs about poverty and the poor that are widely shared and socially validated; 2) prejudice, or negative attitudes and emotions felt toward the poor, and 3) discrimination, distancing from, or vilifying the poor. This definition is particularly useful for highlighting the “widely shared and socially validated” aspects of prejudice, and particularizing the general manifestations of prejudice in specific beliefs about poverty and the poor.

According to Homan (2007: 22) “Classism is defined as any form of prejudice or oppression against people based on their actual or perceived socio-economic class.” Assessing the merits of this definition warrants breaking it down to its component parts and critically examining the concepts it invokes: prejudice, oppression, and socioeconomic class. Allport made clear, and later scholarship confirmed, that prejudice is fundamentally characterized by unfounded categorical judgments coupled with a feeling tone. Mullaly (2002: 28) suggests that oppression is a multifaceted phenomenon, that clearly exists,

> when a person is blocked from opportunities to self-development, is excluded from full participation in society, does not have certain rights that the dominant group takes for granted, or is assigned second class citizenship, not because of individual talent, merit, or failure, but because of his or her membership in a particular group or category of people.

Socioeconomic class, expanding the monolithic aspects of orthodox Marxian theorizing with Weberian insights, can be seen as a composite ranking that invokes not only one's material standing via wealth and income, but also the social status derived from, among other things, the source of that material standing.

Homan's (2007) work is also invaluable for detailing the explicit tenets of classism that are implicit within welfare policy and discourse.

The Tenets of Classism

The basic tenets of classism hold that:

1. If you are poor it is entirely your own fault.
2. If you are poor, you must be deficient in some way.
3. If you are poor, you are a potential thief.
4. If you are poor, it's because you are stupid.
5. If you are poor, it's because you are lazy.
6. If you are poor, it's because you chose to be poor.
7. If you are poor, it's because you didn't try hard enough.
8. If you are poor, it's because you didn't plan better.
9. If you are poor, it's because you had children you couldn't afford.
10. If you are poor, it's because you are uneducated and unskilled.
11. If you are poor, you lack good manners.
12. If you are poor, you are threat to the rest of society.
13. If you are poor and female, you are sexually promiscuous.

> **14.** If you are poor, it’s because you lack the discipline to control the urge for immediate gratification. (Homan, 2007: 57-58)

This list is a composite of things that may be believed about people living in poverty. Although few people would (or logically could) subscribe to all fourteen tenets concurrently, when one considers the reasoning invoked, and the conclusions drawn, by dependency discourse it becomes clearer that social welfare policy has been influenced by a negativity of the kind displayed here. Notably, when the respondents of this study were asked “why do you think that poor people are poor people poor?” their attributions (examined in chapter 6), almost invariably, named some form of personal deficiency as the primary causal component of impoverishment. Given that the term “dependency” has become a keyword guiding welfare reforms, it is essential to understand the images invoked when this abstract “symbolic machinery”[11] (Chase, 1938: 10) is invoked.

Dependency Discourse

“Dependency has become a keyword of U.S. politics. Politicians of diverse views regularly criticize what they term ‘welfare dependency’” (Fraser and Gordon, 1997: 121).

In The Poverty of Welfare Reform Handler concisely summarizes four key features of the assumptions inherent in the term “dependency” that serve to rationalize welfare reforms in several locales,

> - ‘Dependency,’ as used in the context of welfare, is not simply being poor. It is not simply being out of work. Rather, welfare dependency is a moral issue; it is a failure to have the proper work ethic.
>
> - Providing aid destroys the work ethic. Welfare is not simply a matter of ‘economics’ – that is, providing income support. Rather, fundamental values are threatened.

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[11] This term is borrowed from The Tyranny of Words (Chase, 1938) which predates the linguistic theorizing of Allport.

> - The behaviour of the individual rather than the environment should be changed. Self sufficiency through work is to be achieved by changing the mothers rather than the labour market. People who want to work can work.
>
> - Reform efforts should be directed at adults. In spite of the apparent fear that deviant values will be passed on, with relatively few exceptions (for example, requiring school attendance) welfare children are largely ignored (Handler, 1995: 4).

In reference to the term "dependency", Fraser and Gordon (1997: 122) argue that,

> Keywords typically carry unspoken assumptions and connotations that can powerfully influence the discourses they permeate – in part by constituting a body of *doxa,* or taken-for-granted common sense belief that escapes critical scrutiny.

If one were to look for a concrete illustration of how terms utilized to describe the social world are active forces in shaping it, one would be well served to examine the usage of the term "dependency' in welfare discourse and how,

> use of this keyword serves to enshrine certain interpretations of social life as authoritative and to delegitimate or obscure others, generally to the advantage of dominant groups in society and to the disadvantage of subordinate ones" (Fraser and Gordon, 1997: 123).

Haney and Rogers-Dillon (2002: 328) observe, "Given that so many welfare state scholars and researchers rely on the in/dependence dichotomy, it is surprising that few of them have reflected systematically of what it implies." In addition to the class based implications noted above by Handler (1995), the mutual interdependence required to make a traditional family wage system work, advantages men by minimizing the necessity and value of caring labour beyond the labour market (Swift, 1995; Hays, 2003). The term "dependency" has not become any kinder, or more gender sensitive as the traditional family wage system broke down. As family forms changed, caring labour has remained the primary responsibility of women and continues to be patently subordinated (both materially and culturally) to labour that takes place within the market. Further, our mutual interdependence is badly obscured by the term “dependency” and obscures the empirically verifiable reality that we are all dependent on others (Gordon, 1994).

In the course of political debate at Queen’s Park, “dependency” was a term frequently invoked by the proponents of policy shifts. In reference to the objective of ending “welfare dependency”, within the Provincial legislature MPP Tony Clement argued,

> What we're talking about here . . . is increasing responsibility by the individual recipient to ensure the outcomes are the ones that the recipient wants and that society wants (Ontario Hansard Issue, 1997: LO1900)

The evaluation criteria for a positive outcome was the number of people leaving social assistance, which was considered tantamount to ending dependency. Curiously, the number of people escaping poverty after exiting social assistance was not considered important enough to be included in policy discussions. In purportedly combating the evils of ‘dependency’, MPP Jack Carrol argued from within the Provincial legislature,

> The Ontario Works Act seeks to bring back the original intent of this system, which was to provide people with an income assistance program of last resort and to help people return to work. The system was not created as an incentive for people to stay on it and to become dependent upon it. In the long run, that has not done recipients any great favours. We all know that people are better off with a job than without a job. Ontario Works gives recognition to this obvious fact. Ontario Works, unlike our current system, will operate on the basis that people will be better off with a job (Ontario Hansard Issue, 1997: LO1640).

One caregiving mother in this research, Gina (see chapter 5), was quite clear that she was not better off with a job because the cost of child care offset her minimal earnings (from the secondary labour force) so that she was no better off, and the end result was that her young children spent more time being raised by strangers and less time with their mother. This mother was not making an irresponsible decision in returning to social assistance, but was responsibly making the best of a bad situation. While this particular monograph is concerned with a particular form of classism as it relates to people who are receiving social assistance (and understanding the connotations implicit in the term 'dependency' is a prerequisite of this aim), it should be noted that, like most forms of oppression, classism is a multifaceted phenomenon that does not exist as a discrete or isolated problem: there is a gendered subtext intersecting with the classism of welfare discourse.

Conceptualizing Further: Overt, Covert, and Institutional Classism

While the above definitions – owing to those authors who have take the time to define classism -- are all well thought out and usefully conceptualized, distinguishing between overt, covert, and institutional classism can, very practically, assist in recognizing the different facets of classism as a form of prejudice, and ultimately, facilitate understanding the various ways in which it operates and survives.

Overt classism, then, can be defined as a candid and direct moralizing antipathy toward the poor. The natural corollary is a candid and direct moralizing reverence for the economically affluent. In short, overt classism links and attributes poverty to character deficiency, immorality, and / or a supposed inability to defer gratification. Wealth is associated to strong character, morality, and asceticism. Overt classism is virtually synonymous with what Baxter (1997: 39) calls "poor bashing." Overt classism, notwithstanding the reality that is has not been named throughout history, has a very long historical lineage. As Max Weber (1978) argued in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism,* people threw themselves into commercial activity and associated material prosperity with moral salvation and equated destitution with damnation in a manner that was thoroughly grounded in the religious doctrines of sixteenth century Calvinism (Morrison, 1995: 340). Weber pointed out that the famous maxims of Benjamin Franklin – frugality, punctuality, hard word – were seen as not only practical but contained a 'surplus of virtue' (Morrison, 1995: 247).

To be covert is to be concealed or not open. Covert classism, I will suggest, is a more insidious form of prejudice that is grounded in an uncritical – and unfounded -- acceptance of beliefs about meritocracy and equality of opportunity. Power (2006: 1) suggests that "belief in the 'American Dream' persists despite evidence of negligible social mobility . . . the poor are blamed for their own [poverty]." There may be anomalous periods (i.e. the depression of the 1930's) where poverty attributions become more sociological, but as anthropologist Katherine Newman comprehensively details in No Shame in My Game: The Working Poor in the Inner City,

> We inhabit an unforgiving culture that is blind to many reasons why some people cross that employment barrier and others are left behind. While we may remember, for a time, that unemployment rates are high, or that particular industries have downsized millions of workers right out of a job, or that racial barriers or negative attitudes toward teenagers make it harder to get a job at some times and for some people, in the end American culture wipes these background truths out in favour of a simpler dichotomy: the worthy and the unworthy, the working stiff and the lazy sloth (Newman, 1999: 87)

Covert classism, then, can be defined as a cultural belief system that ultimately attributes people's vocational, economic, and social standing directly to their individual efforts and abilities, while simultaneously ignoring the structural and econometric factors inevitably generating poverty and unemployment and the well established sociological patterns of social stratification. While it is beyond debate that the labour market does not provide employment for everyone or enable everyone who labours within it to escape poverty, covert classism still thrives even among highly renowned scholars. Consider the seminal neoconservative scholarship of Murray,

> The intellectual analysis of the nature of structural poverty had given a respectable rationale for accepting that it was not the fault of the poor that they were poor. It was a very small step from that premise to the conclusion that it is not the fault of the poor that they fail to pull themselves up when we offer them a helping hand (Murray, 1994: 39).

Murray is clearly inferring here that it is the fault of the poor that they are poor and presupposing that the “helping hand” offered is adequate. It says something about the prevalence of classism that very few of the twenty four of the respondents in this research directly countered Murray’s reasoning when they were asked, “Why do you think that poor people are poor?” According to a labour force survey from Statistics Canada (March 2009), Canada has lost 295 000 jobs since October 2008. Stereotypes clearly do direct our attention to certain aspects of available information and colour the interpretation of that information.

While covert classism is more prevalent than overt classism, both have recurring institutional bases. In her comprehensive policy analysis of welfare reform in six jurisdictions, Quaid (2002: 7) writes that “the process by which actions [or beliefs] are repeated and given similar meanings is referred to as ‘institutionalization.’” Similarly, Kingfisher (1996: 8-9) suggests that,

> At a broader structural level, the languages of newspapers, radio talk shows, television sit-coms, and everyday chit chat

> at the grocery store are the 'institutionalization' of views of women and poverty, while at the same time being sites for the contestation of these views.

Kingfisher (1996: 9) suggests that the qualitative data she examines in her work, is "more than just 'talk'", but "rather, it is one of the means by which social structures and institutions are reproduced." Institutional classism, then, is about the repeated policy actions, words of welfare, and the resultant cultural beliefs about poverty and unemployment that are given similar meanings that function to reproduce stereotypes and prejudice toward the poor.

Policy and Political Illustrations of Classism

Two compelling examples of "nouns that cuts slices," can be found in the frequently invoked welfare policy terms "personal responsibility" and (as we have already examined) "dependency". These nouns, in the form of things, are inextricably associated with imagery of 'the welfare recipient' -- a noun in the form of a person who is tagged with a label of primary potency (or an emotionally toned label). Given the prominent role that these intertwined conceptualizations have played in contemporary welfare discourse, and the pejorative meaning making charge that results when they are invoked, it is important to critically analyze the problematizations that are signified and framed (and, equally significant, the problems that remain linguistically untagged and thus languish in obscurity) within these words of welfare.

Writing about 'welfare dependency' in an American context, Fraser and Gordon (1997: 122) perceptively note, "If we can step back from this discourse we can interrogate some of its underlying presuppositions." While Fraser and Gordon's (1997: 122) genealogy of the word "dependency" asks "What are the gender and racial subtexts of this discourse, and what tacit assumptions underlie it?", there is an opportunity to build upon this line of questioning to enquire about the class based subtexts of welfare discourse and the ‘tacit assumptions under[lying] it.” I join Hays (2003: 10) in examining contemporary welfare policy to critically enquire, “What message does it send to the poor and the nation?” I concur with Hays’ (2003) assessments that caring labour is not adequately valued or remunerated and that single motherhood and changing family forms have been scapegoated for the impoverishment brought about by a low wage post industrial economy. But as important as Hays’ (2003) question is about the message being sent “to the poor and the nation”, her question, as it is posed and answered, presupposes that there is only one message being sent. I suggest, that there is more than one message embedded in welfare policy. One of those pivotal messages – about demanding responsible behaviour – clearly has moralizing overtones with a class based subtext informing the central argument of this manuscript.

As we saw in Chapter 1, the first section of the OWA states that the first purpose of the act is to recognize personal responsibility. Similarly, the term is written directly into the title of American Legislation, “The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act.” There is a latent, and essentially unquestioned, process of problematization in this discourse. Replete within this explicit purpose acknowledging personal responsibility is the underlying assumption that if you are a social assistance recipient, it is some form of personal irresponsibility that accounts for this undesirable reality. Former notions of collective responsibility languish on the proverbial sidelines of contemporary social policy and the discursive field of welfare reform. Following Allport’s metaphor or “nouns that cut slices”, the labelled welfare recipient is sliced off (or atomized) from the context of societal circumstances, and their impoverishment *ipso facto* attributable to some form of a personal shortcoming.

The second purpose of the OWA states that the Act is to provide temporary financial assistance to those most in need while they satisfy obligations to become, and remain, employed. Again, there are underlying stereotypical assumptions, grounded in the categorical noun "welfare recipient" and detailed throughout the Common Sense Revolution, that inform this policy directive: i) that welfare policy has unduly served those not really in need for unnecessarily extended periods; ii) and that welfare recipients have unfairly forgone obligations to become and remain employed and instead have become dependent on the system. The adequacy of financial assistance necessary to enable people to function at a level required to carry out a meaningful job search is excluded in contemporary policy discourse and "spirited away through a linguistic 'sleight of hand'" (Fraser and Gordon, 1997: 130). According to the Social Planning Council of Toronto (1999: 7), 'extreme poverty threatens health, and therefore, employability'.

The third section of the Ontario Works Act states that the act should effectively serve people needing assistance. Effectiveness in mainstream welfare discourse is tantamount to exiting social assistance. If being on welfare is considered personally irresponsible, leaving welfare is the responsible thing to do. Consider the words of welfare from Premier Harris on the night of his re-election in 1999,

> I am proud of the 380 000 people who have broken free of the 'cycle of dependency' off of welfare. And our goal, as I said, it's a 'rising tide.' And I very much disagree with those who say 'well if there is a winner somebody has to lose.' That's nonsense. When we grow and prosper and get stronger – everybody wins (CTV election Broadcast[12]).

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[12] Transcribed verbatim from VHS recording of CTV's election coverage of the 1999 provincial election in Ontario.

Absent from this discourse is an understanding of the plight of what Statistics Canada (2003) calls "welfare leavers". There is a very critical distinction between exiting social assistance to escape poverty and exiting social assistance to remain impoverished or have one's material life conditions worsen. Later in this chapter we will examine how Harris and others discussed the problem of increasing homelessness.

The fourth section of the OWA states that the Act must be fair to taxpayers. This directive is significant as it concretely establishes a responsible taxpayer (ingroup) / irresponsible welfare recipient (outgroup) binary categorization replete with the moral meaning that hardworking taxpayers are unduly exploited by welfare policy and, ultimately, by welfare recipients who have become unduly dependent on the system. Welfare receipt is likened to an irresponsibly "chosen" lifestyle of drug, alcohol, or medical dependency.

Illustrations of Overt Classism

"People have ideas about how reality actually is, or was, and they have ideas about how it ought to be, or ought to have been. The former we call 'beliefs.'" The latter we call 'valuations.' . . . In their 'opinions' people express both their beliefs and their valuations. Usually people do not distinguish between what they think they know and what they like or dislike" (Mydral, 1944: 1027).

Perhaps Rush Limbaugh's political commentaries, which are usually overflowing with beliefs and valuations, can be considered the epitome of overt classism. Consider the perspectives he posited in The Way Things Out to Be,

> The poor in this country are the biggest piglets at the mother pig and her nipples. They're the ones who get all the benefits in this country. They're the ones who are always pandered to. (Limbaugh, 1993: 27)

The "us / them" categorizing Limbaugh invoked could not have been clearer. The corollary of this perspective holds that the non-poor / "the taxpayer" is the harshly treated moral bystander having their needs ignored while "the [immoral] poor" are concurrently "always pandered to." Now if Limbaugh's perspectives were solely those of one isolated right wing editorialist, they would hardly be worth mentioning but the blatantly prejudicial and classist views Limbaugh regularly espouses have had, and continue to have, even more prominent proponents who have ultimately written these perspectives into social policy (and regressive tax policies) in a way that has institutionalized classism.

Consider how the term "dependency" has been utilized within congressional debates. Florida governor John Mica (cited in McCormack, 2002) held up a sign in congress reading, "DON'T FEED THE ALLIGATORS" and explained,

> We post these warnings because unnatural feeding and artificial care create dependency. When dependency sets in, these otherwise able alligators can no longer survive on their own. (House of Representatives, March 24 1995 cited in McCormack, 2002: 62-63)

Representative Barbara Cubin of Wyoming went further,

> The Federal Government introduced wolves into the State of Wyoming, and they put them in pens, and they brought elk and venison to them every day. This is what I call the wolf welfare program. The Federal Government provided everything that the wolves need for their existence. But guess what? They opened the gates and let the wolves out and now the wolves won't go. Just like any animal in the species, any mammal, when you take away their freedom and their dignity and their ability, they can't provide for themselves (McCormack, 2002: 63).

The 'elk and venison' imagery invoke the perception, by analogy, that social assistance benefits are unduly generous and enable a posh diet and catered to lifestyle, particularly when overly privileged recipients exploit the system to live in opulence – while the hardworking taxpayer suffers unduly.

Harsh sentiments towards welfare policy, and welfare recipients, transcend the spectrum of formal politics and infiltrate the views of those whom society tends to hold in high esteem. Fraser and Gordon (1997) have noted that Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas was openly critical of his sister,

> She gets mad when the mailman is late with her welfare check. That's how dependent she is. What's worse is that now her kids feel entitled to the check too. They have no motivation for do better or getting out of that situation. (Fraser and Gordon, 1997: 121)

Thomas is inferring a 'culture of poverty' perspective, here, and suggesting that the single-parenting his sister is providing (which is not considered real work) is inadequate, *ipso facto*, because she is on welfare. Thomas did not mention anything about the Father of his nieces or nephews. Discourse draws our attention away from the inequalities embedded in different axes of domination. Neoliberal forms of discourse – the significations and meanings that they carry -- were effectively prefigured by Ronald Reagan, to whose words of welfare we now turn.

While the practice and rationale of the welfare state once viewed redistributive government policy to ensure a minimum standard of living for everyone as a necessary social provision (Mishra, 1984), "Reagan's demonization of the poor sowed the seeds that killed any benevolence towards the poor and this eventually brought the Welfare Reform Act of 1996 to fruition" (Homan, 2007: 263). Reagan was a master at playing the working poor off against those out of work. Quoting Reagan, Homan (2007) cites a compelling illustration,

> It's not fair that some healthy strapping young buck piles up his shopping cart with steaks which he pays for with food stamps while the working man is wondering how he is going to be able to afford a couple of pounds of hamburger.

> It’s time we ended welfare as an entitlement (Homan, 2007: 260).

McCormack (2002) shows that Reagan was also instrumental in shaping public opinion by leading the charge against those allegedly ‘scamming the system’,

> The Chicago welfare queen has eight names, thirty addresses, twelve social security cards and is collecting veterans’ benefits on four non existing deceased husbands. Her tax free income alone is over $150 000 (cited in McCormack, 2002: 20)

Although no person fitting Reagan’s fictional description was ever located, the images he invoked were influential in portraying welfare fraud, and by extension people on social assistance, as a nationally scandalous problem. The choice of Chicago for Reagan’s fiction clearly had racial overtones. That Reagan chose to vilify a welfare “queen”, here, was also gendered.

Further, in his 1986 State of the Union address, Reagan invoked concern over family values and strengthened an already strong association between poverty and immorality,

> in the welfare culture, the breakdown of the family, the most basic support system, has reached crisis proportions – in female and child poverty, child abandonment, horrible crimes and deteriorating schools (cited in McCormack, 2002: 59).

In sum, by fuelling images of opulence, fraud, and immorality “Reagan was particularly effective in shifting the terms of the debate around welfare” (McCormack, 2002: 59). He cemented the new right rhetoric and instilled the belief that “Government is not the solution to our problem; government is the problem” (Obama, 2006: 174). The market and tax cuts were the solution.

Now if Reagan’s views were merely the isolated sentiments of a deceased president who has been out of power for over twenty years, they would not warrant much attention but the fundamentals of Reagan's perspectives spawned Clinton's popular call to "end welfare as we know it." Ronald Reagan's influence is alive and well in contemporary welfare discourse: personal responsibility and dependency are still the dominant players controlling the discursive field.

Contemporary Manifestations

Current American President Barack Obama (2006: 39-40) writes, "What I find remarkable is not that the political formula developed by Reagan worked at the time, but just how durable the narrative that he helped promote has proven to be." The current American President has perceptively noted, and expressed concern, "that our current political discourse unnecessarily divides us" (Obama, 2006: 13). Obama certainly deserves credit for attempting to interrupt the discourse of present day "tax rage" in suggesting that "the Bush tax cuts for the wealthy [are] both fiscally irresponsible and morally troubling" (Obama, 2006: 58). In some contexts, Obama appears to be highly cognizant of,

> How a particular narrative, repeated over and over again . . . eventually becomes a hard particle of reality; [and] how political caricatures and nuggets of conventional wisdom lodge themselves in our brain without us ever taking the time to examine them (Obama, 2006: 148).

In the context of welfare policy, however, Obama is certainly not immune from repeating, and not taking the time to examine, a harsh public narrative that is far too familiar, "I think that much of what ails the inner city involves a breakdown in culture that will not be cured by money alone" (Obama, 2006: 15). While Obama is writing in the context of providing hope, not just money, to the inner city, he seems to gloss over the reality that the former is a pretty significant prerequisite for the latter. Lost in the public narrative is the reality that a minimum standard of living is a pre-requisite of hope and healthy functioning. Ironically enough, even the original author of the 'culture of poverty' thesis recognized this,

> Above all, where hunger and discomfort rule, there is little spare energy for the gentler, warmer, less utilitarian emotions and little chance for active happiness (Lewis, 1959: ix).

This realization is so incredibly important. It is so unequivocally true, and yet it remains so thoroughly ignored.

Obama goes on to assert what he believes is a primary solution to inner city poverty,

> We could begin by acknowledging perhaps the single biggest thing we could do to reduce such poverty is to encourage teenage girls to finish high school and avoid having children out of wedlock (Obama, 2006: 303)

Given that this is the primary inner city poverty reduction strategy of the most left leaning President in more than two generations, then it is clearly time to unpack the longstanding, deeply ingrained, and insidious narratives of classism and the gender based subtexts[13]. First, let's review some Ontario manifestations of that narrative.

Neoliberalism in Ontario

If the OW Act hinted toward an antipathy of welfare receipt, Harris himself was somewhat more candid when he suggested that most people who were out of work did not know how to find a job or they just did not want one. Harris was quite clear about his rationale for cutting the $40 per month nutritional supplement for pregnant women on social assistance, "We don't want them spending it on beer" (Lessa, 1999: 1). The "Common Sense Revolution" and its proponents would exploit the stereotypes vilifying the economically disenfranchised – specifically, zoning in on the alleged concern that the "taxpayer" was being ripped off. This rhetoric would transcend welfare policy.

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[13] Obama's poverty reduction strategy, here, curiously overlooks that teenage girls (except in extraordinarly rare circumstances of artificial imsemination) do not become pregnant on their own. On different occaisions Obama has also spoken out against "deadbeat fathers".

Consider how Harris refused to budge when it was suggested that cuts to social housing should be reversed to ameliorate homelessness, "To say that government should build more housing and have more boondoggles and rip offs is not a solution" (Hurtig, 1999: 46). The October 1998 "Report of the Provincial Task Force on Homelessness", chaired by former MPP Jack Carroll, further fuelled concern over fraud by pointing out it was not clear how to respond to,

> situations where people in the same month receive a welfare cheque, which includes a shelter allowance, and also stay in an emergency hostel. Some estimates suggest this practice may involve as many as 60% of the emergency hostel client caseload. If that is accurate, it means that substantial resources are being spent which could be better directed.

So the provincial task force was not only concerned with welfare fraud, but now there was additional alarm over people scamming the homeless shelter system. Taxpayers clearly did not deserve this irresponsible spending catering to the irresponsible homeless. Later, responding to the deaths of homeless people in Ontario, Harris replied "Isn't it sad that these people just seem to want to be homeless" (Layton, 2000: 15).

Harris was certainly not alone in his views, according to Al Palladini, Harris's Minister of Economic Development, Trade and Tourism:

> Street beggars are blemishing Toronto's image as a tourist attraction, and the time has come to make them move along. Some of these people are basically doing it because they want to do it. Some of them should be moved out of there (Hurtig, 1999: 46).

This was essentially at the heart of the rationale leading to the passage of the Safe Streets Act in Ontario – specifically targeted at 'squeegee kids', another ethnophaulocentric noun that cuts slices -- which made it a criminal offence to ask for assistance in public places. The logic and spirit of this legislation has a history that can be traced back to Elizabethan Poor Laws. While the Toronto Sun ran its headlines claiming the enormous profitability of panhandling, NDP MPP Peter Kormos critiqued the safe streets act and the conservative stance on “squeegee kids” by pointing out how hypocritical the conservative position was. Kormos suggested that it is the Tories who preach the message – over and over again – that when life deals you a hard blow, you don’t come crying to government, but rather use whatever resources you have at your disposal, sell yourself, and become entrepreneurial. That, Kormos claimed, is exactly what “squeegee kids” were doing and thus to criminalize them for it was tremendously hypocritical. The Safe Streets Act passed nonetheless and remains in effect today. Swanson (2001: 19) has argued that “poor bashing is more than name-calling; it can be laws that assume it is acceptable to treat poor people inhumanely” (Swanson, 2001: 19). Allport (1954: 23) reminds us that “holding to a prejudgment when we know better is one of the strangest features of prejudice.”

Notwithstanding the reality that the NDP in Ontario opposed the Safe Streets Act, and both the NDP and Liberals, in several ways, had begun to enact more social democratic welfare policy after the SARC report of 1988, Jordan’s claim that a rigid market based logic and anti-welfarism are not the sole province of conservative parties certainly has relevance for Ontario. The views espoused by Thatcher and Regan were not only taken up by Blair and Clinton, but are “now percolating through to all other first world societies” (Jordan, 2008: 121). Consider the sentiments of former NDP premier Bob Rae,

> The left’s answer to welfare reform has been widely perceived as simply giving people who are not working more money to stay at home. This approach created a

> reaction from working families who then determined that their taxes were simply being used to subsidize idleness[14]. This happened in the US, the UK, and now Canada. It has changed the welfare debate. Social democracy needs to put work and education back at the centre of its commitment to income support (Rae, 1998: 99).

During his tenure in office Rae convened the Advisory Group on New Social Assistance Legislation. According to Scott, the advisory group produced two studies, "Back on Track" (1991) and "Time for Action" (1992): "The first identified further changes to the existing system, similar to those implemented by the Liberals in 1989, as a prelude to the creation of new social assistance legislation outlined in the second" (Scott, 1996: 23).

While "Back on Track" and "Time for Action" recommended building upon the first SARC operating principle of meeting needs, in 1993 the NDP published its own plans for reform in a report appropriately entitled "Turning Point." This *was* in fact a "turning point" of the transition from welfare to workfare in Ontario precisely because it asserted,

> that the first goal of social assistance should be to 'assist people in moving as quickly as possible back to work.' The system should be designed, then, to promote independence by encouraging job preparation, and to provide fair treatment to all low income families, including the working poor (Scott, 1996: 23).

The differences between the NDP, Liberal, and Conservative stance, in some cases were hard to locate. Consider the views of Sandra Pupatello, a Liberal MPP, when she was Minister of Community and Social Services,

> Our government is committed to helping people leave welfare for work, and leave welfare for good . . . We know that Ontario Works employment services do work well for some people on social assistance . . . And in the end, the more people we get off social assistance, and into real,

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[14] The term "subsidizing idleness" was originally used by Newt Gingrich in the United States.

> lasting jobs, the better it is for all of us (Pupatello, 2005: A8).

Liberal MPP's, like Bruce Crozier of Essex South, would sometimes invoke the "words of welfare" from within the provincial legislature, and add a minor variation,

> When the word 'fraud' is mentioned, I would like to say that there isn't anybody in this legislature, anybody in the province, save a few, who doesn't want to eliminate all forms of fraud, whether it be in the welfare system, whether it be in the workplace, whether it be in our financial district. (Ontario Hansard Issue, 1997: LO2000)

Of course the term "fraud", by definition, denotes something bad. No fair or rationale person supports fraudulence. But what is term fraud, in many instances, could (given the benefit levels we examined in chapter 1) be more accurately labelled "survival". Notwithstanding the reality that the excerpt above points out that "fraudulence" exists in different walks of life, the argument is more similar than different from what was argued by the proponents of the common sense revolution.

Illustrations of Covert Classism

"If there is anyone out there who still doubts that America is a place where all things are possible . . . Tonight is your answer" (Barrack Obama, election night victory speech, Nov.4, 2008).

Covert classism certainly has a less draconian feel than the vitriol of a Reagan, Limbaugh, or Harris and it operates more insidiously than overt classism. Yet one should not underestimate the inhumane policy decisions and cultural beliefs that results from covert classism. In his groundbreaking expose The Other America: Poverty in the United States, Harrington (1993 [1962]: 27) writes, "The mind and the feelings, of even good willed individuals, are so suffused with unconscious racism that [the] misery [in urban ghettoes] is overlooked." Extending Harrington's insights, the same can surely be said for covert classism. But of course this could not be said in Harrington's time as there was no word to articulate prejudice toward the poor.

Consider how policy makers with less overtly harsh sentiments than Reagan have invoked the notion of dependency in the context of welfare,

> The issue of welfare is the issue of dependency. It is different from poverty. To be poor is an objective condition; to be dependent, a subjective one as well . . . Being poor is often associated with considerable personal qualities; being dependent rarely so. Dependency is an incomplete state in life: normal in the child, abnormal in the adult. In a world where completed men and women stand on their own feet, persons who are dependent – as the buried imagery of the word denotes – hang. (Moynihan, 1973: 17)

Although not appearing to have the intense vitriol of overt classism, covert classism still translates into a very harmful prejudice that functions to legitimize enormous material inequalities that would otherwise be considered illegitimate. Margaret Thatcher's often cited quip is perhaps the very acme of covert classism,

> I think we have been through a period of time where too many people have been given to understand that if they have a problem, it's the government's job to cope with it. 'I have a problem, I'll get a grant.' 'I'm homeless, the government must house me.' They're casting their problems on society. And, you know, there is no such thing as society. There are individual men and women and their families. And no government can do anything except through people, and people must look to themselves first. It is our duty to look after ourselves, and then to look after our neighbour. (Dean, 1999: 151)

Thatcher would frequently repeat comparable messages decrying state intervention to ameliorate inequality,

> governments and experts cannot fix these problems for us. It is only when each of us recognizes our individual personal and social responsibility to be part of the solution that we also realize higher self esteem

> (Cruikshank, 1999: 8).

The neoliberal logic, here, suggests that inequality (in whatever form it appears) should not be ameliorated by the state because, among other things, it has resulted from the fair and open outcome of market competition. Notably, one of the first acts of the Harris government in Ontario was to rescind employment equity (Bezanson, 2006: 61). The belief that "there is no such thing as society" patently draws attention away from structural inequality in various forms and thus does not even begin to consider the inter-related connections between various axes of domination.

Intersectionality

"The conceptual isolation of class (or any other aspect of social identity, for that matter) is a contrivance that, although helpful for the purposes of discussion, does not accurately represent the complex interactions among class, race, ethnicity, gender, and / or sexual orientation that characterize lived experience" (Smith, 2005: 687).

Brenner (2002: 293) writes, "in feminist theory 'intersectionality' has emerged as an analytic strategy to address the interrelation of multiple, cross cutting institutionalized power relations defined by race, class, gender, and sexuality (and other axes of domination)." Intersectionality denotes the notion that inequality has multiple, and interrelated, manifestations and that oppression takes many forms. McCall (2005: 1721) suggests that intersectionality can be seen as, "the relationships among multiple dimensions and modalities of social relations and subject formations." The "complexity of intersectionality" began to be acknowledged when "critics first alleged that feminism claimed to speak universally for all women" and this made many feminist researchers "acutely aware of the limitations of gender as a single analytic category" (McCall, 2005: 1721). In "Psychotherapy, Classism, and the Poor", Smith (2005: 689) explains,

> By the early 1980's, feminist thinkers and social critics such as Davis (1983), hooks (1981, 1984), and Lorde (1984)

> were effectively challenging mainstream feminism on its claim that it represented the experiences of all women – rather, they argued, it was concerned primarily with the experiences of middle class, White, heterosexual women.

More recently Bernice Lott and Heather Bullock (2007: 9) have adopted a comparable stance in claiming that "middle class feminists[15] need to do the difficult work of stopping to consider what they do not know about the lives of their less affluent sisters." Some would argue that this claim can, and should, be taken an anti-oppressive step further to interrogate the public silences regarding the undesirable commonalities in lives of all less affluent people, while not losing sight that impoverishment is experienced in different ways by different people and intersects with other forms of advantage and disadvantage.

For present purposes, the point of drawing upon the intersectionality literature is to point that prejudice does not discriminate against only one target. Numerous categorically bound forms of advantage and disadvantage overlap and interact with one another. Notably, this observation has a quantitative predecessor in a classic Canadian work on inequality. Perhaps the most overlooked aspect of John Porter's legacy from The Vertical Mosaic is relevant here, "If we attempt to treat ethnicity as a single independent variable we are immediately confounded by many related variables that are impossible to hold constant (Porter 1965: 74)." While this manuscript focuses on a particular form of prejudice called classism, "The problem [of prejudice] as a whole is many sided, and the reader is asked, while examining one facet, to hold in mind the simultaneous existence of many other facets" (Allport, 1954: 17). With this caveat in mind, Allport's classic work will nonetheless remain at the forefront of the analysis for much of this manuscript because his insights on ingroup formation and outgroup rejection remain far too relevant to the subject matter of welfare reform. While scholarly analysis from various schools of thought have enhanced understanding about the tenuous nature of classification, the general populace – and the respondents in this research – appear to have been deeply impacted by the presumed essentialism inherent in the terms "taxpayer" and "welfare recipient" and thus Allport's work remains too relevant to ignore. But to supplement Allport's classic work, more contemporary understandings will show that prejudice and oppression are truly multi-faceted phenomena.

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[15] Given the seemingly pejorative usage of the term "middle class feminists", here, it should be pointed out that I would be replicating a prejudicial error I am arguing very strongly against to not posit a critique of Lott and Bullock: it is fallacious to presume a homogeneity within this (or any other) categorical label. Given that the notion of intersectionality is coming out of feminist scholarship, there are several "middle class feminists" – many of whom are cited in this manuscript -- who have taken the time to carefully consider class oppression.

Robin Kelley opens Yo' mama's disfunktional: fighting the culture wars in America (1997) with a compelling illustration of gender, race, class and age oppression intersecting to culminate in a very draconian prejudice. Kelly writes about growing up in an urban American ghetto and recounts playing a game called 'the dozens.' In Kelley's neighbourhood the 'dozens' consisted of light-hearted and humorous insults about a given person's mother. While carried out as a form of entertainment, the dozens was also designed to toughen inner city kids up for the harsh realities of ghetto life. Kelley (1997: 2) articulates an extreme disenchantment with the harsh reality that the "culture of poverty" cult gained the prominence that it did in the academy, formal politics, and society at large. Kelley explains his reasoning,

> You would think that as a kid growing up in this world I could handle any insult, or at least be prepared for any slander tossed in the direction of my Mom – or for that matter, my whole family, my friends, or my friends' families. But when I entered college and began reading the newspaper, monographs, and textbooks on a regular basis, I realized that many academics, journalists, policy makers, and politicians had taken the 'dozens' to another level. In all my years of playing the dozens, I have rarely heard

> vitriol as vicious as the words spouted by Riverside (California) county welfare director Lawrence Townsend: ‘Every time I see a bag lady of the street, I wonder, ‘Was that an A.F.D.C. [welfare] mother who hit the menopause wall – who can no longer reproduce and get money to support herself?’ I have had kids tell me that my hair was so nappy it looked like a thousand Africans giving the Black Power salute, but never has anyone said to my face that my whole family – especially my mama – was a tangle of pathology” (Kelley, 1997: 2).

Clearly the prejudicial views that Townsend espoused had more than one manifestation: class, race, gender, and age were intertwined to create a powerful antipathy along more than just one axes of domination.

In “White Privilege and Male Privilege: A Personal Account of Coming to See Correspondences Through Work in Women’s Studies” (1988), McIntosh expresses concern that although she had noticed throughout her academic career that some men may acknowledge that women are disadvantaged in the curriculum, acknowledgements of male over-privilege were nonexistent. McIntosh (1988:70) suggests that “these denials protect male privilege from being fully recognized, acknowledged, lessened, or ended”. A parallel is then drawn to the phenomenon of “white privilege that was similarly denied and protected” (McIntosh, 1988: 70). McIntosh argues that her contention that whites are carefully taught not to recognize their privilege, just as males are taught not to rectify their advantages. White privilege is defined,

> as an invisible package of unearned assets that I can count on cashing in each day, but about which I was meant to remain oblivious. White privilege is like an invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, assurances, tools, maps, guides, codebooks, passports, visas, clothes, emergency gear, and blank checks (McIntosh, 1988: 71).

McIntosh then illustrates what she means by white privilege in detailing “forty six ordinary and daily ways in which I experience having white privilege by contrast with my

African American colleagues in the same building" (McIntosh, 1988: 71). The list is explicitly termed an "invisible knapsack of privilege", reflecting the reality that most people are oblivious to its existence. The forty six items on the list, McIntosh states, detail "those conditions that I think in my case attach somewhat more to skin color privilege than to class, religion, ethnic status, or geographical location, though these other privileging factors are intricately intertwined" (McIntosh, 1988: 73).

In assessing the merits of McIntosh's invisible knapsack, one has to be impressed with anyone willing to take stock of his or her privileges – in whatever form they appear -- and explicitly detail that privilege for the commendable purpose of ameliorating the plight of those who are on the undesirable end of a given oppression. As Harrington pointed out more than a generation ago, there are misconceptions about poverty and the poor that function to blind people. "Privileged irresponsibility" (Tronto, 1993) grants people who enjoy privilege the right to ignore hardships they do not face.

Below I have charted seventeen aspects of white privilege taken directly from McIntosh's (1988: 73-75) list. Beneath each item I will point out how class privilege remained incognito.

Class Privilege Incognito

- *"If I should need to move, I can be pretty sure of renting or purchasing housing in an area which I can afford and in which I would want to live."*

Depending on the depth of one's poverty, renting anywhere at all can be exceptionally challenging and purchasing a home is not an option.

- "*I can be reasonably sure that my neighbours in such a location will be neutral or pleasant to me"*

Material deprivation has a proclivity to turn neutrality or pleasantness into harsher sentiments.

- *"I can go shopping alone most of the time, fairly well assured that I will not be followed or harassed by store detectives."*

Extreme poverty can take away one's capacity to go shopping and if one has the appearance of having been extremely deprived, they are not likely to be exempted from the prejudice of law enforcement (Hester and Eglin, 1992).

- *"I can turn on the television or open to the front page of the paper and see people of my race widely and positively represented."*

Depending on the depth of one's poverty, televisions and newspapers may not be part of one's lifestyle. If they are, the media does not portray the poor in a positive light.

- *"When I am told about our national heritage or civilization I am shown that people of my color made it what it is."*

The myth of meritocracy is rampant in history books.

- "*I can be sure that my children will be given curricular materials that testify to the existence of their race."*

When Canada's poorest children are more than three times as likely to be in remedial education that the richest children (Statistics Canada, 1997), the curriculum is clearly failing the poorest children of all races.

- *"I can go into a book shop and count on finding the writing of my race represented, into a supermarket and find the staple foods that with my cultural traditions, into a hairdressers shop and find someone who can deal with my hair."*

Published work from people who have lived in poverty is also rare, finding foods that fit within one's budget can present other challenges, and not being able to afford a haircut is also a humbling experience.

- *"Whether I use checks, credit cards, or cash, I can count on my skin color not to work against the appearance that I am financially reliable."*

Extreme poverty can certainly undercut one's capacity to present as financially reliable because, among other things, it undercuts one's capacity to be financially reliable.

- *"I could arrange to protect our young children most of the time from people who might not like them."*

Parents living in poverty may be deprived of this luxury by virtue of their poverty.

- *"I did not have to educate our children to be aware of systemic racism for their own daily physical protection."*

Parental education about classism is often impaired by an incapacity to name this form of prejudice.

- *"I can be pretty sure that my children's teachers and employers will tolerate them if they fit school and workplace norms; my chief worries about them do not concern others' attitudes towards their race."*

Canada's richest children are more than twice as likely as Canada's poorest to be in enriched education (Statistics Canada, 1997). The odds of a person being in white collar work are strongest if both his father and grandfather were also in white collar work than for any other combination of background statuses (Goyder and Curtis, 1977).

- "*I can talk with my mouth full and not have people put this down to my color."*

Bad mannerisms may also be attributed to one's class.

- *"I can swear, or dress in second hand clothes, or not answer letters, without having people attribute these choices to the bad morals, the poverty, or the illiteracy of my race*."

Bad manners can be attributed to moral deficiencies associated with class.

- "*I can remain oblivious to the language and customs of persons of color who constitute the world's majority without feeling in my culture any penalty for such oblivion*."

The language and customs of persons of material privilege are written into social policy and culturally sanctioned and desirable.

- "*I can criticize our government and talk about how much I fear its policies and behaviour without being seen as a cultural outsider.*"

The term "socialist" is frequently invoked as an ethnophaulism to describe, and "other", people who espouse for greater material equality.

- *"I can be reasonably sure that if I talk to 'the person in charge,' I will be facing a person of my race.*

When one lives in poverty, they can be reasonably certain that they will be facing a person of a different class if they ever get to talk to "the person in charge."

- *"I can go home from most meetings of organizations I belong to feeling somewhat tied in, rather than isolated, out of place, outnumbered, unheard, held at a distance, or feared."*

If one lives in poverty, they are more likely to be isolated and not be able to attend meetings. If they do attend (depending on the nature of the meeting) there is a very real possibility that they will not be heard.

- *"My culture gives me little fear about ignoring the perspectives and powers of people of other races."*

The perspectives of those living in poverty are frequently ignored with impunity.

- "*I am not made acutely aware that my shape, bearing, or body odour will be taken as a reflection on my race."*

These traits may also be chalked up to class.

- "*I can worry about racism without being seen as self interested or self seeking."*

A person living in poverty speaking out against its injustice faces a comparable conundrum.

- *"I can take a job with an affirmative action employer without having my co-workers on the job suspect that I got it because of my race."*

Class based inequality is generally not even recognized in affirmative action programs.

- *"I can think over many options, social, political, imaginative, or professional without asking whether a person of my race would be accepted or allowed to do what I do"*

Living in poverty in a consumer culture limits the options one can realistically think about, and concurrently means that one will have to think about acceptance with the limited options they do have.

- *"I can be late for a meeting without having the lateness reflect on my race"*

One is more likely to be late for a meeting without the benefit of owning a reliable vehicle, and lateness may be interpreted as a reflection of one's class.

- *"I can choose public accommodation without fearing that people of my race cannot get in or will be mistreated in the places I have chosen."*

Extreme poverty may mean that one cannot afford accommodation and even if they can, landlords have more freedom to mistreat those without resources.

- *"I can be sure that if I need legal or medical help, my race will not work against me."*

The quality of legal and medical help one has access to is also, very much, a reflection of one's material standing. Incidentally, if one is poor one is much more likely to require medical supports.

- *"I can easily find academic courses and institutions that give attention only to people of my race."*

Those same courses and institutions are very likely to exclude the perspectives of people living in poverty.

- *"I can expect figurative language and imagery in all of the arts to testify to the experiences of my race."*

That same language and imagery concurrently testifies to the middle and upper class experiences.

We know that categories in general, and stereotypes in particular, emphasize certain traits while ignoring other realities. The purpose of supplementing McIntosh's inventory of invisible privilege was not to detract from her insightful way of tagging unearned privilege that is too frequently ignored. The purpose was to join her project and add another class dimension to understanding invisible privilege. Privileges, in whatever form they appear, are too often invisible to those who possess them. The pejorative views on impoverishment posited by some prominent politicians whom we examined earlier in this chapter are illustrations of "privileged irresponsibility" in action. As we will see in chapter 6, one effect of welfare discourse is to facilitate "privileged irresponsibility" by ignoring various facets of underprivilege that are made invisible by readily accepted slogans and buzzwords. Incredibly, even underprivileged people are not immune to invoking a discourse of privileged responsibility because the cultural images of welfare discourse screen out the harsh realities of impoverishment.

Conclusion

It is next to impossible to combat a prejudice like classism when much of society remains oblivious to its existence. Allport's classic work can assist in understanding what prejudice is and how it operates. In particular, understanding the linguistic factors of prejudice is vital in recognizing how meanings, and thus perceptions, are created by the new right words of welfare. After Allport, poststructural theory later took up the project of understanding the latent power of discourse in constituting the world as we know it. Specifically, “Foucault suggests that, by naming something, by constituting it in discourse, the possibilities for resistance are created” (McCormack, 2002: 42). It is to the work of Foucault we now turn.

Chapter 3

The Discursive Field: From Foucault's Theorizing to Schram's Application

"Subjectivity cannot be properly understood outside the conditions of its own production" (Cruikshank, 1999: 56).

Introduction

This chapter will assess the merits of Michel Foucault's poststructural theorizing, review the postmodern welfare policy applications of Schram, and suggest that the strengths of a discourse analysis should supplement, not ignore, the insights from a class analysis. Power, I contend, operates discursively *and* ideologically and this operation is not separate or autonomous: the meanings and identities constituted by welfare discourse are patently ideological in the sense that they serve to justify and legitimize the class domination of one group over another. There is also a gender component to inequalities exacerbated by welfare state restructuring (Bezanson, 2006). While the qualitative data in this research from twenty four semi-structured interviews is more amenable to a discourse analysis to illuminate how power operates, I will join Pimpare (2004) and Swanson (2001) in suggesting that there is a "who" behind the "how?"

"Power," Michel Foucault (2003: 72) argues "creates illusions." Illusory thinking often manifests itself in sweeping categorical and unifying generalizations, perhaps the most common being "those people are all the same". Despite the empirically verifiable realization that "as soon as one questions that unity, it loses its self evidence" (Foucault, 2006 [1969]: 26) the unifying categories of welfare discourse predominate and remain unquestioned. This, Schram argues throughout his extensive scholarship, is a cultural phenomenon with very real power effects. Rational analysis (i.e. everyone deserves a minimum standard of living that enables them to function) is often subjugated to irrationality (i.e. making poor people poorer will force them to work and thus reduces poverty) in welfare policy and the resultant cultural meaning making, in part because Foucault's (2006 [1969: 24) call to "question those divisions or groupings with which we have become so familiar" has never really been answered. In fact, under neoliberalism the taxpayer / welfare recipient binary division is as entrenched as it ever has been. Groups like the Canadian Taxpayers Federation and the National Council of Welfare advocate at opposite ends of this division, but neither group has ever put much thought, at least in their published works, into the cultural construction of the dichotomy. This division appears natural and thus escapes critical scrutiny.

In The Poverty of Welfare Reform, Handler (1995: 8) asks,

> What is going on? Why does society cling to the basic assumptions that underlie welfare policy when it is so clear that they do not comport with reality? Why do we perpetuate the same misguided policies that not only do nothing positive for the welfare poor but continue to punish and stigmatize them? What is this incessant need to blame the victim? Why do we continue this exercise in symbolic politics?

While these critically informed questions initially struck at the heart of my personal rationale for undertaking and completing this dissertation, throughout my research my analytical side became more informed by a theoretical orientation that is more concerned with *episteme* by concretely detailing "the workings, the effects, and the ***how*** of power" (Foucault, 2003: 275). When I began examining the qualitative data from semi-structured interviews with twenty four respondents subsisting on social assistance, I began to notice how discourse divides and 'others' people. There were some common themes that resonated throughout these unconscious divisions that, if noticed, could provide some compelling answers to the question of why "we perpetuate the same misguided policies that not only do nothing for the poor but continue to punish and stigmatize them?" But the question of "why?", post structural Foucaultian theory suggests, is inseparable from the question of "how?"

In her PhD dissertation,"TANF Reauthorization: Divergent Discursive Practices and Welfare Policy Discourse", Copeland (2005: 11) writes about how the association between morality and wealth unconsciously makes its way into subjectivities,

> discursive fields are marked by boundaries that define what can [and cannot] be understood. These boundaries are marked by powerful normative assumptions about the relationship between morality and wealth.

Discourse, like stereotypes, direct our attention to certain features of social life and divert our attention from others. To understand ***how*** the association between wealth and morality is discursively constituted, disseminated, and reproduced – in other words, to understand the survival of classism – this chapter will review the social theory of Foucault (1980, 1988, 1990, 2003, 2006, 2007a, 2007b) and the contemporary applications of Schram (1995, 2000, 2006).

First, I will briefly review some key observations on social theory provided by Sears's (2005) insightful treatise A Good Book in Theory: A Guide to Theoretical Thinking. Next, I will review the intellectual legacy of Foucault by breaking his theorizing down into its conceptual component parts and detailing what Foucault meant by governmentality, regimes of practice, discourse, truth, subjugated knowledges, and power / knowledge. After defining each of these terms, I will explain their relevance to contemporary welfare policy analysis in general. Chapters 5-7 will further detail why these terms are relevant to this monograph in particular. After Foucault's work is reviewed, I will examine the contemporary applications of Schram and, in particular, emphasize Schram's (2000) conceptualizations of culture and cultural software and deconstruction of the powerful welfare policy buzzwords "personal responsibility". I conclude this chapter by arguing that although Kurt Lewin was quite correct in asserting that "There is nothing so practical as a good theory", Karl Popper was equally correct in suggesting that "There is no theory that is not beset with problems" (Robbins and Chaterjee, 1998: i). I briefly point out what a class analysis (as opposed to a discourse analysis) of welfare reform could reveal and suggest that there are valuable insights that could be gained from different theoretical orientations.

Some Perceptive Theorizing on Theory

"Theoretical thinking can be exciting because it allows us to be surprised by a world that we thought that we already knew" Sears (2008: 14).

In The Archaeology of Knowledge, Foucault (2006 [1969]: 6) asks "what is a theory? what is a concept?" These definitional considerations warrant a brief exploration prior to delving into the heart of Foucault's work. While I will rely, momentarily, on the definition of some renowned scholars to conceptualize theory, I will suggest that a concept is a thought, term, or definitional idea that functions as a building block of theory. All social theories entail key, interrelated, conceptualizations that are somewhat analogous to pieces of a jig saw puzzle in that they need to be put together in order to see the whole picture (and different theoretical puzzles, of course, culminate in different completed images). Foucault himself argued that "it is the concept that the historian's work never ceases to specify"(2006 [1969]: 9). To understand Foucault's work, to be able to apply it, and thus to grasp the central argument of this monograph, it is imperative to understand what Foucault, and later theorists, meant by six interrelated concepts of: i) governmentality; ii) regimes of practice; iii) discourse; iv) subjugated knowledges; v) truth and vi) power / knowledge. After these terms have been defined, I will explain why each concept is relevant to understanding the substantive subject matter of welfare policy in general: chapters five through seven of this monograph will show why these concepts are relevant to this manuscript in particular. A few more reflections on theory are warranted at the outset.

Expanding on the epigraph (above) from Sears, one will see things that one will not otherwise see, gain insights that they will not otherwise gain, and ask critically reframed questions that they will not otherwise ask, if they can come to apprehend and apply the "key premises [and] cornerstone assumptions about the way [a given theory suggests] things work" (Sears, 2005: 22). That, of course, is what social theory does: posit explanations of "the way things work." Armstrong and Armstrong (1990: 18) suggest,

> theory is an attempt to organize explanations in a systemic way, to develop a connected and logical understanding of how people and social systems work.

Questions surrounding the concept of power – what is it? who possesses it? how does it operate? --have been a central preoccupation of much social theorizing for a very long time, and because one cannot underestimate the often latent operation of power in the formation of subjectivities, this longstanding central preoccupation with power remains as relevant today as it ever has been.

The Poststructuralism of Foucault and The Postmodern Applications of Schram

In her PhD dissertation, "Discourse as a Category of Analysis in Policy Studies: The Case of Welfare Reform", Lindquist (2003: 35-36) explains,

> Poststructuralists argue that discourse – the seemingly ephemeral phenomenon of sensory signifiers we use to give meaning to the world – is the primary means through which power and dominance is exerted, and social, economic, and political institutions and structures are the sites of its exercise (Foucault 1990, 1979, 1983). Poststructuralists take discourse as the primary unit of analysis.

The post-structural theory of Foucault provides invaluable insight about "the way things work" by specifically focusing on *how* power operates through discourse and, in particular, "how it is that subjects are gradually, progressively, really and materially constituted" (Foucault, 1980: 97). Utilizing the theorizing of Foucault in the context of American welfare policy analysis, Schram (2006: xi) demonstrates, in a compelling way, that "discourse extends to [create] social identities." Understanding *how* subjects are constituted provides greater opportunity for taking on the formidable, but necessary, challenge of reconstituting subaltern subjects; thus, it is a worthwhile endeavour to closely examine the politics, and the "how?", of identity formation. It is to the work of Foucault and Schram which we will now turn.

Governmentality

"The activity of government is inextricably bound up with the activity of thought. It is thus both made possible by and constrained by what can be thought and what cannot be thought at any particular moment in our history" (Rose, 2004: 8).

Governance, in its everyday meaning, is any attempt to regulate or control a behaviour or thought. Foucault's conceptualization of governmentality suggests that we need to think of that regulation in ways that transcend the standard conceptualizations of government as taking place solely through the prohibitive power of the state. Governance takes place not solely by what it represses, but, crucially, by what it creates: objects of knowledge, truths, and realms of practice (Goode and Maskovsky, 2001: 286). In The Philosophy of Foucault, May (2006: 82) points out that Foucault never denied that repressive power exists or that the state possesses it, but that many have misread Foucault's work on power to arrive at this misguided conclusion. Foucault did suggest, however, that a compelling form of power can also operate from below – from our practices and our existing relations in civil society. In an interview entitled “Truth and Power” Foucault makes this point clearly in a passage that has not received the attention that it warrants,

> I don’t want to state that the state isn’t important; what I want to say is that relations of power, and hence the analysis that must be made of them, necessarily extend beyond the limits of the state – in two senses. First of all, because the state, for all the omnipotence of its apparatuses, is far from being able to occupy the whole field of actual power relations; and, further, because the state can only operate on the basis of other, already existing power relations (Foucault, 1980: 122).

It is necessary, then, to perceive of governance beyond the state. How we are directly regulated is important, but this question cannot be divorced from how we come to indirectly regulate ourselves. Foucault (1991: 102-103) provides a threefold conceptualization of governmentality,

> By this word I mean three things,
>
> 1. The ensemble formed by the institutions, procedures, analyses and reflections, the calculation and tactics that allow the exercise of this very specific albeit complex form of power, which has as its target population, as its principal form of knowledge political economy, and as its essential technical means apparatuses of security.
>
> 2. The tendency which, over a long period and throughout the West, has steadily led towards the pre-eminence over all other forms (sovereignty, discipline, etc.) of this type of power which may be termed government, resulting, on the one hand, in the formation of a whole series of a specific governmental apparatuses, and, on the other, in the development of a whole complex of savoirs [knowledges].
>
> 3. The process, or rather the result of the process, through which the state of justice of the Middle Ages, transformed into the administrative state during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, gradually becomes ‘governmentalized’.

The Relevance of Governmentality

"An 'analytics of government' [is] a way of analyzing those regimes of practices that try to direct, with a certain degree of deliberation, the conduct of others, and oneself " (Dean, 1999: 40).

The notion of governmentality, specifically its pre-occupation with the "how?" of power, is invaluable to analyzing many issues including welfare policy because,

> Practices of governing and ruling are not restricted to 'the political' or to one sphere, so we must focus on how we are governed and by what practices, rather than by which people in which sphere (Cruikshank, 1999: 120).

State power would not be so powerful if it were not disseminated through the social institutions and daily discursive practices of civil society that create cultural divisions. So, for example, when the Conservatives instituted a welfare fraud hotline for the public to call this produced a number of effects, not the least of which was a departure from the necessity of a16th century panoptical type of surveillance – given that the few could be watched by the many at any time, people would better govern themselves. This governmental rationality also played a notable role in constituting the identity of both the welfare, and working, subjects. Lost in the 'zero tolerance' rhetoric of the "Common Sense Revolution" is the realization that "the discourse and politics of welfare fraud have obscured the imprecision of what is considered to be fraud, and by whom" (Chunn and Gavigan, 2004: 228). As we will see in the next chapter, many research respondents employed survival techniques like relying on the assistance of extended family members or babysitting a neighbourhood child in order to compensate for the inadequacy of their income. What is considered "fraud" could more properly be named survival. Despite all the hype, the hotline, and the hysteria, after 52 582 official investigations from the Ontario Ministry of Community, Family and Children's Services, (http://dawn.thot.net/kimberly_rogers/wb-qa.html) a total of only 430 criminal convictions resulted. Yet this story, or these numbers, never made its way into mainstream consciousness. In chapter 6 we examine how the twenty four respondents in this research took up the discourse of welfare fraud.

This monograph in particular is concerned with how the prejudice of classism is constituted in welfare discourse, reproduced, and survives in the operation of power "from below". In understanding how subjectivities and behaviours are governed, we will follow a theoretical tradition that "directs us to attend to the practices of government that form the basis on which problematizations are made" (Dean, 2001: 28). Understanding this theoretical tradition necessitates understanding, among other things, the latent and insidious meaning-making role that "practices" invariably play.

Regimes of Practice

"Such forms of knowledge define the objects of such practices (the criminal, the unemployed, the mentally ill, etc.), codify appropriate ways of dealing with them, set the aims and objectives of practice, and define the professional and institutional locus of authoritative agents of expertise" (Dean, 1999: 22)

In a powerful passage that is at the theoretical heart of the analytical rationale informing this study, Foucault detailed the difference between his theorizing on power and the perspectives of other theoreticians in an interview entitled "Questions of Method",

> The target of analysis wasn't "institutions," "theories," or "ideology" but practices – with the aim of grasping the conditions that make these acceptable at a given moment; the hypothesis being that these types of practices are not just governed by institutions, prescribed by ideologies, guided by pragmatic circumstances – whatever roles these elements may actually play – but possess up to a point their own specific regularities, logic, strategy, self-evidence and 'reason.' (Foucault, 1991: 75).

Understanding the end results of these practices, then, is a worthwhile endeavour. Practices are not necessarily undertaken to ameliorate a pre-given problem, but rather define exactly what is problematic.

The Relevance of 'Regimes of Practice'

"It is a question of analyzing a 'regime of practices'– practices being understood here as places where what is said and what is done, rules imposed and reasons given, the planned and taken for granted meet and interconnect" (Foucault, 1991: 75).

The concept of "regimes of practice" is clearly relevant to OW, because welfare policies impose rules and give reasons that create taken for granted, or 'common sense', perceptions. In this respect, there truly was a 'common sense' revolution in Ontario, but certainly not in the sense of sound logic. While it is standard to regard social policies and social programs as solutions to ameliorate social problems, it is perhaps more realistic to think of those policies and programs as presumptively defining what is problematic, *ipso facto*, by virtue of the solutions they espouse. As we will see in the qualitative data analysis examining the subjectivities of twenty four research respondents in this manuscript, the regimes of practice associated with Ontario Works were instrumental in circulating power in the form of perceptions about issues such as the nature of unemployment, poverty, personal irresponsibility, welfare fraud, and tax rage. Regimes of practice include regular and patterned phrases, or sets of statements, that come to shape what is, and is not, thought.

Discourse

"*Discourse works by telling us in advance of any perception what it is we can see and what is or is not important*" (Cruikshank, 1999: 24)

For Foucault discourse is a set of patterned and recurring statements -- that transcend a given individual speaking those statements -- that systematically function to constitute formal knowledge. These “discursive regularities” (Foucault, 2006 [1969]: 23-85) not only govern the way that a given topic can, and cannot, be meaningfully discussed, queried or assessed but also regulate *what* topics are appropriate for discussion, enquiry, or assessment.

Foucault suggests that on a given ‘discursive field’ there are “rules of formation” that are unconsciously followed and,

> the rules of formation operate not only in the mind or consciousness of individuals, but in discourse itself; they operate therefore, according to a sort of uniform anonymity, on all individuals who undertake to speak in this discursive field (Foucault, 2006 [1969]: 69-70).

The discursive field can be seen as an external cultural force – existing over and above individuals – that exerts an unnoticed but powerful coercive influence on communication and thus subjectivity. In reviewing Foucault’s legacy, May (2006: 39) concurs that “the unconscious structuring of discourse, sets the character and boundaries of how the debate and discussion can happen.” One of the most profound and important expressions of power is the power to frame the problem and thus set the parameters of the debate.

The constructed boundaries of discourse, and thus thought, are ultimately unrecognized by those speaking within the discursive field. Foucault himself refers to discursive regularities as “the positive unconscious of knowledge” precisely because they elude consciousness (Foucault, 2007 [1966]: xi). In her doctoral dissertation examining American welfare policy, Copeland (2005: 10) argues,

> The power of discourse stems from its appearance as factual – through the creation of a common sense understanding as well as the silencing of alternative understandings that seem to challenge the truth.

"Common sense", by another name, is habituated patterns of thinking that are so readily accepted by virtually everyone so as to avoid scrutiny or alternative understandings. Foucault explains why understanding how the discursive field plays on perception is vitally important,

> The analysis of thought is always allegorical in relation to the discourse it employs. Its question is unfailingly: what was being said in what was said? The analysis of the discursive field is oriented in quite a different way; we must grasp the statement in the exact specificity of its occurrence; determine its conditions of existence, fix at least its limits, establish its correlations with other statements that may be connected with it, and show what other forms of statements it excludes (Foucault, 2006 [1969]: 30-31.

To appreciate how a given problem gets framed or how a given subject is formed, it becomes necessary to transcend "common sense" and "describe [and contextualize] the organization of the field of statements where they appeared and circulated" (Foucault, 2006 [1969: 63). That is what the qualitative data analysis of this monograph aims to do.

The Relevance of Discourse

In The Archaeology of Knowledge Foucault argues that discourse transmits power not only by what is being said, but equally significant, by what it does not say,

> All manifest discourse is secretly based on an 'already said'; and this 'already said' is not merely a phrase that has already been spoken, or a text that has already been written, but a 'never said', an incorporeal discourse, a voice as silent as breath, a writing that is merely a hollow of its own mark . . . The manifest discourse, therefore, is really no more than the repressive presence of what it does not say, and this 'not said' is a hollow that undermines from within all that is said (Foucault, 2006 [1969]: 27-28).

One of the things that is "not said" in contemporary welfare policy is that there is a "conservative function at work in the theme of cultural totalities" (Foucault, 2006 [1969]:

17). The taxpayer / welfare recipient dichotomy creates a “binary perception and division of society and men [sic]; them and us, the unjust and the just” (Foucault, 2003: 74). Power is in operation in the unquestioned naturalization of these binary perceptions.

In undertaking comparable research, Telling Tales: Living the Effects of Public Policy, Neysmith, Bezanson, and O’connell (2005) articulate an observation that I will adopt as the theoretical linchpin of my central argument,

> All of these stories rely on the ways in which people “make meaning” and on our capacities as researchers for hearing these practices at work. While experiences have a material reality, once they are communicated and continue to be retold, they take on a new shape. Discourses also operate at an institutional level. The meanings and values of an institution are expressed in systematically organized sets of statements. These are also picked up [and repeated] by participants. The notion of a ‘discursive field’ is helpful here because it seeks to understand the relationship between language, social institutions, subjectivity, and power. (Neysmith, Bezanson, and O’connell, 2005: 170).

These “systematically organized sets of statements” facilitate the survival of classism when they are “picked up by participants”. These culturally sanctioned recurring statements highlight some aspects of certain issues while ignoring, or discounting, other aspects.

Subjugated Knowledges

“Has any member of congress ever tried to live for a month on a welfare check? For that matter, have any of them ever tried to live on the check that a welfare recipient would receive if she were lucky enough to find a job?” (Quindlen, 2002: 64).

To subjugate, in conventional usage, is to subdue or conquer. In post-structural social theory, to subjugate knowledges is to ignore, disqualify, or delegitimize their legitimacy. The political aspects of Foucault’s (2003: 7) theorizing explicitly call for “the insurrection of subjugated knowledges.” In Society Must Be Defended (2003), a collection of his

1975-76 lectures from the College de France, Foucault posits a twofold definition of subjugated knowledge:

> Subjugated knowledges . . . are blocks of historical knowledges that were present in the functional and systemic ensembles, but which were masked, and the critique was also able to reveal their existence by using, obviously enough, the tools of scholarship.
>
> Second, I think that subjugated knowledges should be understood as meaning something else and, in a sense, something quite different. When I say 'subjugated knowledges' I am also referring to a whole series of knowledges that have been disqualified as non conceptual knowledges, as insufficiently elaborated knowledges; naïve knowledges; hierarchically inferior knowledges; knowledges below the required level of erudition or scienticity" (Foucault, 2003: 7)

While both conceptualizations of subjugated knowledge are relevant, it is the former conceptualization that warrants the most attention given the qualitative interview data upon which this manuscript is based.

The Relevance of Subjugated Knowledges

"*If you don't have the necessities of life – nothing else matters*"
(John Sweeney)

The quote (above) from John Sweeney was the central message of his opening remarks at a Kitchener-Waterloo community action forum on homelessness in 2000. Sweeney chaired the Social Assistance Review Committee back in the 1980s. I witnessed Sweeney speak in Kitchener in 2000 when he stated, "If you don't have the necessities of life – nothing else matters". Sweeney was summarizing what the participants of SARC told the committee back in the 1980s. Sweeney argued that things were bad for social assistance back then, but they are worse now. What has been thoroughly subjugated in welfare discourse and welfare policy, notwithstanding the rhetoric of the "perversity thesis"

(Block and Somers, 2003), is that “you can’t punish people out of poverty” (Homan, 2007: 475). When talking about the barriers to securing meaningful employment, many respondents, in similar variations delivered that same message. Chapter 6 of this monograph will take up Foucault’s project and examine the subjugated knowledges of welfare because “adequate social support to meet basic physiological needs cannot be dismissed from the equation” (Homan, 2007: 33).

Truth

“*Meaning is being solely constituted by systems of constraints characteristic of the signifying machinery*” (Foucault, 2007b: 53)

Truth, in conventional use, generally means ‘factually correct’ or ‘accurate’. The post-structural meaning, however, is quite different. Foucault (1980: 133) argued in Power / Knowledge that:

> ‘Truth’ is to be understood as a system of ordered procedures for the production, regulation, distribution, circulation and operation of statements.
>
> ‘Truth’ is linked in a circular relation with systems of power which produce and sustain it, and to effects of power which it induces and which extend it. A ‘regime’ of truth.

In Welfare Discipline: Discourse, Governance, and Globalization, Schram perceptively expands on Foucault’s conceptualization of “truth”,

> Truth remains for me best understood as an artefact of discourse. In other words, truth, whatever it may be ultimately, is, for humans, apprehensible first and foremost as a discursive practice. Bracketing the ultimate nature of truth, I prefer to situate my truth studies in the ways in which discourse presents things to us as if they were true. With Michel Foucault, I am more interested in how discourse makes some things out to be true, regardless of whether they are. (Schram, 2006: 1-2).

In Powers of Freedom: Reframing Political Thought, Nikolas Rose critically posits an explanation for (among other things) how truth is formed. Specifically, Rose's examination is concerned with,

> the ways in which certain languages of description, explanation, calculation and judgment came to acquire the value of truth and the kinds of actions or techniques that were made possible by such truths. (Rose, 2004: 8).

The Relevance of 'Truth'

"The truth is kept secret. It's swept under the rug. If you never know truth then you never know love. Where's the love y'all? C'mon. Where's the truth y'all? C'mon!" (Black Eyed Peas, 2003 hit "Where is the love?")

Shortly after being ousted from power by the Tories, former Ontario premier Bob Rae wrote in his memoirs "the [political] right likes to point to a massive growth in fraud and delinquency as the reason for this [increased welfare expenditures], but this is simply not true" (Rae, 1996: 200). The discursive practices of the "Common Sense Revolution", however, were politically successful in presenting their arguments as true. Understanding "truth" as an artefact of discourse would assist in the process of mastering "the art of not being governed quite so much" (Foucault, 2007: 45). To master this art "we must ask two questions: what does Foucault mean by power and how does it work?" (May, 2006: 82)

Power / Knowledge

"Power, according to Michel Foucault, is fundamentally productive: it does not simply constrain and repress but also – or thereby – creates. It creates objects of knowledge; it creates truths; and it produces realms of practice" (Goode and Maskovsky, 2001: 286).

According to Foucault, "power acts as much, or more, through what it creates than through what it represses" (May, 2006: 81). Foucault initially made this argument by posing an illuminating (and rhetorical) question,

> If power were never anything but repressive, if it never did anything but to say no, do you really think one would be

> brought to obey it? What makes power hold good, what makes it accepted, is simply the fact that it doesn't only weigh on us as a force that says no, but it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse (Foucault, 1980: 119).

Breaking with traditional state and class theory conceptualizations, Foucault further details what he suggests power is not,

> Power is not something that is acquired, seized, or shared, something that one holds on to or allows to slip away; power is exercised from innumerable points . . .
>
> Power comes from below; that is, there is no binary and all-encompassing opposition between rulers and ruled at the root of power relations, and serving as a general matrix [there is] no such duality extending from the top down . . . (Foucault, 1990 [1978]: 94

It must also be noted that Foucault grafted his conceptualization of "power" (*pouvoir*) within an inextricable nexus to "knowledge" (*savoir*) and explained the interrelationship between the two,

> the use of the word knowledge (*savoir*) that refers to all procedures and all effects of knowledge (*connaissance*) which are acceptable at a given point in time and in a specific domain; and secondly, the term power (*pouvoir*) which merely covers a whole series of particular mechanisms, definable and defined, which seem likely to induce behaviors and discourses (Foucault, 2007: 60).

The nexus between power and knowledge, then, is clear: the former does not function without the latter.

The Relevance of Power / Knowledge

"For knowledge to function as knowledge it must exercise power" (Foucault, 2007b: 71)

Applied to the subject matter at hand, power has created the objects of 'welfare dependency' and 'personal responsibility', the 'truths' of welfare fraud and "tax rage" and the realm of workfare known as OW. The discourse produced, the resulting 'discursive regime' is replete with moralizing prejudices. As we will see in the qualitative data analysis to follow, these objects, truths, and realms of practice have produced a fundamentally classist "power [that] passes through the individuals it has constituted" (Foucault, 2003: 30). Here, we can begin to understand one compelling explanation of *how* "mimetic adoption of dominant values and manners appears among the subordinated" (Adam,1978: 86). Subordination can, and does, play a role in reproducing itself. Let us now examine the "words of welfare" as detailed by Schram.

Schram's American Welfare Policy Scholarship

"Welfare dependency discourse was never an accurate representation of a pre-existing reality, but over time it made itself real" (Schram, 2006:19).

Schram's postmodern American welfare policy analyses, as we have seen, provide a useful supplement and contemporary application to the theoretical groundwork laid by Foucault. There is also unique value in Schram's works in that he provides practical conceptualizations of 'culture' and 'cultural software'. Schram's compelling cultural critiques reach their intellectual acme in a detailed unpacking of how the uncritically de-contextualized notion of 'personal responsibility' deceptively functions to individualize poverty in welfare discourse while ignoring what globalization is doing to the labour market.

In the foreword to Words of Welfare (Schram, 1995: ix), Frances Fox Piven, explains why she finds Schram's approach to welfare policy analysis so informed. Piven does this, adeptly, by an illuminating comparison between Schram's postmodern approach and the dominant model of policy studies that uncritically assumes policies to be scientifically informed interventions to obvious pre-given social problems,

> Presumably the objective is to alter taken-for-granted
> conditions named poverty, or dependency, or underclass

> culture. The means, or strategies, of intervention are ostensibly derived from scientific studies of empirical cause and effect relations that identify the sorts of interventions, usually in the form of economic incentives and disincentives, that can be expected to reduce poverty and the cultural deficiencies associated with poverty. In other words, the dominant model regards policy as the rational and scientifically based manipulation of specific aspects of the circumstances of the poor to achieve the articulated goal of reducing their poverty.

Piven shows that the dominant model of policy science in American politics has resulted in: i) portrayals of welfare expenditures as cause for alarm when program costs amount to 1 percent of the federal budget; ii) claims that welfare encourages women to become perpetually dependent on handouts when the administration's own data show that 75% of recipients remain on the rolls for less than two years; iii) right-wing moralizing arguments suggesting that welfare has increased out of wedlock births while ignoring the reality that this phenomenon has increased in all social strata of society.

While one could certainly argue that these are prime examples of bad applications of the dominant model of policy science, there are also less incriminating applications of the dominant model (i.e. like when the depth of poverty becomes measured and examined as a variable determining the likelihood of escaping poverty (Ross et al, 2000). Schram claims,

> Policies do more than satisfy or dissatisfy; they change the basic features of the political landscape. Policies can set political agendas [determining what is and is not considered problematic and in need of amelioration] and shape identities and interests. They can influence beliefs about what is possible, desirable, and normal. They can alter conceptions of citizenship and status. They can channel or constrain agency, define incentives and redistribute resources. They can convey cues that define, arouse, or pacify constituencies (Soss and Schram, 2007: 113).

There is far too much that is missing from the "common sense" view that social policies simply remedy pre-given social problems by invoking scientifically informed interventions. Specifically, the latent and neglected dimensions of welfare policy, Schram (1995: xii) argues, are symbolic, "and the symbols or interpretations constructed by welfare policy discourse are transmitted both by words and arguments about policy and welfare practices". Symbolism matters because it constructs identity. Identity matters because it deeply influences how we view each other's worth, and the world around us. Critiquing both the material and cultural realities of American welfare reform, Piven argues,

> The point I want to make about these new practices is that they are simultaneously material and cultural in their effects. Grants are reduced, or terminated are obviously a very material change. But material practices, especially material consequences with such awesome consequences as the loss of a welfare grant, are also cultural because they help to shape the way people think about themselves and their world (Piven, 2001: 144).

Let us now review Schram's conceptualizations of culture and cultural software.

Culture and Cultural Software

"Social welfare policy has become unusually freighted with cultural significance" (Schram, 2000: 1)

Schram sees culture as "shared ways of communicating, coding, and categorizing. It is akin to what J.M. Balkin calls 'cultural software'" (Schram, 2000: 3). Cultural softwares, according to Balkin (1998), are the predominant conceptual binaries that are socially constructed and carry out a latent, but powerful, meaning-making interpretive function: "People make sense of the cultural world not through isolated conceptual oppositions but through networks of linked conceptual oppositions" (Balkin, 1998: 217) In After Welfare: The Culture of Post Industrial Society (Schram, 2000: 2-4) posits seven assumption about what culture is and how it functions: 1) culture makes social interaction possible; 2) culture invokes interpretive categories we use to understand the world; 3) these categories are often grounded in binary dichotomies; 4) a culture expands via the linking of interpretive categories from one area to another; 5) "new and unsettling social developments, such as same sex marriage or the increase of single parent families, tend to be understood in terms of pre-existing interpretive categories and conceptual oppositions" (p.3); 6) the bias of cultural categories can be re-worked for positive social change; and 7) contesting the unquestioned pre-given nature of culture is an important struggle that can have significant material consequences.

The applications, here, strike at the heart of my argument about the survival of classism. The unquestioned taxpayer / welfare recipient binary written into welfare policy is an integral part of the unquestioned "discursive regime" of power: there is a powerful cultural meaning attached to both sides of the dichotomy and this is integral to neoliberal communication, coding, and categorizing. The 'taxpayer' and 'the welfare recipient' invoke 'cultural categories that undergird the [neoliberal] 'social order' (Schram, 2000: 1).

Schram on 'Personal Responsibility'

"Blaming the victim gets legitimated by the seemingly neutral category of personal responsibility" (Schram, 2000: 28).

If Foucault (2006 [1969]: 30) made it clear that the task of discourse analysis is to uncover "what is being said in what is being said", Schram has carried out Foucault's project with impeccable clarity in decoding the subtext of "personal responsibility" in welfare discourse,

> The contemporary welfare policy discourse might sound fair in the abstract; however, in late 20th century America, it

> has become a way of blaming the poor for their poverty without ever having to say so. "Personal responsibility" allows the cultural biases of welfare to be "hidden in plain sight" (Schram, 2000: 27).

Ultimately, this translates into classism being "hidden in plain sight". The unfairness of "personal responsibility" lies in its implicit failure to consider employment related disadvantages grounded in such structural inequalities "posed by class, race, and gender" (Schram, 2000: 29). Adding to Schram's insights, personal responsibility glosses over several other employment related barriers, in particular, barriers related to health. While several of my respondents listed one, or more, serious health concerns as a barrier to employment (and were fighting hard to get past a restrictive bureaucracy to qualify for ODSP), there is ample evidence beyond my qualitative data to suggest "studies have repeatedly demonstrated the association between ill health and poverty" (O'Connor and Olsen, 1998: 164).

In addition to detailing why "personal responsibility" in welfare discourse culminates in unfair meaning making, Schram is also clear about how this happens,

> the behaviour implied by personal responsibility can be said to suggest an identity. The text of personal responsibility implies multiple identities available from the iconography of the dominant culture, among them the middle class man of virtue and the so called welfare queen as the embodiments of what personal responsibility represents and what it does not. The welfare queen is the implied visualizable other of the contemporary welfare discourse of personal responsibility (Schram, 2006: 29).

That welfare reform has vaulted images of personal responsibility to the forefront of thinking on poverty is significant in that "it is generally an instance of what some have called 'new' forms of discrimination that discriminate without explicitly saying so"

(Schram, 2006: 37). In other words, the meanings and interpretations invoked by the term *personal responsibility* foster discrimination by stealth.

Connecting Allport's Analysis of Prejudice With Schram's Insights on Culture

The words and arguments about policy and welfare practices fit the criteria for prejudice in general and meet the definitional threshold of classism in particular. The taxpayer / welfare recipient moral binary is freighted with a cultural in-group / out-group meaning and is the quintessential method of "typing by nouns" in the era of neoliberalism. Schram has repeatedly argued policy about the poor is about re-encoding the poor as the marginal "other." Ontario Works, as we shall see, has certainly accomplished this, and yet there is no word in conventional usage to articulate this "othering" process.

Some Limitations of Postmodern Theorizing on Power

"*If your only tool is a hammer, you tend to see every problem as a nail"* (Johnson, 1992: 108)

Poststructural analysis, notwithstanding its invaluable insights, unduly glosses over some critically important aspects of power. Inherited material prosperity is an important source of power for some because it expands their choices and, in many cases, enables them to have their will carried out. Inherited material deprivation is a source of powerlessness for others because it restricts their choices (in some cases quite severely) and undercuts their capacity to have their potential maximized or their will carried out. Although not entirely reducible to material standing, in some ways, power ***is*** something that some people possess and others clearly do not. For example, before I complete this section of my dissertation I have the power to go and snack on virtually anything I want – which I will be doing momentarily. When my brain gets tired of writing, I have the power to go and take a break at a quality gym – that will be in a few more hours. When I come back, after I re-fuel with a nutritious meal that I picked up in my car on the ride home, my brain will be rejuvenated. I will return to writing on my quality computer equipped with the most up to date software. If I were deprived of these powers / possessions, I would be significantly less equipped, and thus less able, to complete this dissertation. This incompleteness – devoid of any understanding whatsoever of the material conditions under which I am living my life -- would be attributed to my lack of intelligence, work ethic, or moral character. Possessing these (among other) powers, my privilege is literally invisible. Some will argue, and many will uncritically agree, that when I complete my doctorate and re-enter the middle class world of work, I will deserve to have my taxes cut because I work so hard.

While Foucault’s work is certainly invaluable to answering the “how?” of power, it stops short of adequately understanding the “who?” While postmodernists would, quite correctly, point out that there is heterogeneity within both the “rich” and the “poor” (or for that matter any categorical label) there is also the common thread of material privilege and poverty respectively within these groups (albeit experienced in different ways and at varying levels and in conjunction with a whole host of other forms of advantage and disadvantage). One could argue that Foucault’s claim that “Power comes from below; that is, there is no binary and all encompassing opposition between rulers and ruled at the root of power relations” (Foucault, 1990 [1978]: 94) seems to be “denying the ways in which the origins, identities, and development of subordinated categories of people remain fully rooted in the dynamics of capitalism” (Adam, 1997: 39). In a social policy and regressive tax environment where an already enormous material inequality is widening – tax cuts are making rich people richer and welfare reform is making poor people poorer -- sidestepping the compelling associations between material privilege and power, destitution and powerlessness, produces an ineluctably incomplete picture.

Further, Foucault's (1990 [1978]: 92) assertion that "By power, I do not mean "Power" as a group of institutions and mechanisms that ensure the subservience of a given state" seems to miss the harsh realities of what state power can do -- and whose interests are served (and disserved) by the operation of the state. Though Foucault never denied that the state is a source of power, this reality is lost by many of Foucault's followers. The power of the state could not possibly be clearer than in the repressive mechanisms of Ontario welfare policy. Consider the particulars of section 73.1 and 73.2 of the OWA,

> 1.) The *Labour Relations Act, 1995* does not apply with respect to participation in a community participation activity under this act
>
> **Unionization for participants prohibited** *
> (*bold in original)
>
> 2.) Without limiting the generality of subsection (1), under the *Labour Relations Act, 1995* no person shall do any of the following with respect to his or her participation in a community participation activity:
>
> 1.) Join a trade union
> 2.) Have the terms and conditions under which he or she participates determined through collective bargaining
> 3.) Strike.

Collective bargaining is legislated out of the equation and the conditions of workfare placements are not open to negotiation. It does not matter if a workfare placement is not even coming close to making a participant marketable, or if a placement does not even exist (as in the case of many of my research respondents) – it is not legal to form a union, collectively bargain, or strike. This draconian clause in the OW Act did not receive the attention it warranted.

While there was a provincial tribunal set up to oversee the changes in welfare legislation, the OWA sec. 67(2) made it clear that,

> The Tribunal shall not inquire into or make a decision concerning,
>
> a.) The constitutional validity of a provision of an Act or a regulation; or
>
> b.) The legislative authority for a regulation made under an act 1997, c. 25, Sced. A, s.67

Not only was there prohibitive state regulation here, there was state legislation regulating that this regulation could not be deregulated or legally questioned. Power here, in this instance, needed no capillaries: it was functioning by legally sanctioned edict from the start. It could not be argued that making poor people 21.6% poorer, or enacting draconian eligibility restrictions, was constitutionally violating anyone's rights (under sec. 7 of "The Charter of Rights and Freedoms") to "life, liberty, liberty or the security of person."

Finally, there is too much that is cloaked in the view that "power is not something that is acquired, seized, or shared, something that one holds on to or allows to slip away" (Foucault, 1990 [1978]: 94). In some ways, power is not solely something that one has or doesn't have, but in other ways power must be associated with material and social standing. Foucault's view seems to be overlooking that some very important forms of power are acquired when one assumes certain vocational positions replete with their accompanying material and status rewards, and that power is something that can – and in the cases of several of my research respondents, has – slipped away.

As we will see in the qualitative data analysis in the next two chapters: there is power in being able to pay all of one's bills and in having the resources to carry out one's life in a way that is materially desirable; there is a very real form of powerlessness in not being able to meet living expenses, and existing under conditions of material deprivation. When the material resources to move forward remain beyond one's reach, this is a very profound form of powerlessness. This fate is likely to befall certain people through no fault of their own, while others are likely to be forever exempt from it by virtue of their circumstances of birth.

Discourse vs. Ideology or Ideological Discourses?

Schram posits his own Foucaultian take on discourse, detailing what he argues are the distinctions between the key concepts of a discourse analysis and class analysis of perception and subjectivity,

> What we call the conspiracy of discourse is a potent force for making the world the way it is because discourse is more than mere talk or propaganda. It is also different than ideology. Discourse is arguably more powerful than ideology. Ideology characterizes an alleged pre-existing reality, but discourse constitutes that reality. Although the distortions of ideology can be challenged by pointing to inconsistent facts, discourse operates more insidiously to constitute those facts (Schram, 2006: 12).

While Schram's argument is compelling, it is a mistake to overlook the class based interests that are served by the ideological dissemination of facts and their discursive constitution. While some authors have gone even further than Schram to abandon Marxist notions of ideology as a theory of perception, in his doctoral dissertation "*Invisible Hands, Visible Harms: Ideology and the Welfare System*", Palitto (2002) argues that abandonment is unduly premature. Palitto's revision of orthodox Marxism sees ideology as distortions of meaning that serve unjust domination. Wallerstein (1995: 230) suggests that ideas still matter, serve the interests of some people to the expense of others and that those "ideas do not come out of nowhere [thus] thinking about the social bases of our ideas, seems more necessary than ever."

I would suggest that rather than seeing ideology and discourse as two entirely separate and autonomous conceptualizations of power and perception, it is possible – in fact, quite necessary -- to graft the strengths of both perspectives and see how the constitution of meaning via the discursive 'words of welfare' is patently ideological. Further, as Barry Adam notes,

> Hegemonic discourses are scarcely primal causes in constituting subjects; rather they require propagators and beneficiaries. It remains necessary to explain why they flourish or wither in particular societies and eras, and why some succeed in "hailing" subjects and why others fail. (Adam, 2002: 105)

So, who is propagating? Who is benefitting? According to Steven Pimpare's The New Victorians: Poverty and Propaganda in Two Gilded Ages (2004) self interested free market business conservatives orchestrated the attack on welfare. Studies from the Fraser Institute in Canada (Scafer et al, 2001) and TD Bank Financial Group (2005) followed the suit of their American counterparts by praising conservative welfare policy shifts after the fact. There were powerfully mobilized elite driven campaigns leading the charge. Redistribution of wealth to the privileged and attacks on the underprivileged were inextricably linked. As much as Harris claimed that his policies originated in what "Main street" wanted, he was carrying out what "Bay street" wanted.

In a political and policy environment where an already enormous material inequality is growing larger, it is important not to lose sight of what is still invaluable in a class analysis. Given that Marx was clear that "the only wheels which political economy set in motion are greed and the war among the greedy" (Marx, 1844: 132) in the era of neoliberalism, we should be asking, as Wallerstein (1995: 231) does, “Who, or what would be served, by ignoring [Marx’s work] completely?” It seems clear that greed and greedy people would be, and are being, served when class analysis is flattened.

Gender and Power

It must also be noted that there is an inequitable gender dynamic creating power imbalances (McCormack, 2002; Copeland, 2003) in what Baker and Tippin (1999: 39-44) call ‘Malestream’ theories of the welfare state. Foucault’s argument that power is not something some people have, or don’t have, overlooks who has easier access to paid work, and who is culturally expected to carry out what forms of unpaid (or poorly paid) domestic labour under what conditions. Notwithstanding Foucault’s important contribution in understanding the “how?” of power, to make invisible or downplay the “who?”, is to do a disservice to those who are on the undesirable end of power imbalances.

Assessing the Political Dimensions of Foucault’s Theorizing

“By this phrase ‘political dimension’ I mean an analysis that relates to what we are willing to accept in our world – to accept, to refuse, and to change, both in ourselves and in our circumstances” (Foucault, 2007a: 152).

One does not adopt a theoretical perspective and take the time to author an extended monograph on a given topic, unless one sees tremendous value in the strengths of that perspective. Consider Foucault’s analysis of his own work,

> But my project is precisely to bring it about that they ‘no longer know what to do’, so that the acts, gestures, discourses which up until them seemed to go without saying become problematic, difficult, dangerous. This effect is intentional. And then I have some news for you: for me the problem of the prisons isn’t one for the ‘social workers’ but one for the prisoners (Foucault, 1991: 84).

If there is power in discourse, and there most certainly is, then to affect change we do need to "invent new ways of talking and seeing" (Foucault, 2007a: 21). It would be ideal if those uncritically accepted meaning-making terms would become "problematic, difficult, [and] dangerous."

But Foucault's brilliance has not had the impact that it may have had – and may still have – because his work (like that of many of his followers) is too often written in unintelligible and inaccessible academic language. If "new ways of talking" are not clear, enough people will not hear what is being said. Following from Foucault's proclamation that his problem is for the prisoners, it simply cannot be overlooked that the overwhelming majority of disenfranchised people (there may be rare exceptions) are going to be able to understand Foucault's discourse on discourse to translate his political dimension practical action. In Structural Social Work: Ideology, Theory, and Practice, (Mullaly, 1997: 109) posits that effective change agents must communicate "in a form that is intelligible to those who are oppressed in society". Those who are serious about laying classism (or any form of prejudice) to rest, would be well served to heed Mullaly's call for intelligibility.

Conclusion

Just as Foucault (1980: 110) argued that "there were no ready-made concepts, no approved terms of vocabulary available to question the power-effects of psychiatry", I suggest that precisely the same argument can, and must, be levied against the power effects of welfare reform. Naming classism, understanding how it survives and is transmitted in welfare discourse, is an important strategic endeavour. There is practical transformative potential in "finding words that will at last name accurately that which has never been named before" (Foucault, 2007a [1966]: 130). It would be hard to imagine the civil rights movement accomplishing what it accomplished had the populace been unaware of what racism was. The same can be said for all three waves of the women's movement and sexism. In 2010, the general populace remains oblivious to what classism is.

This chapter opened with an epigraph from Foucault suggesting that power creates illusions. One of the illusions created by the power effects of Ontario Works is the legitimizing inhumane policy practice of invoking the "perversity thesis" – ultimately making poor people poorer – to punish them out of poverty. In chapter six we will review what 24 respondents on social assistance had to say about the conservative view that exceptionally low social assistance rates force people to work, and thus are a wise policy decision.

There is also the illusion, invoked by the unquestioned totalizing use of the term "taxpayer", that people with enormous amounts of wealth have been given a raw deal by our system of distribution and that we need to continue to cut their taxes and give them more. The wealthy, after all, are the good people of society. The poor, on the other hand, have reaped what they failed to sow.

If there is power in discourse, and there most certainly is, the natural corollary of that observation is that there must also be power in counter discourse. Schram cites the underappreciated legacy of Amartya Sen to suggest that, particularly in a culture pre-occupied by notions of personal responsibility, "we must first re-allocate resources sufficiently so that all persons have the ability to develop their capabilities sufficiently to participate as full members of society" (Schram, 2006: 130). This insight is so important to those most directly impacted by welfare policy, and yet this reality remains so thoroughly subjugated. As an effort to counter these disturbing realities, I will examine the subjugated knowledges of research participants in chapter 5. As Lott and Bullock (2007: 20) have argued in Psychology and Economic Injustice: Personal, Professional and Political Intersections, “We need to take seriously the question asked by Fine (2002: 20), ‘Who is absent? Who is excluded? And who is refused an audience?’”

Chapter 4
Methodology: Strengths and Limitations

"Qualitative methods are most useful and powerful when they are used to discover how respondents see the world" (McCracken, 1988: 21)

This chapter will detail the qualitative methodology utilized to carry out this study by reviewing the specifics of data sources, recruitment strategy, sample and sampling frames, semi-structured interviews, coding, analysis, and the methodological rationales for presenting this dissertation in the form of an "autoethnography" (Ellis and Bochner, 2000: 733-768) reflexively explaining the research process through the first-person narrative medium of a "confessional tale" (Van Maanen, 1988: 73-100). The chapter will conclude with a critical assessment of both the primary strengths and weaknesses of this particular approach.

Epistemological Standpoint

Like virtually any research project, the methods employed in this dissertation serve as instruments to arrive at conclusion(s) presented in the form of valid knowledge claims (Power, 2002: 128). I operate from the assumptions noted, and synthesized, by Power (2002: 128),

> 'Empirical propositions have no absolute status, but are only claims to truth, to be tested as adequate through the inter-subjective judgment of the scientific community' (Fowler, 1996: 8). The practice of science, and scientific sociology, involves 'moving from a less true to a more true knowledge, or rather, as Bachelard puts it, an 'approximated, that is to say, rectified, knowledge' (Bourdieu, Chamboredon, and Passeron, 1991: 8).

Data Sources

Semi-structured interviews with 24 people on Ontario Works in Oxford County serve as the primary data source for this monograph. To address the central research question and meet the research objectives, speaking directly with people on social assistance, and making these conversations the focal point of analysis, was a natural decision. Data analysis is supplemented by welfare policy in the form of the Ontario Works Act, the legislation that preceded the OWA (the General Welfare Assistance Act), and selected political commentaries from the most outspoken proponents of the cultural logic of neoliberalism whose prominent "words of welfare" (Schram, 1995) were disseminated into public discourse, written into public policy, and (as I will demonstrate) inculcated into the subjectivities of respondents. These data sources are suitable for answering the central research question guiding this inquiry: How does OW, and the accompanying logic of neoliberal welfare reforms, impact the subjectivities of respondents?

Recruitment

In the fall of 2006, I approached the executive director of Ontario Works Oxford soliciting his assistance in order to secure respondents to interview for this research. I explained that I was a PhD student and a social worker with the local Children's Aid Society. The executive director presented as quite approachable and asked, during this initial meeting, exactly what I was researching and what was prompting me to carry out this research. I was candid in stating that I wanted to capture how OW was experienced on the ground by those most impacted by welfare reforms. When probed further, I expressed concern with the logic informing welfare policy shifts in that it ultimately reduced the problems of poverty and unemployment to the personal deficits of the poor and unemployed. But irrespective of my views, I advised that I wanted to speak with people on social assistance to find out, from their perspectives, what is and is not working. The executive director gave me a nod of affirmation and proceeded to assist me in making provisions to facilitate data collection by including an informational flyer I had created advertising the research (see appendices) within the social assistance checks that were mailed out in February 2007.

For ethical reasons of confidentiality, OW could not provide me with the contact info of people on social assistance, but they could make my study known to them. OW Oxford was helpful in that the only requirements placed on me for advertising this research was assuming the cost of copying the flyers (925 in February 2007 and 904 in June 2007) and ensuring that all of the flyers were folded so that they could fit in a letter sized envelope. In short, OW Oxford was helpful in facilitating this study. For a social service organization to so easily facilitate an unsolicited researcher's request to examine how clients experience their services (especially when that researcher had been candid expressing concerns with the logic of the policy directives governing how the organization operated) was, in my view, impressive.

Consistent with Baxter (1997), McCormack (2002) and Soss (2005), engaging economically disenfranchised people for research purposes proved challenging (and these challenges are often attributable to the effects of their disenfranchisement). Recruiting enough participants proved difficult and it was not much of a consolation for me to realize that other researchers investigating comparable subject matter had gone through the similar challenges. Power (2002: 139) detailed her experience by pointing out,

> lone mothers did not respond to more 'sociologically acceptable' methods of recruitment, such as sending formal, written requests as for participation, but were willing to participate when referred by someone who was known.

Snowball sampling had only limited success in my study as it provided me with two additional research participants. Notwithstanding the discouraging challenges recruiting respondents, it was encouraging that those who became engaged in interviews, twenty four in total, participated thoroughly in the interview process. All respondents presented as very willing to share the particulars of their personal stories and detail their views on a variety of issues related to social policy and impoverishment.

The first round of recruitment secured 12 respondents who replied to the invitation to participate in this study and one additional participant via snowball sample. Knowing that more respondents would be required, a second round of recruitment took place in June 2007 and this secured another 10 respondents who replied directly to the flyer soliciting research participants and another respondent via snowball sampling. Snowball cases were solicited by asking each research participant if they knew anyone else on social assistance in Oxford county who might be interested in participating in my study. If respondents answered affirmatively, I provided them with additional flyers advertising this research and requested that they be passed on to anyone else on social assistance who may be interested in talking to me. Both respondents secured via snowball sample advised that they did not receive the original flyer advertising my research with their social assistance check, but became familiar with this research via the contact that referred them to me. While my intent was to provide every person in Oxford County an equal opportunity to participate in this research, it is not certain if everyone in the sampling frame ended up receiving notification of this study. Through my social work position with a different organization, I was made aware of two other people in Oxford County who were on social assistance but did not receive the pamphlet advertising this research. When I initially discovered this, my first instinct was to secure these two people for an interview and include them in my study. The research ethics board at the University of Windsor, however, advised that this would not be permissible as it would clearly constitute a conflict of interest. This decision that was disappointing to me at the time, but in hindsight the REB at U of W was clearly fulfilling its role.

After 24 interviews it appeared that I had reached the point of saturation. To be sure, each respondent had a somewhat unique story and a different way of expressing it. Further, there was also some uniqueness and variation in the ways each respondent articulated their views on various social and political issues that arose during the course of semi-structured interviews. But amid the uniqueness and differences, there were also consistently recurring themes: the undesirability of coming to OW, the instability and insecurity of life on the system, experiencing degradation, barriers to employment, and (perhaps most intriguingly) about how the poverty attributions respondents expressed about “others” simply did not fit with their own story. In the later interviews, I was not hearing much that was different from what I was hearing earlier in the data collection process. After having talked to twenty four people, it was time to move from analyzing each interview separately to a more comprehensive qualitative analysis determining what could, and could not, be meaningfully ascertained from the totality of all twenty four interviews. The quality of my analysis, in part, would hinge upon understanding the sample of respondents who participated in this study in relation to the sampling frame from of all people on social assistance in the municipality where this research took place and the province of Ontario as a whole. Further, to be credible, the conclusions drawn from this study (like those of any meaningful research) would have to be placed within the context of the knowledge base established by the existing research literature.

The Sample in Relation to the Sampling Frames

The recruitment strategy for this research was designed to provide all people on social assistance in Oxford County an equal opportunity to participate in this research. As previously noted, at least four people in Oxford county who should have received the flyer advertising this research reported that they did not. It is not known how many others of the more than 900 people in the sampling frame were not made aware of this research. Just over 1% of the sampling frame participated in each round of recruitment. When Lightman (2003) carried out comparable research attempting to recruit people on social assistance in Toronto, there was an 8% response rate. One can realistically deduce from these numbers that there were very likely more than four people who did not receive the flyer advertising this study.

As one might expect the sample that chose be interviewed was not a completely representative sample of the population under investigation. It is necessary to look at the particulars of the sample in relation to the sampling frame. This analysis will entail examining the demographic traits of age, gender, race, and family composition. For each of these traits it will be made clear who was over and underrepresented and a discussion methodological implications will follow.

Age

The age of respondents ranged from 27 to 59 years. The average age of respondents was 42.14 years old with a standard deviation of 9.09. While the average or standard deviation of the sampling frame was not available, the specific numbers of welfare recipients who fell into the following age brackets was provided to me by the MCSS.

AGE DISTRIBUTION OF SAMPLING FRAME (January 2007) AND SAMPLE

Age	16-19	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	45-49	50-54	55-59	60-64	65 +
% of the sampling frame N=200753	5.94	15.67	14.19	12.69	12.79	13.04	10.61	7.18	4.74	2.79	.37
% of sample	0	0	16.6	12.5	12.5	4.16	20.83	8.33	12.5	0	0
# =	0	0	4	3	3	1	5	2	3	0	0

Source: Electronic Correspondence With Ministry of Community and Social Services (2009)

To concisely summarize who was over and under-represented in terms of age demographics, the youngest and oldest age cohorts were not represented at all and most age groups in between had an approximate representation. One can reasonably posit that being at the extreme ends of the age groups expected to participate in the labour force poses unique barriers that were missed by this study. Further, like virtually all qualitative research examined in the process of reviewing the literature, this study did not examine the perspectives of children. This is a notable gap in the literature given that approximately 40% of OW beneficiaries are children. According to the MCSS, in January of ’07, of the 422 641 total OW beneficiaries, 159 015 were children (37.62%). In an attempt to limit the extent to which this limitation of excluding children’s’ voices detracts from the analysis in this study, chapter 5 will review qualitative data from the Interfaith Social Assistance Reform Coalition whereby children in poverty detail the realities of impoverishment.

Gender

Three quarters of respondents 75% (n = 18) were female and one quarter 25% (n = 6) were male. During the month that data collection commenced for this research, January 2007, there were 200 696 cases (referring to either a single individual or family unit). Of those cases, 113 888 (56.7%) were female and 86 808 (43.2%)[16] were male. The total number of beneficiaries on OW (single individuals and heads of family units plus all their dependents) was 382 301. Of all beneficiaries 151 944 (39.7%) were children. Comparing the sample to the sampling frame, then, women were overrepresented in this study, men were under-represented and children were not represented at all.

Race

Twenty two respondents identified their race / ethnicity as white while one respondent advised that she was black and another stated that she was from aboriginal descent. Like McCormack (2002: 10), "one weakness of my sample is the lack of racial diversity of those interviewed in the [research locale]". While only one of McCormack's seventeen respondents from the locale of an urban ghetto she called "Harbor City" was white, only two of twenty four respondents in my research project (8.3%) were not white. According to Bezanson (2006) 13% of the Canadian population is non-white (Aboriginal or racial minority). Given that 3.8% of the Canadian population is Aboriginal, this population was represented in my sample. But it is important to not lose sight of the reality that having only one Aborignal person who opted not to make reference to their ethnicity does not even begin to cover the depth and prevalence of Aborignal impoverishment in Canada. (Specific data on racial inequality and poverty will be provided in the strengths and limitations section of this chapter). Contact with the office of the Ontario Minister of

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[16] The Ministry advised that the numbers were rounded and thus only add up to 99.9% of the caseload.

Community and social services revealed that the racial composition of OW recipients in Ontario is not known.

Family Composition

In terms of gender and family composition, here are some demographic OW statistics, provided via personal correspondence with the MCSS[17]. In January of 2007, single people with children constituted 70 166 (34.96%) of cases and 194 311 beneficiaries (50.82%), 118 065 (30.88%) of whom were children. Single people with children were adequately represented in my sample then, given that 33.33% (n=8) fit into that family composition. Single people with children constituted 72 597 (31.64%) cases and 200 118 (47.43%) beneficiaries, 120 833 of whom were children. Single adults were slightly over-represented in the sample, 41.6% (n=10).

While the lack of representativeness of the youngest and oldest categories of recipients is one limitation of this study it should be noted that even "the most carefully selected sample will almost never provide a perfect representation of the population from which it was selected. There will always be some degree of sampling error" (Babbie, 1995: 226-227).

As in any research project recruiting respondents, it is reasonable to conclude that participants who chose to participate probably had different characteristics from those who opted to remain on the sidelines. Most of the people in my study were candid that they had no alternative but to rely on family and friends in moments of material and social crisis. While acknowledging that different people have different reasons for participating (or not participating) in a research project, it seems reasonable to assume that others within the sampling frame may not have had this additional support and thus were too isolated and atomized to respond to my study. Power (2002: 141) wrote about becoming familiar with two people in her community who chose not to respond to her request to be interviewed,

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[17] Sylvia Gurriero, a policy analyst with the Ministry of Community and Social Services provided the provincial demographics to me via electronic correspondence.

> These last two cases were poignant reminders that I was only able to recruit single mothers who had the security and resources to speak with me, and that there were others in more vulnerable and precarious situations who did not have those resources.

To minimize the extent to which the sampling error limits this study – and to increase the verisimilitude of my argument – I will set my findings within the context of what other samples in other studies have found. Notwithstanding some sampling limitations of this research, it is important to note that the generalizability of my argument is enhanced by the reality that they qualitative data gathered by other researchers examining different cohorts produced remarkably similar results.

Semi-Structured Interviews

"The method [of interviewing] can take us into the mental world of the individual, to glimpse at the categories and logic by which he or she sees the world. It can also take us in the lifeworld of the individual, to see the content and pattern of daily experience" (McCracken, 1988: 9)

I began each interview by remunerating respondents $15.00 and proceeded to explain to each participant their rights as a participant in the study. I stated that I was not affiliated with OW and that under no circumstances would I compromise the anonymity of anyone who was a part of this research. I discussed having gone through a research ethics board at the University of Windsor to ensure, to the maximum extent possible, that no harm would come to people who participated in my research by virtue of their participation. I invited respondents to choose a pseudonym for themselves and (where relevant) their places of employment and explained the rationale for utilizing pseudonyms. To protect respondent's pseudonyms are used throughout the write up of this research. Almost without exception, this preamble to the interviews appeared to put respondents at ease. I requested permission to audio tape interviews and advised respondents that they could have me turn off the audio recorder at any time without having to give me a rationale or explanation. Each respondent signed the necessary releases to authorize audio recording the interviews and verify that they had been remunerated (see appendices). It was made clear to all respondents that they did not have to answer any question that they did not want to answer, and that they reserved the unconditional right to end the interview at any time, for any reason, without having to explain or justify that decision. I believe that describing the ethics safeguards to respondents had the effect of putting most conversational partners at ease during the interview process. Except for three respondents who opted not to reveal their age, all respondents answered every question that was posed and no respondent exercised their right to have the audio recording device turned off or terminate the interview.

The content of my benchmark questions in the semi-structured interviews revolved primarily around the following areas: coming to OW, living on a social assistance income, attempting to exit social assistance, support networks, experiences with workers and / or work placement, views on the Ontario Works Act, and suggestions for improving OW. Open ended questions asked respondents to share any other experiences or views they wanted to discuss and asked if they felt we had missed anything important in our discussion. This semi-structured approach allowed participants to emphasize the aspects of their experiences with OW that they deemed most important and to articulate their views in their own words. The interview guide was specifically designed to concurrently address questions that the existing research literature deemed problematic, yet at the same time to afford participants to discuss whatever they deemed relevant irrespective of the preconceived notions I had going into the interview. The flexibility of the semi-structured style afforded the opportunity to probe ideas, rephrase questions, and investigate the basis on which recipients' views were grounded.

Research participants were invited to choose the location of interviews. Two thirds of respondents chose to be interviewed in their home, almost one third in a designated coffee shop chosen by conversational partners, and one participant chose to meet and tell her story in a local library. All interviews were preceded with informal greetings and small talk that led into the ethics preamble prior to officially starting the interview. When respondents made important comments outside interviews, I requested that they would repeat what they had said on my dictaphone (audio cassette recorder). This request was accommodated on all occasions and it was common for respondents to appear pleased that I had a keen interest in recording what they had to say. Almost all interviews lasted approximately one hour in duration with the shortest interview being forty five minutes and the longest lasting just over two hours. All of the people who participated in this study were promised anonymity in any public materials based on their interviews and were invited to choose their own pseudonym. While a few respondents advised that I could use their real name, I opted not to do so.

Other researchers interviewing respondents under comparable conditions in different locales have noted that "most informants appeared surprisingly relaxed and comfortable with the interviews" (Soss, 2005: 23) presumably because they were eager to tell their story (Hays, 2003). This was my perception of how most respondents experienced the interview process in this research. It appeared that most could sense (and appreciate) that the ethics preamble was designed to protect them, and in making it clear that I was not affiliated with OW I believe that most respondents gathered, quite correctly, I was carrying out this research because I may have some concern for their plight. Also, in providing financial remuneration ($15.00) immediately when meeting with each respondent, and advising them that I would be remunerated from the department at my university, I believe assisted in building a favourable rapport with respondents. This was significant because,

> When interview informants recount their own experiences, their stories are shaped by what they perceived at the time of the events, what they can remember during the interview, and what they are willing to share with the interviewer (Soss, 2005: 19).

I believe that I solicited more data than I otherwise would have because informants' recollections did not appear compromised by anxiety during the interviews, and virtually all respondents seemed candid and open when revealing their personal stories and perspectives on policy.

In terms of the substantive content of interviews, comparable qualitative research has suggested that the cultural and sociological significance of the data analysis lies in the critical understanding that,

> The interviews were a meaning making process; while women recounted moments during which they experienced welfare stigma, their narratives also allowed [the researcher] to gain some insights into the process through which they construct their identity in relation to the discourse (McCormack, 2002: 15)

The particulars of exactly how the insights of this research were gained via examination of the qualitative data lie in detailing the process of coding the transcripts to analyze the meaning making that resonated through the interviews.

Coding and Analysis

"Data analysis is exciting because you discover themes and concepts embedded throughout your interviews" (Rubin & Rubin, 1995: 226).

All twenty-four interviews were transcribed in their entirety and entered into QSR N6 qualitative software analysis program. Transcribing the interviews myself provided me with an in-depth and detailed knowledge of the data I had to work with. Further, because I was hearing the data for a second time during transcription, and often had visual images to supplement the auditory recording, the transcriptions were very likely more accurate than they would have been had I chosen to hire another person for this task (see Power, 2002: 147-149). After having carried out and transcribed the interviews, I listened to the audio recording of all twenty four interviews again prior to carrying out the coding process. Further, each of twenty four transcripts were read separately to begin the process of beginning to make sense of the data as a coherent whole.

After the transcripts and audio recordings had been reviewed, coding was the first tangible step in the process of analysis. Rubin and Rubin (1995: 238) define coding as, "the process of grouping interviewees' responses into categories that bring together similar ideas, concepts, or themes." As one might expect, the prospect of beginning the process of making sense of more than 300 pages of interview data was somewhat intimidating. Coding the data effectively necessitated a comprehensive microanalysis. Strauss and Corbin (1998: 57), in a thorough examination of the coding process, define micro analysis as "the detailed line-by-line analysis necessary at the beginning of a study to generate initial categories (with their properties and dimensions) and to suggest the relationships among categories."

Nineteen general categories and codes provided the basis of analysis informing the write up. Within almost each category and code there were two recurring themes that resonated throughout the entirety of the qualitative data, virtually without exception (the exceptions will be examined in chapters 5 and 6). First, when respondents would question, challenge or discredit the predominant cultural narratives about poverty and welfare receipt, they would concretely evidence their case by drawing upon their experiential knowledge and detailing why they did not consider themselves to be personally irresponsible in light of the circumstantial realities confronting them. This phenomenon occurred throughout the explored themes of coming to social assistance, life 'on the system', and when respondents discussed their efforts to leave welfare or detailed the undesirable reasons that realistically precluded this from happening. These stories were often foregrounding or followed by stories of experiencing the stigma of poverty and welfare receipt – a stigma they claimed should not be applied to them.

Notwithstanding the frequency with which respondents spoke of experiencing an unfair stigma, interviewees would just as frequently accommodate and reproduce public discourse and the dominant pejorative narratives of welfare. Specifically, it was common for conversational partners to discuss "others on the system" who fit the irresponsible "work-shy" caricatured images that initially fuelled reforms (and were later fuelled by reforms). Going into the interviews, I was anticipating that I would encounter some "working class conservatism" (Gough, 1979) in the form of in-group hostility (Bishop, 1994), but I was completely unprepared for how frequent, and in some cases how severe, this phenomenon would be. Early in the data collection process I came to understand why my thesis supervisor had persisted in suggesting that I explore the merits of the governmentality paradigm and began to appreciate his patience when I was too mired in a different theoretical orientation and conceptualization of power to understand that power does, in fact, pass through the people it has constituted. While it was becoming clearer what theory would come to guide my research, I was still facing the problem of method and coding over three hundred pages.

The coding and analyses processes were heavily informed by Rubin and Rubin's superlative (1995) Qualitative Interviewing: The Art of Hearing Data. The extended discussion in a chapter aptly entitled "What Did You Hear? Data Analysis" on recognizing concepts within themes proved particularly useful. One particular passage is worth exploring in detail as it came to prove indispensable to my coding and analysis, and ultimately, to arriving at the central argument of my dissertation,

> Sometimes people describe a core idea but don't label it with a single word or phrase, so you then create a label yourself for the concept . . . When looking for concepts and core ideas that interviewees have not labelled with the specific word, ask yourself first, 'what is the interviewee talking about?' Then, is the idea important? If it is important, can I summarize this idea with a word or phrase that suggests the meaning of the underlying idea? If the answer to that question is also yes, you have yourself a concept (Rubin and Rubin, 1995: 231).

Supplementing Rubin and Rubin's practical directives, I also asked myself how frequently this unnamed idea presented itself among different respondents. I found the qualitative data I had gathered was exceptionally amenable to having an application of this analytical process, so much so, that I found the process of coding to be exciting because I began to feel that I had stumbled upon some important insights. Virtually all respondents expressed the core ideas of being treated harshly or rudely (both within and beyond the welfare bureaucracy) because of their impoverishment or welfare receipt, and described why this de-contextualized harsh treatment was unfair given the realities of their lives. Yet the core explanation given by virtually all respondents when asked "why do you think poor people are poor?" was "because there is something wrong with them". Often, that "something" was taken to be an irresponsible aversion to work. When I looked at these recurring passages repeatedly, and asked myself what the interviewees were talking about, I determined that they were talking about, and exhibiting, classism. Looking closer, I asked, "within [this] one category . . . how uniform are the examples? Do the illustrations suggest some nuance of meaning in concept or theme? (Rubin and Rubin, 1995: 252) I answered by creating two subsidiary coding categories: "experiencing classism" and "exhibiting classism". When I asked if these ideas were important, the obvious answer was "yes". Summarizing these themes was possible, and I recognized that I had stumbled upon an under-researched concept – and a very real but un-named cultural phenomenon -- to write about.

Qualitative Interviewing: The Art of Hearing Data also proved invaluable in providing another practical directive for my analysis that also proved to be an integral component in the cultivation of my central argument,

> When you are looking for underlying meanings and themes, it can be useful to pick out and analyze stories . . . A story if often thought out in advance and designed to make a point, usually one that cannot be made in a direct way . . . . Stories often communicate significant themes that explain a topical or cultural arena. Because interviewees seldom preface stories with "I am going to tell you a story", you have to learn to recognize them. (Rubin and Rubin, 1995: 231).

On countless other occasions it became easy to pick up on what was occurring during interviews because I had the good fortune of being armed with the insights of Rubin and Rubin (1995) whose extensive experience in qualitative research show that it is common for respondents to articulate their views through the medium of a story. When I specifically began to look for stories within the qualitative data, they were clearly abundant and I went back to Rubin and Rubin (1995: 233) to make sense of the stories, "Once you notice a story, try to figure out what lessons it is trying to communicate. In cultural studies . . . stories often present moral themes." When I began to examine the underlying meanings and themes of these stories (which we will examine in detail in the findings chapters 5 – 7), my central argument – armed with a pivotal concept unnamed in the data -- started to take shape.

When I continued to analyze and re-analyze the qualitative data in N6, the recurring patterns I noted about the relatively common meanings about poverty, welfare, and taxes it started to became clear that "culture and social structure were mapped into the mental structures of the persons studied" (Denzin, 1997: xvi), social structure being a recurring pattern of perception or behaviour that are external to individuals but that exerts a coercive influence on their lives. My interview data suggest that there are structured and patterned attributions for impoverishment, and this phenomenon transcends my project. "Research consistently shows that Americans tend to associate poverty with personal deficiency and failure and to hold the poor in low esteem." (Soss, 2005: 38) There was clearly something happening in my data that was larger than the interviewees who were providing me with their insights. I went back to Rubin and Rubin again because I recalled that they had given direction on hearing themes, "When you hear themes, ask yourself which ones go together. Related themes help you build towards a broader description of an overall theory" (Rubin & Rubin, 1995: 234). The illustration provided was directly germane to my investigation,

> Themes provide explanations for how or why things happen. 'People are poor because they are lazy' or 'People

> are poor because companies buy equipment and lay off workers' (Rubin and Rubin, 1995: 234).

As I concluded my analysis, I began to locate my finding within what other researchers had discovered. I thought about how social psychological theory on prejudice and poststructural theory on discourse, together, could explain what was happening,

> In the final stages of analysis, you organize the data in ways that help you formulate themes, refine concepts, and link them together to create a clear description of a culture or topic. This material is then interpreted in terms of the literature and theories in the researchers field (Rubin and Rubin, 1995: 251).

Chapters 5-7 are the culmination of merging theory and method to highlight my findings within the context of the existing literature.

The Rationale For an Autoethnography Written in the form of a Confessional Tale.

"The most admirable thinkers within the scholarly community . . . do not split their work from their lives. They seem to take both too seriously to allow such dissociation, and they want to use each for the enrichment of the other" (Mills, 1959: 195)

An autoethnography is an "autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural" (Ellis and Bochner, 2000: 739). Confessional tales (Van Maanen, 1988: 73-100) acknowledge openly that,

> Ethnographic writing of any kind is a complex matter, dependent on an unaccountable number of strategic choices and active constructions (e.g. what details to include or omit; how to summarize the present data; what voice to select; what quotations to use) (Van Maanen, 1988: 73)

Confessional tales make the above named decisions, that are frequently latent and unaccountable in different writing genres, manifest and accountable by re-counting them as they occurred throughout the "confessional" research process. Far from compromising the integrity of scholarship, this accountability puts the reader in a more informed position to assess the merits of research because the processes and logic of arriving at the central conclusions are more open to analysis and critique. This genre of writing can differ in the extent to which emphasis is placed on the research process (graphy), personal (auto), and cultural (ethnos) (Ellis and Bochner, 2000: 740). While most of this thesis will focus on the cultural given that the primary research question is investigating the impact of cultural influences on subjectivities, at select points I also document aspects of my personal biography (auto) and the research process (graphy). Part of my rationale for doing so is concisely stated thus,

> Qualitative researchers try to be conscious of the perspective they bring to a study. For that reason, they often explain their own background and particular interest in the research question as part of the report (Locke, et al 2000: 99).

The positivist ‘doctrine of immaculate perception” (Van Maanen, 1988: 73) should, at the time of this writing, seem methodologically *passé*. My academic rationale for turning to an autoethnography is bolstered by a realization posited in the form of a rhetorical question,

> Why should we take it for granted that an author’s personal feelings and thoughts should be omitted? After all, who is the person collecting the evidence, drawing the inferences, and reaching the conclusions? (Ellis and Bochner, 2000: 734).

Comprehensively researching the subject matter of governance through discourse in the realm of child welfare, Cradock candidly acknowledges in his doctoral dissertation that “it would be dishonest of me to pretend that my occupational experience and the tacit knowledge this experience created have not coloured my deliberations” (Cradock, 2003: 14). I seek to emulate this candour and will reflexively account for the undeniable reality that in arriving at the conclusion that classism is embedded in welfare policy and discourse, I collected the evidence, I drew the inferences, and I reached the conclusions. My valuations lead me to conclude that everyone deserves access to an adequate standard of living and that everyone deserves to be treated with decency. My evidence has led me to draw the conclusion that OW has produced results diametrically opposed to these values.

Equally important, the processes that led me to pose the question I posed and arrive at the conclusions that are at the foundation of my work will be transparent so that the readers can decide if I have adequately controlled for personal bias and thoroughly assess the merits of my reasoning. This personal and methodological transparency, according to Geertz, is grounded in the argument that,

> If you want to understand what science is you should look in the first instance not at its theories or its findings, and certainly not at what its apologists say about it; you should look at what the practitioners of it do (Van Maanen, 1988: 73).

Methodologically, these select personal accounts will serve the function of an open reflexivity that is transparent about what led me to carry out this research, my experiences conducting this study, and the logic and reasoning behind my analysis and conclusions. The first step in controlling for researcher bias, is to acknowledge that all researchers have pre-dispositions and acknowledging what those predispositions are (and how they will be managed) enhances the credibility of the end result produced by the researcher. The reflexive honesty and transparency necessitated by this process leads to a greater self-understanding necessary for understanding others and the world in which self and others exist. Notwithstanding select excerpts of reflexivity, this research will remain primarily interview based focusing more on the cultural.

The Habit of Truth

Notwithstanding researcher bias I will commit to "the habit of truth" (Locke, et al, 2000: 25) as there could be no scholarly accumulation of reliable knowledge without this commitment. Adam (1978: 5-6) writes an extended passage that warrants examination,

> Traditional selections of evidence tend often to perform an unwitting cover up of the behaviour examined here. A certain romantic liberalism runs through the literature, evident from attempts to paper over and discount the very real problems of inferiorization. Some researchers seem bent on 'rescuing' their subjects from 'defamation' by ignoring the problems of defeatism and complicit self destruction. Avoidance of dispiriting reflection upon the day-to-day practice of dominated people appears to spring from a desire to 'enhance' the reputation of the dominated and magically relieve their plight.

While I must confess a desire to rescue poor people from defamation, I realize that I am not going to do that by "ignoring the problems of defeatism and complicit self destruction" that did appear within my data. My desire does not extend so far as to ignore harsh realities or engage in unwitting cover ups. Adam (1978: 6) goes on to cite Memmi, "As for most social romantics . . . the victim remains proud and intact through oppression: he suffered but did not let himself be broken."

I consciously have made a significant effort to include in my qualitative data analysis evidence that does not support my central argument (i.e. there were instances when some respondents defended not only themselves, but other poor people as well) and I have included interviewees' voices when they spoke highly of OW. I explicitly discuss that one respondent in my study did acknowledge having a drug addiction problem and that another respondent acknowledged that his decision to apply for social assistance as teenager was not a good (or necessary) one in hindsight. I don't attempt to paint every interviewee or poor person as a saintly hero. But I do attempt to convey my argument that the label “poor person” or “welfare recipient” creates culturally sanctioned meanings that too frequently predispose people to see the polar opposite image of a saintly hero. I have included many stories from respondents articulating their beliefs about “others” living in conditions of impoverishment. I offer an interpretation for many of these stories (presented verbatim) that will enable to the reader to draw conclusions about the fairness of the analyses emanating from both the research respondents and myself.

“How are qualitative studies to be evaluated in the contemporary post-structural moment?” (Denzin, 1997: 4)

Denzin (1997: 9) suggests that the traditional methodological criterion of “validity has been replaced with the words authority and legitimation”. Authority and legitimacy are, in turn, seen as the extent to which a study has reproduced, simulated, or mapped something significant in the social world that had previously gone uncharted. Further,

> These understandings are based on glimpses and slices of culture in action. Any given practice that is studied is significant because it is an instance of a cultural practice that happened in a particular time and place. Its importance lies in the fact that it instantiates a cultural practice [or] a cultural performance (Denzin, 1997: 8).

The reader can make the determination if this monograph has legitimately instantiated the cultural practices of classism as they appear in the words of welfare.

Authority and legitimacy, moreover, are earned by the transparency of the research process and an openness and candidness about the reasoning that brought the researcher to the question en route to the answer. Just as the world as we know it has been socially constructed, so has the research that examines that world. Further, all credible research must be placed in the context of scholarship and be clear about what contributions are being added while simultaneously remaining cognizant of its own limitations and aware of ground that has remained uncharted.

Strengths and Limitations of this Study

Like any research, this project has both methodological and theoretical limitations. In confessional tales, "missing data, incompleteness, blind spots, and various other obscurities are admitted into the account" (Van Maanen, 1988: 91). The nature of social analysis is such that not only is it impossible to cover all aspects of a given issue in one report, it is also equally untenable to acknowledge all that is missing from a particular analysis. Nonetheless, being aware of how different perspectives were downplayed or missing from an argument lends credibility to the insights produced. Here are some insights that were given only limited attention in my analysis.

First, by zoning in on how classism (as a single analytic form of oppression) is embedded in welfare policy and reproduced in public discourse this manuscript gives only a thin coverage of other inter-related prejudices and glosses over insights that could have been provided by other theoretical lenses. While no project can be all encompassing, there are insights (expanding on the limited discussions from theory chapters three and four) that were not fully developed in my analysis. Here are select perspectives from other authors and theoreticians that could have been further developed in my work.

A gender based evaluation (Greene-Sang, 1999) would have detected particular patterns in my qualitative data that are reflective of larger sociological inequalities. Some of the women in this study came to OW because they left an abusive relationship and the realities of providing child care seriously undercut their capacity for competing in the labour market. This was not the case for any of the men in my study nor had this experience been reported by any man in the extensive welfare scholarship informing this research. While Armstrong and Armstrong (1990: 7) note that 'women still bear the responsibility for child care and domestic work' that work remains undervalued despite the reality that if it had to be replaced, it would cost money (Eichler, 1980). Further, in not extensively examining the social realities of gender based inequality, this monograph limited discussion of how what appears to be a natural or given arrangement (i.e. that women care for children while men are largely exonerated from that task) is in fact a cultural phenomenon. Welfare policies discourage all family forms except a traditional family wage system and while policy poses as gender neutral, there are patently inequitable gendered effects. While I would not be adding anything to the literature by repeating the sound arguments and insights of a gender based analysis examining welfare reform (Hays, 2003; Lessa, 1999; McCormack, 2002; Power, 2005; Power, 2002; Greene-Sang, 1999) I would like to limit the extent to which this limitation limits my study by presenting data provided by Ontario Works Oxford. This data shows a consistent pattern that concretely evidences that as children get older and thus require less caregiving, parents overwhelmingly return to the labour force. A careful analysis shows that entry into the labour force is frequently undercut by the demands of caregiving.

Demographics of OW Oxford Caseload, January 2007, 2008, and 2009

(Source: Electronic Correspondence with Lynn Chenier from OW Oxford).

Month	# of singles	# of sole support parents	# of couples with no children	# of couples with children	# of adults	# of Dependent adults.	Children 0-6 years	7-12 years	13-17 years	total #of children
Jan. '07	407	384	28	32	911	11	372	212	103	687
Jan. '08	469	392	25	42	995	6	396	222	107	725
Jan. '09	608	415	31	70	1225	18	442	220	134	796

A careful analysis of these numbers shows that as children get older and the demands of caregiving thus lessen, the need for social assistance receipt becomes much less common. Notably, for each year of available data, there are more than three times as many sole support parents with young children (0-6 years) in receipt of assistance than sole support parents of older children (13-17 years). The gendered caricatures of the "lazy welfare Mom" not only minimize caring labour, but ignore the reality that most single parents return to the labour force after they have met the most time consuming demands of their caring labour during the formative years of their children. While the extent of gender analysis is limited in this study, at various stages throughout the manuscript I will point out the gender inequalities that are embedded in welfare discourse and were experienced by several respondents.

Racial Inequality in the Labour Market

A segmented labour market theory would look at the racial distribution of impoverishment in Canada to note the patterns of racial inequity. While the classic Vertical Mosaic (Porter, 1965) imagery in Canada has shown some improvement The Vertical Mosaic Revisited (Helms-Hayes and Curtis, 1995) shows that racial inequality has not entirely flattened the mosaic. This study had only one person (4.16% of the sample) who reported being from Aboriginal descent. According to Hurtig (2008: 37) 3.8% of Canada's population is Aboriginal. Aboriginal people are the most economically disenfranchised ethno-cultural group in the country. Thirty five percent of on-reserve Aboriginals are on welfare (Hurtig, 2008: 38) but the MCSS could not provide data about the racial composition of social assistance recipients. According to Poverty and Policy in Canada: Implications for Health and Quality of Life,

> Poverty rates for Aboriginal Canadians are higher in relation to overall Canadian rates. The Canadian 2000 census revealed that 31.2% of Aboriginal Canadians living in families were living in poverty as compared to the overall Canadian rate of 12.9% (Raphael, 2007: 64).

While chapter 4 briefly acknowledges that a class analysis of welfare reform could reveal compelling insights, and suggests that the strengths of Marxist and Foucaultian conceptualizations of power should be merged to arrive at the conclusion that the public discourse of neoliberalism is patently ideological, a closer look at my qualitative data reveals that another powerful Marxian concept could very easily be applied. If hegemony, as Gramsci (1971) defined it, is an uncritical acceptance of 'common sense', that reflects the cultural domination of one group over another, then hegemony was rampant throughout the qualitative data in this monograph, particularly in the most revealing responses explaining poverty. The accepted rhetoric of the common sense revolution could truly be taken as a case study in hegemony. To fully draw out the merits of this argument would require a fuller analysis of another theoretical paradigm and is beyond the scope of this dissertation. The final chapter of this manuscript, however, will discuss how this notion should be explored in future research.

Notwithstanding the limitations noted above, the verisimilitude of my analysis is partially enhanced by comparable research (McCormack, 2002; Copeland, 2003; Hays, 2003 and Kingfisher, 1996) that corroborates my claim that there is a notable disjuncture between the way people living on social assistance present themselves as materially and morally more worthy than they have been treated, while concurrently leaving the cultural stereotypes of impoverishment unchallenged by invoking negative views of "the other" lazy people scamming the system.

Further, the transparency of the process of my methodology and analysis allows the reader to assess openly assess the merits of my reasoning and central conclusions. Like Neysmith et al (2005) the intentional use of extended verbatim excerpts from interviewees also permits the reader, to a large extent, to carry out their own analysis of the content of my qualitative data.

Finally, the authority of my analysis partially lies in grafting well established social psychological theory on prejudice with poststructural theory on discourse to an applied qualitative data set. My qualitative analysis of empirical data then arrives at the conclusion that classism is insidiously embedded in welfare discourse and reproduced by – survives in -- the "words of welfare". Mills (1959: 201) once argued that "imagination is often successfully invited by putting together hitherto isolated items, by finding unsuspected connections." My aim, by the end of this monograph, is to convince the reader that Gibran was expressing a profound observation when he noted that "the obvious is that which is never seen until someone expresses it simply" (Bowman, 1998: 193). As a final note on methodology, I concur with the assertion that,

> Although it is often extraordinarily difficult to explicate the standards of evidence, the criteria of relevance, paradigms of explanation, and norms of truth that inform such distinctions, informed judgments can be made . . . there are some things than can be known (Hawkesworth, 1989: 555).

The reader can examine my methods and reasoning to decide, in the following three value added chapters, if I have adequately evidenced my central argument that classism is latently embedded in welfare policy and insidiously reproduced in public discourse.

Chapter 5
Subjugated Knowledges: Respondents' Views of Self

"It can be argued that poverty is not [just] a matter of low well being, but of the inability to pursue well being precisely because of the lack of economic means" (Sen, 1992: 110).

The aim of this chapter is to make the discourses of respondents (who are consistently marginalized in the policy making process) visible and connect their voices to others who have written about, and understand, poverty from a grounded experiential knowledge base – in other words, to promote "an understanding of poverty from those who are poor" (Baker – Collins, 2005). In so doing, I will take up Foucault's (2003: 7) call for an "insurrection of subjugated knowledges." To achieve this aim, I will first review the recurring themes, and the few anomalies to those recurring themes, of how respondents described the circumstances of coming to social assistance, the material and social realities of subsisting 'on the system' both within and beyond the welfare bureaucracy, and the barriers conversational partners reportedly faced in attempting to re-enter the workforce in a manner that would enable them to leave welfare. Twenty two (of twenty four) respondents had compelling rationales for applying for social assistance and they articulated these rationales -- i.e. job loss, health, relationship breakdown, child care demands -- with detail and clarity. Twenty three respondents advised that the material realities of social assistance were extraordinarily difficulty and all twenty four respondents spoke of being treated harshly because of their poverty and / or welfare receipt. Respondents also did a commendable job detailing the material, health, and childcare barriers that realistically precluded re-entry into the labour force.

After presenting the embodied stories of research participants, I will review a small but compelling literature from subaltern actors who have experienced poverty and make connections between those subaltern voices and the subjugated knowledges of the respondents in this research. Considering this literature, it becomes clear that the subjugated perspectives of the people in the research sample transcends the respondents with whom I spoke (and are comparable to others who have experienced impoverishment). The task of establishing the commonalities in the subjugated knowledges of economically and socially disenfranchised people functions to break many of the stereotypes that are written into welfare policy and implicit in the "words of welfare".

Respondents' narratives, contrary to popular images, overwhelmingly suggest that the rationales for coming to the system were not grounded in a lack of personal responsibility. There were several stories about why people ended up on social assistance, and it was clear from virtually all respondents that coming to the system were frequently precipitated by undesirable circumstances beyond their control (i.e. health problems, relationship break down, caregiving demands, loss of a job via company closure or lay off, etc.). Many respondents reported that they only resorted to applying as a mechanism of survival when they were left with no other viable options. Surviving on the system was described as very difficult, for a number of reasons that we will examine in detail, and demanded informal support networks for virtually everyone. Even with the assistance of those informal support networks, it was common for needs to remain unmet. Daily life, both materially and socially, on the system was frequently portrayed as uncomfortable, often to the point of being incapacitating "precisely because of the lack of economic means". Notwithstanding the dependency discourse of the "common sense revolution", the barriers to exiting welfare were never reported as being too comfortable on welfare. Several respondents talked about their grocery shopping patterns (or lack thereof when they were completely out of money) and, notwithstanding the rhetoric of material opulence that originated in American welfare politics, there was no discussion of steaks, elk, or venison. Even when reportedly shopping very carefully and very modestly, there was often "month left at the end of the money." In hearing the subjugated voices of respondents in this chapter, and later connecting their voices to others who have written about, and understand, poverty from a grounded experiential knowledge base, I will join Baker-Collins's (2005) compelling project of promoting "an understanding of poverty from those who are poor." This project, I contend, is necessary because policy has been formed with misunderstandings from those who are not poor.

To understand how respondents assess and interpret their own lives in relation to the public perceptions of impoverishment and welfare, during the course of semi-structured interviews with twenty four respondents, I asked them among other things (see appendix 1) what brought them to social assistance, what their life was like living 'on the system', what barriers they faced to employment, what they believed would assist them, and how they managed to survive on a social assistance income. Respondents, almost without exception, answered these questions, with compelling detail. When probed to expand on a thought or experience, respondents filled in the necessary details to tell their story. On several occasions conversational partners would push back against the dominant discourse.

There were two themes that were widespread among respondents. First, there was a consensus (save for one exception) that the material realities of life of welfare were exceptionally uncomfortable, often to the point where well being -- and thus the capacity to move forward -- was compromised. Several respondents (almost one third of the sample) made a point of emphasizing that OW workers and administrators should be forced to live on a social assistance income for a brief period so that they could come to understand what they misunderstand about the daily living realities of impoverishment: namely, that it takes material resources and a certain level of well being to secure, get to, and maintain regular employment. Second, the social and cultural realities of life on welfare, both within and beyond the welfare bureaucracy, were similarly seen as very negative. Virtually all respondents spoke of being on the receiving end of degrading stigmata associated with welfare receipt and impoverishment. The harsh social realities were articulated clearly in such statements as "*you are treated as if you are the lowest form on earth*" and seen as "*less than human*." It is to respondents' stories we now turn.

Coming to OW

"Legitimate reasons for needing public assistance are increasingly hard to articulate in such a [mainstream]discourse, and the positive benefits to one's family and society are as well" (Schram, 2006: 130).

One of my opening questions to research respondents enquired about the factors prompting them to apply to social assistance. Most respondents thoroughly answered this question with ease, detailing the specifics of the circumstances that initially brought them to OW. It was common for respondents to point out that applying for social assistance was a last resort -- and one of desperation -- when previous means, for reasons beyond their control, no longer enabled them to meet necessary living expenses. In short, coming to OW was often described as a last-ditch act of survival (i.e. "*It was my life, and I was doing what I had to do*" (Heather). The specific details of respondents' stories about coming to OW will be categorized here into the five most common themes: health challenges, loss of employment, relationship break down, child care responsibilities, and other factors. Several respondents reported experiencing more than one of these factors concurrently: i.e. Adrienne's health problems of fibromyalgia and osteoporosis reportedly played a role in her relationship breakdown when her ex-husband chose not to remain with her (and because he was a wage earner had the freedom to leave their relationship quite easily). Alison also reported a relationship breakdown coinciding with news from her doctor that she had a cancerous tumour. Diane had a severe leg infection, requiring intense medical treatment and antibiotics, coincide with a divorce while attempting to carry out child care duties. While these three examples are among the most compelling, hearing the detailed nuances of respondents' stories as they articulated them, the circumstantial plight of people is put in a context that is too frequently ignored, or lost to sight, when respondents are categorically defined as dependent welfare recipients. Contrary to the logic underlying "personal responsibility" welfare policy shifts, the rationale for applying to social assistance was not, "I just don't feel like working anymore." Virtually all respondents were aware of this common cultural perception and categorically rejected its application to their circumstances. Each respondent had a much different story – grounded in their personal experience -- about what brought them to OW, and most were eager to provide contextual details. In telling their stories, which we will now examine, respondents consistently resisted and rejected the dominant discourses of welfare in relation to their embodied experience.

Health Challenges

"Different people feel that different factors affect one's ability to secure employment. What factors do you feel have affected you?" (Interviewer)

"My health." (Alice, research respondent)

Research has repeatedly shown a strong association between poverty and ill health (O'Connor and Olsen, 1998: 164; Social Planning Council of Toronto, 1999: 7; Raphael, 2007: 205-237). Health officer Dr. John Millar has argued,

> We have reached a point where you can think of poverty
> and low income the way in the past we have thought of

> smoking. It’s as causally related to people’s poor health as smoking and lung cancer. It’s that solid (Capponi, 1997: 42).

Health factors, resulting from illness and / or injury, were prominent in the explanations for applying to OW among the respondents of this study. While there are certainly some variations in these stories, there is also an underlying theme. To adapt, and paraphrase, the compelling wisdom of John Sweeney, “If you don’t have your health, nothing else matters.”

Prior to delving into respondents’ stories, it is important to return to theorizing on the tenuous nature of classification and categorization to show that there are very deep shortcomings in the manner in which a binary either / or ‘disability status’ – eligible or ineligible -- is legislatively constructed (Lightman, 2009). As we examined earlier, categorization frequently works by dominant conceptual opposition creating a totalizing binary presuming a pregiven homogeneity. We have established that Foucault made it clear that as soon as we question many of the assumptions implied by pre-given by classifications, they immediately break down. This theorizing has a very direct application to disability policy because the bureaucracy of the application process rigidly classifies one a fully disabled (and eligible) or, much more often, able and thus ineligible (Lightman, 2009) and persons whose health challenges do not fit with the eligible categories are denied support (or channelled in Ontario Works with less support).

Alice’s appearance was a good fifteen years older than the age (59) she reported at the start of our interview. Alice greeted me at the door of her modest bachelor apartment. When I came in the first thing that I noticed about Alice was that she moved, hunched over, very slowly and gingerly – like she was in some kind of physical discomfort. She wore an old and tattered beige shawl and had noticeably dry skin, a wrinkled forehead, scraggly greying hair, and hardened dark brown eyes. Alice advised of what brought her to OW following seven years of employment – initially full time but then part time -- as a Community Support Worker with the Red Cross.

> *Yes. I can tell you it was my doctor. I have arthritis and I have a medical history of different things that make it difficult for me to work. One of those problems is that I had a hip replacement 11 years ago and that was partially the result of a long term circulation problem. And another problem was because of having children*[18] *I had a prolapsed uterus and bladder so I had surgery there and a [medical device that was not audible in audio recording] to support my bladder so I am not able to do heavy lifting. I also have carpel tunnel syndrome in my wrists and severe arthritis in my thumbs so that means I couldn't do lifting. So on November 1, 2006 my doctor signed a form to say that I would no longer be able to work for the Canadian Red Cross that I had worked for the previous seven years. Then I received unemployment insurance until March 1 and then my doctor said that I would need to find another line of work that I could go back to on March 1. So I joined OW to help me get a job and get some financial support because I had no income after unemployment insurance ended* [Alice].

Alice advised that her former employer (The Red Cross) understood her challenges from the onset of her health problems, "*They were very good to me. They allowed me to work part time and have modified duties."* While Alice's doctor deemed that she was not fit to return to her previous line of work, he encouraged her to seek alternative (less physically demanding) employment, which she was in the process of doing at the time of our interview in the summer of 2007. Alice described how her present health dilemma makes it difficult for her to secure employment,

> *There are some days when I am able to function and some days I actually even feel pretty good, but that is definitely*

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[18] An injury or health problem incurred in the process of production within the labour market would have a much higher chance of securing material remuneration than a health problem or injury incurred by the labour of reproduction.

> *not every day. There are some days when it is painful just to get out of bed. Today was one of those days. Now how many bosses are going to understand that?*

The “either / or” orthodoxy of current disability policy clearly did not do justice to the nature of Alice’s episodic disability. Like others in my sample, Alice languished in a state of being “Not Disabled Enough” (Lightman, 2009) from the standpoint of satisfying eligibility requirements.

Frances arranged for our interview to take place at a local coffee house. I arrived shortly before the arranged interview time. I saw Frances pull up with her boyfriend in a loud and rusted pickup truck that appeared to be 20 years old. Frances was a heavy set woman of 47 years who also moved very slowly. She described the circumstances that brought her to OW,

> *I have degenerative disc disorder. Even with this disorder I was a bartender and a waitress for fourteen years and my doctor said that I was unable to continue working. Because I couldn’t stand for long periods of time and I couldn’t sit for long periods of time. I couldn’t find a job that would suit me when I needed to take a break and when I needed to lay down. My doctor said that I couldn’t stand on my feet all day so if you can’t find a different job you are going to have to quit work. So I ended up on social assistance which in turn just, as of last week, got me on to disability.*
> [Frances]

Frances reported that she had been trying for four years to qualify for disability, and that her doctor had been fully supportive of her application from day one. Frances was the one respondent I interviewed who had qualified for ODSP. After a prolonged application process that lasted several years, Frances became eligible for ODSP after she committed to being interviewed for this research but prior to the interview taking place.

I interviewed Gloria in her one-bedroom subsidized housing unit that she shared with her cat. Gloria was a 51 year old woman with completely gray hair. Her apartment was full of pictures of her three children, whom she stated regularly help her with additional groceries or securing rides to her many medical appointments. She too was trying to qualify for disability,

> *The main reason I applied is that I have health problems interfering with my work . . . Since my 30's I have had two major and one minor operation. My back and legs went completely out six years ago. Now, I have osteo and rheumatoid arthritis.* [Gloria]

Gloria also advised that her application to ODSP had the full support of her doctor. Gloria advised,

> *I would love to go back to work but that isn't going to happen. My body is too old to work but I am too young to retire, and that is a terrible to have to deal with everyday*.

Gloria was one of several respondents who noted that her health clearly precluded a secure attachment to the labour force, but her health challenges were not readily visible. Health problems are not always obvious and some people may appear in good health yet be unable to work. This problem frequently evokes suspicion from others (Kimpson, 2000).

Heather was a 27 year-old woman whom I interviewed at her residence. Heather rented a room in a large 4-bedroom home that she reported was approximately one-hundred years old. She arranged for our interview to take place when her roommates were not home (and later explained the rationale that she was embarrassed about being on OW). The challenges that reportedly brought Heather into contact with OW were not physical, but certainly presented her with a self-reported different set of barriers,

> *What brought me there was that I was working at my "Chicken Diner" job for about four and a half years and I am bi-polar and I suffer from anxiety. So basically I ended up having a nervous breakdown. And that is how I first left work. They did hold my job for me which was so nice of*

> *them. So anyways I went on unemployment but that only lasts for 15 weeks and once that was up I was still not ready to go back to work. So that is why I ended up having to go on welfare. This was the first time I have had to ever go on social assistance – like I had no choice. I had no income coming in whatsoever. I had to do something to get money to pay rent and bills.* [Heather]

What was clear from Heather's account that she suffered from incapacitating stress related challenges and that is why she had a significant interruption in her work history. Her disability was not readily visible and was clearly episodic, and thus was not eligible for ODSP. Yet Heather spoke of her challenges in a way that appeared to buttress her esteem.

Immediately after detailing her particulars of coming to OW, without prompting, Heather directed the discussion toward the undesirable stigma and cultural realities of unemployment: *"Being out of work or away from your job is not all that people seem to think it's cracked up to be."* When asked to explain what she meant by that Heather advised,

> *if you don't have a job people think that you are a nobody and you seriously feel like a nobody. Like, when I read your thing for this study I wanted to talk to you for sure, but do you think I seriously want to tell people, like my friends, why I can't go into work? It's embarrassing to say the least. And to be nickel and diming your way through life everyday is brutal. Like when I was working I was not rich but I could go shopping and get everything I needed and even a few things I wanted. Now, I have to call my Mom and Dad to get everything, and I don't like doing that but what choice do I have?*
>
> What do you call them for specifically? [Interviewer]
>
> *I go over there for supper almost every night. So my groceries are basically just breakfast cereal or granola bars and my lunches are sandwiches like cold cuts and eggs. And even with about twenty-five free meals from*

> *Mom every month it is still tough. I will be going back to work soon and I am very happy about that.*

Heather advised that she was very grateful to "Chicken Diner" for holding her job for her while she made provisions to manage the challenges she faced. She was making provisions to return to work. Notwithstanding the clear rejection of neoliberal rhetoric that is palpable in Heather's self-description – i.e. "being out of work or away from your job is not all that people seem to think it is cracked up to be" – as we will see in the next chapter, Heather's subjectivity as it pertained to "others" was deeply impacted by the rhetoric she rejects here.

Other respondents' detailed stories of health problems directly attributable to a work related accident or resulting from the physical repetitive strain of carrying out their work duties. James, for example, worked in a factory and advised,

> *Five years ago I was involved in an industrial accident. And I had a severe dislocation of the right leg and hip. After knee surgery and hip surgery and therapy and four years of struggling to get back to work the doctors finally decided that I would never return to work and that I would file for disability.* [James]

James, a middle-aged man who opted not to provide his exact age, was the third respondent who advised that he had the full support of his doctor in attempting to qualify for disability, yet remained in the eyes of bureaucracy as "not disabled enough" (Lightman et al, 2009).

Lori, 48, was a petite and frail woman who detailed how the physical demands of her vocational life gradually ruined her health. A look of chronic tension, as suggested by raised eyebrows that resulted in a wrinkled forehead, remained with Lori throughout much of our hour long interview. Lori spoke with a soft and slow sound of defeat in her voice,

> *I worked at Mackie Automotive. I was lifting. We had a lot of stock that came in and I was lifting boxes that were from 30lbs to 90lbs. And I had to put them on rollers so it was me lifting them and the way I had to twist to get them onto the rollers is what injured my back. Now I was put on what was called light duty jobs. But I was having major spasms and couldn't turn my head. So I was out of work. I went to a chiropractor and he wanted me out of work for 6 to 8 weeks. And the company would not allow that. They forced me to see a company doctor and the company doctor put all these restrictions down and working in a factory there is nothing you can do. It is all repetitive work. So I went back to work. They put me on a different job and I had to do pushing and pulling which I wasn't supposed to do. I had to do bending which I was not supposed to do. And I was in tears.* [Lori]

Lori advised that her physical health and capacity to function normally was gone and that she "*live[s] every day in either physical discomfort or outright agony*" that she described as *"unbearable."* Lori advised that she had taken so many Tylenol 3's that her body has become somewhat immune so that they now have only a minimal affect on her pain-reduction. Ironically, the concern about people not pulling their weight in society overlooks the reality that, literally, pulling too much weight for too long can clearly undercut one's capacity to keep working. Like virtually all respondents, Lori did not see herself as being anything remotely close to lazy or work-shy. Like several respondents she remained in a bureaucratic limbo as her application for ODSP was being processed.

Rick, a big burly man of 56, walked with a pronounced limp that necessitated a heavy reliance on an oak cane that he had made and painted himself. He moved, hobbling slowly, into the coffee house where we arranged to meet and, told his story,

> *I was in an accident back in the 1970's and I smashed my leg and I had a lot of surgery over it and had the screws put in there [pointing to low part of leg]. It was very bad for quite a while. Rehab helped a bit to the point where I could function most of the time. Then last year I stepped the wrong way and my knee started popping out of joint and I*

> *just couldn't go back to work. Now I have to have more surgery*. [Rick]

Rick, like several other respondents, was also waiting to see if his application to ODSP was successful. Rick explained why he felt his ODSP application should be successful,

> *I have worked all my life whenever I was able to. Any time I have had off work has been because I was not able to do it. I can't do physical work anymore and that is all I know.*

It was not clear from the interview if Rick's doctor was supporting his application and a follow up call to Rick to enquire resulted only in learning that his number had been disconnected.

Gina was a 46 year old woman who opted to be interviewed in her three bedroom subsidized housing unit, where she lived with her two public school-aged children. Although in a different unit, Gina was living in the same complex she had grown up in. Gina detailed how her employment history also came to de-rail her into ill health and unemployment via injury,

> *Well I had been working at a nursing home for 9 years doing a lot of personal care and lifting and I had had 2 injuries, one to my back and one to my shoulder. I was on worker's comp and then my doctor put me on modified duties but then it [her injuries] was too bad and I still couldn't do it.*

Gina's doctor advised that she could not return to the physical care duties of her nursing home work but encouraged her to secure a different line of employment. Gina re-iterated a common sentiment,

> *I spent 9 years [working] at Versa Care [nursing home] and if I was able to go back I would do it in a minute. I miss the people I worked with and I miss the people I cared for and I miss earning my pay-cheque. I have never wanted to be a burden on anyone – that's not how I was raised.*

While Gina's views clearly suggested that her physical health precluded carrying out her previous employment duties (and in this way challenged stereotypical assumptions) yet at the same time Gina still sees herself as a "burden" and states that she was raised to not burden anyone (in this way her subjectivity is very much infiltrated by public discourse).

While it is not known how representative these composite sketches are of the factors that prompt people to apply for social assistance, what is known very clearly is that health related employment barriers are subjugated in the public discourses of welfare reform. Further, recent research finding suggest that it is common for people struggling with significant health challenges to face an additional bureaucratic challenge of "not [being] disabled enough" (Lightman, 2009). Electronic contact with the Ontario Ministry of Community and Social Services[19] (2009) revealed that (at the time of this writing) 5 285 people have applied for the Ontario Disability Support Plan and are awaiting confirmation of eligibility. In more than one respect, several respondents in this research were badly disserved by the inadequacy of binary classification (disabled / abled) to adequately account for the realities of their experience.

Loss of Employment

"I got laid off and there is not too much else out there but I have been looking everyday because you have to." (Mike)

Several respondents spoke of previous employment unexpectedly ending and detailed the specifics of entering an undesirable (and unwanted) period of unemployment. Being laid off, having contract work expire, or having one's employer close down were some of the factors beyond respondents' control that prompted them to apply for OW. Notably, several respondents pointed out that they did not apply for social assistance until they were, financially, left with no alternative. Mike, 57, detailed the particulars of his story:

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[19] As noted in the acknowledgements to this research, as a condition of receiving data from the MCSS I agreed to be clear that the analysis and views expressed in my dissertation do not necessarily reflect those of the Ministry.

> *I was working at True Cheese. They make cheese and stuff like that. I was in shipping and receiving but I got laid off. I didn't make that bad of money there so I had a little bit saved but when that ran out and there was still no work out there, I had my bills to pay so I had to go down there and get some help.* [Mike]

Mike reported that he liked his previous job and wished that it was still available. In advising that he was regularly looking for work, Mike opposed the notion that a lack of motivation was at the heart of his challenges.

Janet, an aboriginal lady of 44 (and one of only two non-white respondents in my sample[20]), explained that although she previously had a good paying job in a refinery, it was contract work – which Duffy, Glenday, and Pupo (2005) show is becoming a more common form of employment in the 21st century. Janet too pointed out that she had exhausted all of her resources before finally applying to OW,

> *I was working on a two year project at the Esso refinery and we all knew that eventually it would be finished and over with. I was making good money, twenty bucks an hour. And when the project ran out I made that money last for about three months until I got to the point where I wasn't able to pay my bills. I wasn't able to find work in this area, especially the type of work that I do. So I basically got very broke and desperate and went to Ontario Works* [Janet].

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[20] Loretta was the other respondent who was non-white. Neither woman alluded to their racial minority status throughout our conversation. There are a number of reasons why this may have been the case. It would be safe to speculate that at some point in their lives, both Loretta and Janet faced additional barriers to employment that intersected with their class and gender.

Janet deemed that her expired contract work, combined with the fact that it was difficult to find work in her area was what had brought to into a state of unemployment. Her views about why other poor people are poor will be explored in the next chapter.

When John, 49, was asked what brought him to apply for OW he told the particulars of his story. His midnight service sector shift that he had carried out for three years was simply eliminated. Although his story is part of a larger sociological pattern in that the secondary labour force is becoming even more precarious for those who labour within it (Duffy, Glenday, and Pupo, 2005), John expressed his surprise, and disappointment, about the undesirable route he took to OW,

> *Unemployment actually. I was just out of a job and at my age work is hard to find nowadays so I had to go on welfare. I was working at an Esso Service station there on Norwich Ave for about three years. I got laid off. I was the midnight guy and they stopped being open 24 hours -- so it was good bye to me. It's not like I ever wanted to be here and it's not like I ever thought that I would* [John].

John's proclamation that he never wanted to be on social assistance, and never thought that he would be, distanced himself from the caricatures of welfare receipt painted by public discourse that he would later take up. Like many respondents, while defining his self-image as responsible (and noting that the circumstances that brought him to unemployment were not his fault) he was, at different times, implying a different image of the "Other". Later in the interview John's inferences became bolder statements about other people on welfare. In the following chapter we will examine John's perspectives on the welfare receipt of others.

Keylee, a 33 year old former delivery driver, reported that she found herself out of work when the company she worked for changed ownership and business slowed down to the point where her position became expendable,

> *Well going back to November 2004 I got let go of my job. I was working here in Tillsonburg for what is now called carquest. It used to be Johnson automotive and I was one of their delivery drivers and I was there for three years. When they became Carquest they slowed down and so they didn't need all of the drivers. [Keylee]*

These particular examples are part of a more general econometric trend whereby the "bad jobs" of the secondary labour force are turning into "no jobs" (Duffy, Glenday, and Pupo, 2005). Not one of these respondents was happy about being on social assistance nor could they reasonably be blamed for the circumstances that brought them there. As we will review later in this chapter, what respondents deemed unreasonable blame was nonetheless difficult for many to avoid both within and beyond the welfare bureaucracy.

Relationship Breakdown

"Social welfare policy has been enlisted in what seems to be an eleventh hour attempt to enforce the traditional values of work and family that have propped up what Nancy Fraser, Linda Gordon, and others have called the industrial "family wage system" that is based on the traditional two parent family in which the mail "breadwinner" earns enough to support his wife the "homemaker", and their children" (Schram, 2000: 1)

Several respondents spoke of a harsh (and sometimes abusive) relationship breakdown as the primary factor that brought them to OW: and in making this claim uncritically accepted the cultural logic that they were primarily responsible for caregiving both during and after their interpersonal relationship. As one might expect, the relationship breakdowns precipitated crises in more than one area of respondents' lives. In some cases, health and relationship breakdown coincided and made applying for OW the lesser of choosing between two evils: going on "the system" or remaining in an undesirable relationship. For Adrienne, who opted not to disclose her age, the loss of her health was exacerbated by the loss of her relationship,

> *I got sick after the pregnancy and that prompted a lot of changes. He didn't want a sick wife and I got very bad. I*

> *have osteoporosis and fibromyalgia. So that is how I got here. By the time my daughter was two I was very sick. So when I left my husband I went to the county where I was born cause I had family back there and I went to the court house so that my ex-husband could have access to see his daughter and I applied for welfare and then disability.* (Adrienne)

Adrienne advised that she was abused by her ex-husband. She opted not to provide details when probed and I respected her decision and re-directed our conversation. Schram (1995) points out the American welfare bureaucracy does not track the number of people coming to social assistance because they are fleeing an abusive relationship to protect themselves and their children – another disturbing subjugation in mainstream discourse. Adrienne clearly did not blame herself for exceptionally undesirable circumstances for which she was not responsible, and thus rejected de-contextualized notions of personal irresponsibility in relation to her situation. Yet at the same time Adrienne's subjectivity was deeply infiltrated by neoliberal discourse in that she did not seem to draw out the gendered imbalances that have material effects when caregiving labour is minimized and devalued.

Uma, a 39 year old woman, also had a serious health matter coincide with a relationship breakdown. When asked what brought her to OW Uma advised,

> *I had some health problems and I ended up on sick leave from work here [Tim Horton's coffee shop where interview was taking place]. I have been here for quite a few years, but I ended up with a leg ulcer and I ended up being off work. But also I was having marital problems and ended up being separated and leaving my husband and I had no other income because not being able to work, where else was I going to go? So that is why I went to Ontario Works. I went into welfare and asked for help* [Uma].

At the time of this interview, the gendered scholarship on the work / care dichotomy was not at the forefront of my mind and thus I missed an opportunity to probe Uma's view that she "was not able to work" even when she was concurrently parenting and dealing with a serious health problem. I directed the conversation toward her health challenges. I was not familiar with what a leg ulcer was so I asked Uma to clarify, which she proceeded to do in graphic detail,

> *It is very gross actually. I had a hole* [in my leg] *and at its worst it was over two inches across and I could stick the end of my finger down inside my leg. And you could see right down inside. It was gross. It was oozing. And the nurses had to come in three times a week and change the dressing on it and keep it clean. It was very painful when it was at its worse because it got infected and that is what made it get so bad. It felt like somebody had a hot knife and was stabbing it inside my leg. That is why I went through a spell when I couldn't work.*

Uma advised that her husband as not understanding or supportive during her illness and she reported that near the end of their marriage he became emotionally abusive. When probed for details Uma explained,

> *He would deliberately and consciously say things to hurt me. And he knew how to do it and he did. I just decided that I could not live with him anymore. It was not worth it. I had to get away from all the fighting for my kids' sake because it's not good that they would see the way he treated me. Like when they started to become withdrawn, and I mean both of them 24 – 7, and they were never like that before, there was no doubt in my mind that something big had to change so I did what I had to do and got them away from that environment. The thing is, he is not a bad dad to them in some ways but the way he treated me in front of them was hard on them and he was too blind to see that.*

Uma told her story in a manner that certainly appeared she was making what she believed was a responsible – not irresponsible – parental and life decision that was clearly in the best interest of her children and herself. Sanford Schram, a leading expert in welfare policy analysis, writes "I know of no research estimating the extent to which welfare taking is associated with attempts to escape abusive relationships" (Schram, 1995: 7).

Relationship breakdown also brought Donna, 36, to the OW system. I interviewed Donna in her three bedroom subsidized housing unit. Donna was one of two respondents who came to participate in this research by way of snowball sampling, as her brother was an earlier respondent and carried out the request I made to all respondents to refer anyone else that they knew on social assistance to my study. She reported that she did not receive the flyer advertising my study. Donna stated that it was a relationship break up that brought her to OW, "*I went on it because my spouse left me and I was a single Mom with four kids"* (Donna).

Donna opted not to expand upon the details of her story beyond that her ex-husband, a mechanic, unexpectedly left her in 2006. Notably, because Donna's husband was the breadwinner in the family, he was free to leave the relationship. Despite the fact that Donna's caregiving enabled her ex-husband to earn a living, she was not permitted the same freedom. Donna's ex-husband was not financially supporting, or having any contact with, any of his children. Schram (2006: 44) writes "While the work / care dichotomy need not be gendered, it is." Prior to her husband leaving Donna was not "dependent" on welfare. Her husband was the breadwinner and she was a stay at home Mother in a traditional family-wage structure. While conventional wisdom would suggest that Donna was "dependent" on her husband, there is not nearly as much stigma attached to that form of dependence. Further, it is too frequently overlooked that traditional familial arrangements – male bread-winner / female caregiver – overlook the mutual interdependence in that it is undervalued care-giving that enables the breadwinner to earn and if that care-giving had to be replaced it would cost money (Eichler, 1980). (Momentarily, we will examine child care challenges as one of the factors that preclude some people from entering the labour market).

Dorothy, an older woman who did not disclose her exact age, reported initially coming to social assistance for financial reasons following the undesirable circumstances of a divorce,

> *The reason I had to* [originally] *apply for social assistance was in 1992 my ex husband was paying me alimony and child support and without going through the courts he just dropped the alimony and just paid child support.* [Dorothy]

Dorothy advised that she had made several attempts to provide for herself and her children and that included going back to school after the divorce to earn a social service diploma. Dorothy was working part time at the time of our interview and having her income supplemented by OW. Dorothy stated with a quiet certainty that she knew very well she had made significant efforts to better herself and give her children the best life possible. At the same time, Dorothy did not seem to question the cultural belief that caring labour (despite the fact that she had devoted a significant portion of her life to doing it) should be worthy of more adequate material remuneration.

Child Care Challenges

Roxanne, 28, advised that she had two jobs prior to having the first of her first of three children. When the father of her first child left her and the baby, Roxanne did what she felt she had to do to survive and applied for social assistance. Roxanne recalled very clearly that she did not plan on being abandoned, and that she was most certainly not happy about the situation,

> *When I had my eldest son I was 17. I had been working two jobs previous to having him but when the baby was born I couldn't really work. I still remember very clearly the day that my Mother said to me 'you are going to have to get welfare' because my first born son's father* had taken off *and I couldn't work so I had to get some kind of help to be assisted. That's how I ended up on the roller coaster. I didn't plan on him leaving and I didn't know he would. The*

> *jobs I had at the time were $5.75 / hour and that wouldn't pay for daycare. He was making $11.00 / hour so we would have been OK. I already knew back then I was very very upset about having to apply for welfare because I already knew back then it would be very difficult to get away from it, once you're on it, it seems anyway. I have been on and off trying to work, trying to support my family.* [Roxanne]

Again, there is a gendered power imbalance here: wage earning gives one the freedom to exit a relationship easily; primary caregivers have this freedom severely restricted and this restriction is exacerbated by the catch-22 reality that caregiving also undercuts one's capacity to become a wage earner.

While Roxanne did not deem herself to be an irresponsible Mother or person, she did seem to take up elements of dependency discourse in suggesting that *"I already knew back then it would be difficult to get away from it."* Despite the fact she explicitly stated that there was nothing desirable about her circumstances, welfare receipt was still likened to some kind of desirable drug that would be a difficult habit to kick. While Roxanne had re-entered the secondary labour market on a number of occasions the instability of that labour market escaped critical scrutiny.

Gina, 27, while not elaborating on the details of her interpersonal history, also advised that the realities of paying for the daycare (of two children) on a limited income made applying for social assistance the lesser of two undesirable situations,

> *I was a single Mom. I couldn't find work and get the kids into daycare because when you make around minimum wage it is hard to pay for daycare, or really, it's not hard but pretty much impossible. Like you seriously just can't do it. I just applied for it* [social assistance] *cause I was told about it and told that I could get assistance. I think my kids are better off with me instead of a stranger anyway* [Gina].

Tina saw herself as a responsible mother who was making the best of a bad situation. Weighing all factors, social assistance (as uncomfortable as it was) made more practical sense than working in the secondary labour force only to have the overwhelming majority of earning go toward paying strangers to care for her young children.

While the public discourse that originated in the United States would pejoratively refer to Mothers like Roxanne and Gina as ‘welfare queens’, stepping outside of that discourse and into the material and social realities that these mothers were facing, one could very reasonably posit that any reference to royalty is grossly misleading. Further what is thoroughly subjugated in mainstream discourse is that raising children is work (with “24 – 7” demands) that significantly undercuts marketability in the world of paid labour,

> The nature of women’s unpaid work and its time demands define women as unreliable employees legitimately confined to a narrow range on low skilled, poorly paid jobs (Forrest, 1998: 228).

Both Roxanne and Gina, like many poor single mothers in their circumstances, had spent time in those low skilled and poorly paid jobs. It is a remarkable cultural phenomenon that the logic and tax rage of neoliberalism, combined with the public discourse on welfare, effectively portrays the belief that families like Roxanne and Tina’s have it too good and too easy to the point that they are exploiting the rest of society. A gender based analysis reveals that while OW poses as gender neutral, there are clearly gendered effects (Greene-Sang, 1999). At virtually all stages of life, the rates of poverty are higher for women than men (Greene-Sang, 1999). Child care responsibilities are culturally prescribed for women (and exonerate men from these demands), yet this is not accounted for in social policy.

Other Factors

In terms of the other factors that brought respondents to the welfare system, there was in fact one story that seemed to have a notably less compelling rationalization for the initial application. One thirty-two year old respondent, Darryl, was quite honest and quite blunt when he described his initial contact with welfare,

> *Well I moved out of my parents when I was 16. I was a typical 16 year old. Thought that I knew it all and wanted it all. I'll admit that now [laughs]. So on my 16th birthday I moved out. I moved in with a relative at that time. And I tried to work at that time and I couldn't find nothing and I had to get some sort of money so that is when I applied for social assistance* (Daryl).

Here, Daryl himself is acknowledging that his decision to initially apply for social assistance was not a good one. Very few people would disagree with Daryl's self assessment. Accessibility to social assistance for teenagers, as it has for all recipients, has become more restrictive since the time of Daryl's initial application. But in talking to Daryl, and observing the surroundings of his bachelor apartment, sitting on his couch that was tattered and likely older than I was, and trying to talk over the rattling refrigerator that Darryl's landlord had not yet repaired, I couldn't help but feel that the symbolism of welfare receipt – the categories, the linguistic tags, the labels of primary potency -- blind people to the finer details of daily living realities that are screened out by the words of welfare discourse. Daryl had, in fact, initially made an irresponsible decision when he was young. Later in life, Daryl made notable efforts to rectify his earlier immaturity by going back to high school and getting his diploma. To believe that Daryl, and people like him, have been unduly rewarded for acting irresponsibly, or have lived opulence, bears no connection to the reality. At present, Darryl's health realistically precludes a re-entry into the work force.

Ryan, 29, came to OW after he quit his job. Initially, he was somewhat vague about the details prompting his resignation,

> *Well I had lost, I had been working at Drumbo tech company and me and my boss didn't get along. He was just certain ways that he shouldn't have been so I ended up leaving that job.*

When probed for the details of his departure from work, Ryan told his story in a manner that was quite candid,

> *Well I had worked at Acme tech for 4 years. Two years that I worked there I was an admitted drug addict but I was just doing stupid stuff but I wasn't getting myself into trouble. I was always at my job and I was always doing my job and when I went to work I was always clean. But some people told my boss I did drugs. And I mean to the extent where we're doing this job putting up tents and he comes out and this lady comes and she's got a handful of twenties and she hands it to us and he says "Oh now you can go and buy some crack." The customer was standing right there. And literally that is how he was treating me day in and day out on that job and I couldn't handle it. I really should have went to the labour board about it* [Ryan].

The label of "drug addict" is a noun that has the same slice-cutting power as the term "welfare recipient." Allport suggests (1954) that what sometimes makes a prejudice hold good is that people will feel that their beliefs are not prejudicial, but rather are legitimately grounded in a well deserved reputation given that the targeted group really does exhibit reprehensible behaviour. Ryan's candour may seem to confirm that there are some people on social assistance who do, in fact, in fact have a substance abuse problem. This is undeniably true. But research on the topic of substance abuse and welfare receipt has demonstrated that "the percentages of welfare recipients using, abusing, or dependent on alcohol or drugs were relatively small and consistent with the general US population and those not receiving welfare benefits" (Pollack and Reuter, 2006). Despite the fact that drug use exists in all walks of life, all walks of life do not become associated with addiction. Hays writes,

> Although public opinion polls suggest that Americans believe drug abuse is one of the central problems of welfare recipients, nearly all government researchers agree that problems of disabilities and of domestic violence are both more prevalent (Hays, 2003: 199).

Drug or alcohol problems are (like welfare receipt) frequently spoken of as symptomatic of a character deficiency (Valverde, 1998), yet there is usually something other than immorality that precipitates using (Fleury, 2009). The undesirable realities of Ryan's existence were palpable in his defeated and appearance and the underprivileged surroundings of the cheap room her rented: these harsh realities are antiseptically screened out by the categorical labels attached to his identity. Ryan's self conception, as we shall see in the next chapter, had been influenced by neoliberal discourse and his views on "Others" was deeply influenced.

Life "On the System"

If there was one theme in this research that was more agreed upon than any other among the twenty four respondents who participated, that theme was articulated clearly in responses to the question "How do you feel about the amount of your monthly social assistance check?" With only one exception, there was a consensus that the amount people were expected to live on was substantially inadequate and this had an incapacitating detrimental effect on people's well being and undercut their capacity to move forward in their efforts to leave social assistance. This finding confirms Piven and Cloward's (1993: 291) argument that "insufficient income [i]s [often] the principal problem" of welfare receipt, and is entirely consistent with what respondents who took part in the Social Assistance Review Committee (MCSS: 1988) told the government of David Peterson. Subjugated knowledges, as we reviewed in chapter three, are knowledges that are ignored or discredited and seen as not having reached a satisfactory level of legitimacy.

Almost all respondents suggested that survival techniques like depending on the support of family (and friends) were entirely necessary (mirroring Hays, 2003 and McCormack, 2002). Being resourceful and frugal was described as necessary survival strategies by most respondents. Loretta reported, "I could give seminars on how to stretch a dollar and get the biggest bang for a buck." Loretta looked directly at me when she made this statement and she spoke with a quiet, but powerful, conviction. I recall during this point in the interview thinking about some of the factors that brought me to this research. I recall during my childhood that my Mother was, of necessity, very frugal and would scour free weekly newspapers looking for the best prices on anything that was a necessity. Non-necessities almost never made their way into our home. The Tsbouchi "welfare diet" bothered me a great deal because I believe the rationale behind it was extremely tenuous, the images it invoked unfair, and the intent behind the scheme malicious.

The material harshness of welfare receipt was often exacerbated by a social harshness. Many spoke about being treated as "less than human" within and beyond the welfare bureaucracy as a direct result of being a poor or a social assistance recipient. This is consistent with earlier research that pointed to systemic "rituals of degradation" (Piven and Cloward, 1993; Herd, Mitchell, and Lightman, 2005). Further, while "arbitrary terminations have always been a conspicuous feature of the public assistance system" (Piven and Cloward, 1993: 309) this phenomenon seems to have been accelerated according to the experiences of several respondents who reported regularly receiving form letters cutting them off social assistance for the vague reason of "insufficient information." It was also common for recipients to report receiving inexplicable letters stating that they had been overpaid a large sum, with the accompanying demand that sum must now be paid back to OW. These subjugated regularities, material and cultural, that constituted the "regimes of practice" carried out by OW made daily life "on the system" almost the opposite of the cushy, desirable, and luxurious life-style painted by Regan-inspired rhetoric of welfare discourse. In relation to their embodied experience, welfare stereotypes were deemed as being misleading and inaccurate.

While income insufficiency was all but unanimous among the respondents of this research, there were some notable exceptions to the "rituals of degradation." Several respondents mentioned that they have had experience with more than one worker, and that some of the workers with whom they had contact were very understanding and treated them kindly. This finding confirms Piven and Cloward's (1993) contention that 80% of people on welfare reported having acceptable workers in an unacceptable system. There were two stories in particular where workers reportedly recognized an unmet need of a client, ensured that need was met, and this enabled the client to move forward. Further, some clients reported receiving new, and more understanding, workers on the rare occasions when they launched complaints about an occurrence whereby they were treated with a blatant indignity. Prior to examining the frequently reported material and cultural harshness of the daily living realities of life on welfare, we will first examine the anomalies when some clients reported helpful and positive experiences.

Needs Were Met

The two moments of highest praise for OW service delivery came when previously unmet medical material needs became met. These positive realities enabled forward movement. Uma, the lady who had a serious leg infection and thus had to leave her service sector work at a coffee chain told her story of what enabled her to be returning to work at the end of the month this interview took place (June '07),

> *Well, Kim was a help with me actually at one point. Because the welfare system wouldn't help me at the start. I have to wear the core stockings for my legs because of the leg ulcer I had. And I have a weak spot now from it being there. I have to wear support stockings. Well they are $250 for two pairs of support stockings and welfare wouldn't cover them. But I went and I talked to Kim and she said, 'you know what, we'll see what I can do under OW' and she actually was a big help there. And she was able to actually get me my stockings under OW where welfare wouldn't cover it at first. What they don't realize is that now I can head back to work because I got the stockings. Like thank God Kim was there.*

Poor health, as a barrier to work, and health supports as facilitating a return to the labour force, are not a part of mainstream discourse.

Ryan told a somewhat comparable story (from his earlier experience) of how OW facilitated meeting a previously unmet need, and this facilitated securing employment that otherwise would have been by-passed,

> *What happened was I had been pounding the pavement looking for work and there was nothing and I was getting pretty unhappy about it. But then one day my buddy called me and he said "Ryan, I got a six-month [construction] job for you if you can start Monday but you need certified work boots." The thing is, I wanted this job so bad because it paid almost $17.50 / hour and it was just a 25 minute walk away. But the catch was, I had no money for work boots and, to kick the cat while he's down, not even a hundred bucks credit to my name. So what I did was call my worker Helen, and she was really nice. She said, "Ryan, call them back and tell them you're taking the job, and I will be out there with a cheque for your work boots before Monday." So they were good that way, like if you try to help yourself – they really do try to help you too. Like Helen congratulated me and she was good about it.*

These examples of medical and material needs being met to facilitate employment were the exception, rather than the rule, in the qualitative interview data informing this research. In fairness, I should supplement these stories recounting positive moments when OW made provisions for unmet needs to be met with further observations from my direct experience as a social worker with the Children's Aid Society of Oxford County. As Karen Swift (1995) has observed, a large part of child protection social work entails securing resources for families whose needs are not being met. In my direct experience, an advocacy based phone call or letter to Ontario Works Oxford usually produces very quick results in accessing resources for the families that I have worked with. Most recently, this involved accessing additional support to purchase a new bed for a child on my caseload whose head lice was emanating from her bed.

The different barriers respondents reported precluding their attachment to the labour force will be examined later in this chapter. First, there are two other examples where respondents reported that OW righted a blatant wrong and (at least partially) met a need for recognition.

Reporting, and Responding To, Indignity

While there were several stories of respondent's being treated with indignity by workers, on the two reported occasions where client's launched complaints to management, OW management acknowledged the wrong and made provisions to, at least partially, rectify the situation. Dorothy told her story, describing what she called the worst time of her life,

> *In 1999, my father [who lived in Western Canada] died. My brother in law was going to send me a plane ticket. And my worker at the time said, 'I am telling you if you take that ticket that is going to be considered income and we will*

> *deduct it from your check.' So I didn't get to go and say good bye to my father.*

Technically, Dorothy's worker could not be reprimanded for this particular incident as he was merely enforcing the rigid deduction regulations that were in place about receiving gifts with any monetary value. There were no practical provisions for extenuating circumstances on humane grounds: welfare bureaucracy superseded humanity. Dorothy's worker, however, later crossed the line whereby his harshness could no longer be excused, "*My worker told me that if he had his way every person on social assistance would have to account for every piece of toilet paper that they use*." Dorothy advised that her blood pressure was inordinately high and when she saw her doctor later that same day, she told him what had happened, *"My doctor said, 'that is the third time I have heard that guy's name [Dorothy's worker] this month, and I have had enough.'*" Dorothy explained that her doctor called Oxford MPP, Ernie Hardeman[21], to complain about the indignities several of his patients endured, the MPP in turn called the OW office, and in this particular case the worker was forced to apologize to Dorothy. Dorothy's strong agency, here, enlisted the support of a resource in the form of a person deemed culturally worthy of respect and this made Dorothy's frustrations appear more legitimate. Dorothy was provided with a new worker and reported that she was pleased, and felt somewhat vindicated, with this resolution. When asked if the worker who had treated her rudely had lost his job as a result of his blatant rudeness, Dorothy advised that he was still working at OW. It would be hard to imagine a comparable scenario of an employee keeping his or her job if they were serving a different disenfranchised population and made an equally ignorant remark about that population to a person they were supposed to be serving.

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[21] In chapter 7 we will review how, during the 2007 Provincial election, Oxford County Conservative MPP Ernie Hardeman drew upon the discursive field to sidestep my public challenge to him to attempt to try to live on a social assistance income for one month. I advised that I would also carry out the challenge myself if Hardeman agreed to do it. In the following chapter we will examine his reply in the context of understanding how a discursive field, and "truth", operates.

Heather told a comparable story that culminated in a comparable resolution,

> *The first time my worker came to see me she was ignorant to me to say the least. She told me that she didn't work 40 hours per week and pay taxes so people like me could pretend they can't work and just sit at home and eat bon bons. Basically, she was being a complete bitch and I wasn't about to take that from her. I told her that I had worked my whole life and was going back to work as soon as I was able to. I must have been yelling because she looked scared. But she was still very rude again and I didn't deserve that so I called the office to complain.*

When I asked Heather about the outcome of her complaint, she advised that OW provided her with a new worker. Given my knowledge of Dorothy's story from an earlier interview, I asked if the worker was forced to apologize and Heather replied, "*No, but she should have been*." Heather was not aware if any disciplinary action was taken against this worker. Both Dorothy and Heather presented as having a positive feeling of being somewhat vindicated when the illegitimate indignities they faced were legitimately acknowledged as undignified. OW Oxford management, and Conservative MPP Ernie Hardeman, both deserve credit for at least partially rectifying these particular wrongs. As we will see very clearly in the next chapter, Heather was certainly not immune from picking up, thus reproducing, the narratives that she was showing a very strong resistance to here.

When hearing these stories I could not help but reflect on the wisdom of Sheila Baxter (1997: vii), "Standing up to injustice and abuse and corruption gives you power." Like Dorothy and Heather, many respondents faced comparable indignities they deemed very unfair, both within and beyond the OW administration, but unlike Dorothy and Heather they unfortunately did not (for various reasons) speak out against them. It is to these stories that we now turn.

Experiencing Classism

"*How would you describe your experience with the welfare system?"* (Interviewer)

"Completely degrading." (Adrienne, research respondent).

Adrienne advised that she went to great lengths to hide the reality that she was on social assistance, and when asked to elaborate she was quite blunt, *"because you are not accepted*". When asked to explain, Adrienne discussed how the stigma of impoverishment had negatively affected both her and her adolescent daughter,

> *It is very hard to hide the fact that you have no money. To have friends my age who are not on assistance, like to meet new people and for them to come into my house and to see only dollar store stuff. Their kids all have cell phones and they all know right away when they come in that I am poor and that my daughter is poor. And it has such a negative effect on my daughter. She was like 'you know Mom, I can't date any guys that come from wealthy families.' I was like "Why?" And she said 'cause we're poor.' And I am like 'No honey, that's not the way it works. You date whoever you want to date. You are entitled to the very best.' You know but it certainly is a huge blow, huge, to her self esteem that I can't really have friends. It is hard to make friends with other families, because it is so obvious that we have nothing and people judge you for that – they do.*

Interestingly, as much as this caring mother claimed that class should not impact her daughter's dating choices, research on the class components of interpersonal relationship and matrimonial partner selection suggests otherwise (Brehm, 1992). Doctoral dissertations "Restaging the Welfare Diva: Case Studies of Single Motherhood and Social Policy" (Lessa, 1999) and "Disciplining Single Mothers on Welfare: Neoliberal

Strategies of Governance in a Consumer Society" (Power, 2002) both highlight the enormous gap between the "welfare queen" identities that are constituted by the meaning-making of welfare discourse and the unrecognized material realities that make the demanding (and time-consuming) role of care giving even more challenging. In both studies, much like the respondents in this research, the women under investigation proceeded to both take up and resist dominant discourses.

Alice was the older woman whose poor health had worn her down and whose impoverishment was palpable in her clothing and appearance. She described her experiencing volunteering at a child care center and experiencing an "otherness" among the children she was trying to serve,

> *The kids told me that they would not listen to anything I said and that they would not eat anything that I cooked for them. They would only eat what their mother cooked. The thing that made me hand in my notice is that I had their breakfast on the table. I had asked them to eat breakfast. I went upstairs to use the washroom when I came back down, three kids were sitting in a different room eating the lunches their mother's had packed with the breakfasts untouched.*

To be sure, it is not particularly uncommon for pre-school children misbehave or fail to follow directives. Further, there can be no doubt that certain people are simply not able to establish rapport with some children for different reasons. But given that Alice reported that the children she was referring to did not exhibit the same defiant behaviour with other caregivers, it is reasonable to draw the conclusion that Alice's physically noticeable disenfranchisement was discernable, and undesirable, even to very young children who determined that they would not eat what this lady had prepared for them. The impact of this rejection appeared to deeply bother Alice. She appeared hurt telling her story.

Alison articulated being treated harshly within the welfare bureaucracy,

> *I asked how I am supposed to live on $324 / month. And she [Alison's worker] says to me 'Well, you have to go door to door collecting pop bottles and turning them in or you can go to the soup kitchen or food bank.' And I thought, geez, you are just a nice person there aren't you? And I got away from her. They just ended up getting me someone else. And I told my social worker about her too. And then she was rude to me. She said 'How can you afford a cat when you haven't got enough food to eat anyway?' And I says 'Well I got to have somebody here with me don't I?" I am on my own. I am alone. And the cat was perfect company. And she said 'well it costs money to feed them.' And I said 'well then I'll starve and I'll give my cat my food.'*

Alison's pronounced facial discomfort – a wrinkled forehead and stoic expression -- was congruent with her words and suggested that she was quite upset when telling this story. When I re-assured Alison that nobody should have to be vilified for owning a cat, she said *'thank you'* and appeared pleased that someone else had confirmed her reasonable perspective that a cat-ownership should not be considered an unearned luxury that warrants chastising. According to Alison's account, her question of how she was supposed to live on $324 / month is what angered the initial worker. The workers smug reply appeared to gloss over the realities that are ignored by the symbolism of welfare receipt. Alison went on to explain why this harsh treatment bothered her,

> *That [rude treatment] made me feel like I was nothing. After all these years I have struggled to survive and I raised my children and 32 foster children. And you can confirm that with Children's Aid. And I would still be doing that if I could but I can't do it anymore. I just felt that after all I have accomplished to be put down to go to Ontario Works and to be put down for having to apply, that made me feel that I was worthless.*

Alison was one of the few respondents who inferred strongly that caregiving labour should be valued more than it is. Alison also opted to talk about some of the details of her distant background given that the stigma of impoverishment was not new to her,

> *I went to a class re-union a few years ago and I said to my grade 8 teacher 'I told you I didn't turn out to be a bum.' He wasn't very nice to me when I was growing up. We didn't always have nice clothes. We weren't always clean. And I used to hide in the cloak room at lunch when I didn't have lunch because I didn't want anyone to know.*

Like many respondents, Alison's story made it clear that undesirable social hardships (i.e. being the brunt of harsh judgements) were part and parcel of material hardships. Given the caregiving that she did with her own children, and 32 foster children, Alison's story is perhaps the quintessential example of how caring labour is in dire need of being restructured (Neysmith, 2000) so that it is valued, carried out, and remunerated more with equity.

Daryl advised that his undesirable status as a social assistance recipient worked against him, ironically enough, in the process of gainfully seeking employment,

> *I went to the local McDonald's. I was dressed nice, you know. I took my resume with me. I filled out their application and I got an interview. So I went in for the interview to flip hamburgers or clean, or whatever, and I thought that it was going pretty good. Then they asked me what I was presently doing and I told them that I was trying to get off welfare. Well, it was a mistake to tell them that. At the end of the interview the manager looked at me and said "I am sorry Mr. Taggart, I can't hire you." And I go "what do you mean? Why can't you hire me?" He said that I was not qualified to flip their hamburgers. I asked him why, and I he just said "I am sorry, I cannot hire you."*

Darryl expanded on his story and further advised that the manager who interviewed him,

> *wouldn't tell me why [he wouldn't hire me], but he didn't have to because I could tell from the moment I told him that I was on welfare that there just would not be a job for me. I*

> *went back and got my grade 12 because I want to work, but it is not quite that simple.*

It seems that if there was a legitimate reason to withhold employment from an unqualified candidate, hiring personnel would be free to disclose their reasoning. Daryl reported that he was given no explanation. In Poor Bashing: The Politics of Exclusion, Swanson (2001: 83) has shown that "people are turned down for jobs because they are on welfare." When it is assumed that people who are applying for jobs don't want to work, there can be no clearer example of a prejudice stubbornly ignoring corrigble evidence.

Notably, Daryl was one of the few respondents who defended, not only himself, but others in his predicament, while concurrently inferring that others may fit the less than favourable caricatures of welfare recipients,

> *You know, there are some [people] who support us and some who just don't care because they got a job and they are financially stable and they just basically call us lazy bums who are not trying. Well I am sorry, but not all of us are lazy and many of us do try. Like, there are some people out there who are like that but that is not all of us. I miss working. If I could go back to work I would. I am bummed out all the time because there is nothing to do and even if there was something to do I don't have the money to do it.*

Like most respondents, there was both resistance and accommodation to the cultural logic of neoliberalism in Darryl's perspectives. But Darryl was one of the select few who offered more resistance than accommodation when speaking about "Others." Without explicitly naming the phenomenon of classism (this term is clearly not available in the discourse accessible), Darryl did a commendable job speaking out against prejudicial views of the poor.

Uma also expressed concern about "not being treated as a person" within the welfare bureaucracy. She advised,

> *It’s awful. And you know I was in an abusive situation with my husband. I was in really rough shape when I left. It wasn’t physical but it was mental and emotional stuff and I was trying to deal with the fact that I had this leg ulcer that was not healing. Dealing with that and then trying to find a place to live and then food to put on the table and then like everything to be a Mom and then go to welfare. I went there on my own to ask for help. And you feel like you are being treated like dirt. There was time when I ended up telling my nurses because I was so upset about stuff. They don’t treat you like a person and they don’t care. The welfare system just does not care about people. They really don’t and it was awful.*

I asked Uma specifically what it was that made her so upset that she decided to talk to her nurses (who were treating her leg infection),

> *When I phoned them and asked them how am I supposed to live with what I was getting. Like one check I was supposed to live on $300 / month. And I said, ‘how am I supposed to pay bills and pay rent?’ It doesn’t do anything. And her answer was ‘go get a loan from the Salvation Army.’ But then they would count that as income and deduct it off and I would still have to pay the Salvation Army back and how could I do that? You end up in a vicious circle and it is never ending.*

Uma’s frustration stemmed from what she perceived as an unreasonable response to a reasonable question that was ultimately an ignored problematic at the forefront of her life and the lives of her children. Notably, this same question was reportedly posed by other respondents and it solicited a comparable response from workers. As we established earlier, privileged irresponsibility affords advantaged people the opportunity to ignore and disregard the disadvantages that they do not face.

Diane also spoke about her embarrassment of living in poverty and the shame she felt in not being able to provide her children with all the school supplies that most children take for granted. She summed up how she felt this way,

> *The situation I was in because of mental and emotional abuse and stuff that is why I left. And you know what? I can see why some ladies are scared to leave. It's like, 'where do you go for help?' If you go to the welfare system you still feel like dirt. The way they treat you. And it's not right. I should feel better being away from my husband. It didn't lessen my worry. It didn't lessen the burdens off of me. They didn't and they don't allow for what that is like.*

Uma shared her views on what she feels are unfair societal judgements,

> *There are some people whose views on it [welfare] are very wrong. They think that because you are on welfare that you are no good, that all people who are on welfare are dumb, lazy, stupid and need to get off their fat ass. And that is not fair because I am not dumb, I am not stupid and I am not lazy. And I do work and I have always wanted to work but I ended up on the welfare system not because I wanted to. It's not like I said "Oh let's go do this". For me it was the furthest thing that I wanted to do. But that is still not what some people think about people on welfare. That is not how they think of them and that is not right.*

Here, Uma was clearly positing a strong resistance to neoliberal views. But this resistance was quite enigmatic in the context of our entire interview. I followed Uma's statement (above) about harsh views of welfare recipients with the natural probe "Why do you suppose some people feel that way?" Her remarkable response, whereby she reproduces the views to which she had just expressed such a strong aversion, will be examined thoroughly in the following chapter.

Interestingly, Dorothy expressed some insights that strike at the heart of The Nature of Prejudice (Allport, 1954), and also at Foucault's claim to question the unquestioned groupings with which we have become so familiar. When asked to describe the strengths and weaknesses of OW Dorothy promptly claimed that "*they are painting everyone with the same brush*." When asked to explain she advised "*they assume that we are all lazy and that all we do is take money we don't deserve*." When probed to elaborate, Dorothy explained that she was five minutes late for an appointment at OW with her worker and "*she yelled at me and asked how I ever expected to keep a job. I told her that I already have a job, that's why I am late.*" Dorothy explained that she felt vindicated,

> *because an officer manager there knows me and luckily she heard the worker yelling and she came over and said to the worker, 'she has gone back to school [Dorothy had graduated from a Community College with a diploma in social services] and worked her butt off. How dare you.'*

As she had done invoking the support of her Doctor earlier, Dorothy exercised agency by making reference to how a person in a position of notable responsibility shared her perspectives.

When Frances was asked to describe her experience with OW she replied that it was "*very unpleasant*." When asked for particulars she reiterated two common themes,

> *There is not enough money. It is utterly ridiculous what they expect you to live on. I guarantee you that they could not do it themselves. And they just treat you like you are the lowest form of person on earth because you need assistance.*
>
> Can you give me an example? [interviewer]
>
> *I have to check in three days per week and show them where I have applied or I am cut off. The stupid thing is that is time I could be doing something like looking for a job rather than showing up like I am a friggin criminal on probation and telling them I am looking for a job. Here's another example, OK, Oxford County is really bad because when you are on social assistance and you are going to find a new place to live they make you take this form and get your new landlord to fill it out. Now when I lived in Norfolk County all I needed from my landlord was a rent receipt. So my landlord never had to know that I was on social assistance. In Oxford County you have this great big orange form that the landlord has to fill out. So he knows you are on social assistance and I am not kidding when I say that to more people than you realize you may as well be a leper. It should be more discrete. Why should the landlord have to know?*

Frances felt that the general public seems to think that "*you are the lowest form of human being if you are on welfare*" and thus was very opposed to having her landlord made aware of her situation.

Gloria also told of experiencing a familiar story,

> *When there are no supervisors in the office they are snobby with you and will talk over your head. The first interview I had up there [OW office] the guy made me feel that small [holding index finger a few centimetres from thumb].*
>
> What happened? [interviewer].
>
> *He wanted to know how long I had worked in the brake shift plant and I am nervous and I forgot how many years and I said a few years and he gave like a sarcastic huff. He never asked me about up until then or after then. I left the plant because of an operation. He made me feel like I hadn't worked much and that is not true. They should understand that not everybody who is on welfare is lazy. But if you are on unemployment insurance or welfare they still have their nose up in the air.*

Like Dorothy had in an earlier interview, Gloria made reference to front line workers being more ignorant when their supervisors were not around. Because supervisors generally have a higher status than front line workers, and rude treatment was reportedly more common when supervisors were not around, Gloria was perhaps attempting to add credibility to her claims. Further, Gloria noted, here, that not everyone on welfare is lazy but like most respondents her subject position oscillated between resistance and accommodation because she later reported that "most people could find work if they really wanted to."

Janet spoke of experiencing an unwarranted judgemental rudeness from a municipal politician, and several others, in her township when she was facing the "they all have big cars" reasoning for vilifying poor people,

> *I have always drove old vehicles. It is very difficult but I have managed to keep a legal vehicle on the road. This is one of the things I think welfare looks at and goes 'well how can you have a legal vehicle on the road when you don't have any money?' And other people will stigmatize that and go 'well you can't be poor if you have a legal vehicle.' Well the thing is you have to keep a vehicle on the road especially if you live in certain areas [Janet lived in the country of Oxford county] because you have to get back and forth to work or else you are never going to work. You are never going to be able to work. So I make my vehicle a priority. And I know a lot about vehicles so I fix a lot of my own stuff. And I actually had the Mayor say to me, well I ended up with a huge parking ticket and I said I don't know how I am going to afford this parking ticket and the Mayor came out and said to me, "Well how can somebody on welfare afford a vehicle anyway?" I was very insulted by that.*
>
> Did you end up having to pay the ticket? [interviewer].
>
> *Yeah, I paid the ticket. I have two brothers that help me out. They are very supportive they have helped me through some really rough times. I don't like to ask them but sometimes I have no choice.*

Interestingly, while carrying out my role as a child protection social worker, I was pulled over by police officers on two occasions during working hours: one time for having an expired licence plate sticker and one time for doing 65km in a 50km zone on my way to interviewing a child for a child protection investigation. An office mate had earlier advised me (based on her earlier experience) that if I was ever pulled over by the police, to advise the officer that I am a child protection social worker because they will almost always let trivial traffic violations go for "us". On both occasions, I escaped with a verbal warning to get my plates renewed and to slow down respectively. Unlike Janet, I easily could have afforded to pay these tickets. Unlike Janet, I did not have to. I reaped the benefits of my white middle class privilege. Janet expressed significant disenchantment with this mentality.

John, like Daryl had earlier, advised of the harshly ironic reality that the mere fact of being a social assistance recipient undercuts his job search,

> *There are certain places you can't go in. They won't accept you. The fact that you are on welfare – they are not going to accept your resume. You bring that up to your worker and you do it [apply] anyways. It doesn't matter if you get the door slammed in your face or not you drop that resume off. To me, some of the workers in there think that they are higher than what you are. You know, it don't matter. They make yourself feel belittled or whatever you want to call it. It is OK with them. They don't have to go out and face it.*
>
> You mentioned that some places won't accept your resume if you are on welfare. Can you tell me about that? [Interviewer]
>
> *OK, for example there is a shop downtown. It's an aluminum place on Dundas Street. You walk in there, like I did with my resume, and he knows you are on welfare.*
>
> How does he know? [interviewer]
>
> *People know what you are doing and what you are and when people find out that you are on welfare you may as well be a parasite. And this guy just happens to know and he pinpoints you right there. Basically, he is 'get the hell outta my shop. Get the hell out.' That's it. And you tell your worker that there is those type of people out there and all they say is that you still need 14-18 job searches per week or you are cut off. I don't like to use the word be-little but at the end of the day that is what they do more than anything.*

Later in this chapter we will examine some of the barriers to leaving social assistance, but for now it should be noted that the stigma of being on social assistance in the first place can be one of those barriers. The respondents who endured this barrier deemed that it was exceptionally unfair.

The Material Realities of Social Assistance

“*Nearing the end of the month there are some days where you just have to get your body used to skipping meals. It’s not good for me and there are days when I feel lifeless like there is nothing in me anymore. And I just lie in bed because getting up burns energy I know I am not going to have.”* [Alison]

If the social realities of being on social assistance were harsh, the material realities were equally as bad, or perhaps even harsher. Depending on the nature of an unmet material or health need, this could be a constant and chronic problem from which there was seldom, if ever, any reprieve. What poverty amounted to for many respondents was having important living needs that were not adequately met or, in some cases, never met at all. While the harshest conservative critics, fuelling a public discourse that re-ignited a harsh public opinion, would de-contextualize a story like Alison’s to zone in on the fact she acknowledged lying in bed and draw the conclusion that this was at the heart of the problem. Yet this victim blaming (Ryan, 1976) mentality is woefully inadequate at the level of interpretive sociological meaning, “Adequacy at the level of meaning requires examination of the “in order to” and “because” motives of the actors” (Adam, 1978: 4). In this particular case, welfare policy makers would be well served to understand that “in order to” get out of bed (assuming that one has a bed to sleep in) and start the day, it is necessary to have adequate food to access “because” one will be burning energy that they will not be able to replenish. Hearing the stories below, the “in order to” and “because” motives of actors that have become “distorted in the discourse” (McCormack, 2002) start to become clearer.

Adrienne, who had come to social assistance because a host of health problems coincided with the dissolution of her marriage, articulated what bothered her about her experience with OW,

> *They have a special diet allowance which is now $10.00 and that will cover an extra couple days but it doesn't matter how carefully you shop – and believe me, I shop very carefully because you have no choice but to be that way -- and if you only buy things on sale, there are still quite a few days left at the end of the month where there is no food and no money, and so I scrape together the remains of what is left in my cupboards and sometimes there isn't anything left. There are days when I have to drink 20 glasses of water because my stomach is so empty. And I have to tell you that when my daughter is hungry I thank God everyday that she can go to her Dad's, because if she couldn't . . . [starts to cry]*

When Adrienne re-gained her composure articulated another concern that was negatively impacting her well being,

> *They have a drug benefit plan, but they cut back dramatically on what they cover. And for someone like me that is just about the worst thing that they could possibly have ever done. So now people like myself are on drugs that they shouldn't be on because the ones they should be on aren't covered. But they are the best the doctors can do. Doctors are scrambling to keep us as healthy as possible.*
>
> *And they have a basic dental plan, but it does not completely cover your dentures, and they won't even tell you how much it covers. You have to go and get your teeth pulled first and then come in with an estimate for the dentures and they say that we'll get back to you. And you know teeth are not just cosmetic, people need them to chew.*

Uma cited an extensive list of comparable concerns, first about not being able to provide everything that she would have like for her children (even when she worked full time in the secondary labour force) and later about her specific disenchantments with OW over repeatedly having her family's legitimate needs ignored,

> *And at Tim Horton's, this is funny too . . . Because I work for Tim Horton's they have a camp and they say how they send kids to camp. The thing is I didn't even know about it. And I have always been low income. We didn't know about Tim Horton's kids for camp. My kids never got to go to summer camp because I couldn't afford it, and yet I work*

> *here and I help send kids to camp but my kids never got to go.*

Uma offered a social critique of her concerns with OW along with establishing the difficulties in the material realities – and the unmet needs -- of her everyday living,

> *I can't get dental work done. I had a tooth go very bad and they eventually helped out a little and I had to fight for that and I still owe my dentist. My kids can't get all of their dental stuff done. I have very sensitive teeth and I ended up with a lot of pain in my mouth and I thought it was a cavity or whatever. And to get dental work done it was, like, well you have to go to the dentist and get it checked out, and then you send in an estimate to welfare and they'll see whether or not they will cover it.*

Adrienne contrasted having unmet needs to the positive way her medical needs had been met earlier. Adrienne had already told this story earlier in the interview, but she obviously must have felt compelled to repeat it,

> *The only good thing that helped me with welfare is that they did buy the drugs and they did get me my stockings when I needed them. Like that medical stuff I didn't have to worry about because that was covered. Like when I needed antibiotics welfare was good for that and I just had to pay a $2.00 fee on the welfare system and the rest was covered. For my legs, I didn't have to worry about the cost of therapy because it was covered. But now that I am being cut off of welfare [Adrienne was returning to her full time work at Tim Horton's at the end of the month this interview was taking place] I can't even get that. But I was told that if something came up and it was quite costly I could phone in and see if maybe I could get a drug card covered – to see if maybe they'll cover it. It wasn't that they will help, it was maybe they might help. So it is pretty stressful to think about it and how can I not think about it.*

Adrienne also articulated a reality of working life in the secondary labour force,

> *And I make minimum wage here and you have to apply for benefits from Tim Horton's and if you are accepted they take $35.00 / month off your pay cheque to cover the cost of*

> *benefits*[22]*. When I found out about that I couldn't spare the $35.00 / month but I wish now that I had been able to.*

Here, gender and class disadvantage were intersecting to exacerbate Adrienne's challenges in that the work she did in the secondary labour force was undervalued and not adequately compensated, and the work she did as a Mother was also prone to a comparable plight. Home-life, the labour market, or social assistance did not providing Adrienne with an adequate material existence.

Mike claimed that not having a vehicle, given his geographic location, undercut his capacity to secure employment,

> *Let's face it. You got to go out of town. Unless you got somebody to get you into Toyota here then you got to go out of town. If I had a car I'd have a job and I wouldn't be here today. See they also stopped the bus passes now. See, I used to have a bus pass and if it was too far to walk I'd get a bus. But see, if I can get that job at Super 8 they are going to give me money for a bus pass after that, so that's all right you know. But that only lasts for a little while and I won't make enough at Super 8 to pay for my rent and food and a bus pass. So it's a no win situation. If I was younger I could walk an hour to work and an hour back but not now.*

The idea that access to a reliable vehicle expands the geographic radius in which one is able to work is something that is not part of the welfare debate, and although a few respondents cited a lack of transportation as a personal barrier to employment, this barrier was not mentioned when discussing the "Other."

Donna described, in a powerful way, how she felt when the inadequacy of her income forced her to go to the local food bank. Despite the fact that nobody at the food bank was rude to her, the cultural stigma was ingrained in how she perceived her situation,

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[22] Most places of employment in the secondary labour force simply do not offer health benefits (Duffy, Glenday and Pupo, 2005; Newman, 1999)

> *That is the most embarrassing thing that you could ever have to do. It's horrible. The people there are nice but to have to go in there and tell them that you can't feed your kids, you can't afford toilet paper. Nobody should have to go through that. Spend a day in our shoes and find out what it is like. Poor people don't want to be poor. Maybe some people don't mind but most poor people don't want to be poor. Do you think that I want to take my kids to the welfare office and tell them that I need help?*

In stating that "poor people don't want to be poor", and adding the caveat that maybe some don't mind, Donna was among a minority of respondents whose rejection of neoliberal discourse was clearly more prominent than her accommodation when discussing the "Other". Notably, almost one third of respondents posited some variation of the refrain that their critics should "spend a day in our shoes." I thought enough about what respondent's were saying, here, to issue that challenge to the PC MPP of Oxford County in the 2007 election. We will explore this exchange in Chapter 7. Because the marginalization of the poor is accomplished through words about poverty, and those words do not adequately articulate the harshness of impoverishment and gloss over (with antiseptic slogans) the disabling effects of being without adequate resources, I truly believe that simulating a period of living on a social assistance income would be an invaluable and humane learning experience for many policy makers.

Survival

Several respondents reported that they had no alternative but to rely on the assistance of family, close friends, and / or odd jobs to secure additional material resources to compensate for the inadequacy of their income. There was a conviction among many that this was absolutely necessary and there was a frequently cited refrain, emblematic in

Heather's view, that people at OW "*should try to live on this amount and live like this for even just a bit. I can guarantee you that they couldn't do it*."

Several respondents also gave graphic and compelling details of shopping very carefully and being as frugal as possible by doing things like buying only what is on sale, seeking out and using every coupon available if it was for a needed item, using cloth diapers, cutting children's hair to save $10.00, getting clothing from Goodwill, and food from the food bank. Despite these survival strategies it was often still a common experience to go without.

Regimes of Practice

Many respondents reported receiving inexplicably vague form letters from OW advising that their benefits had been cut off for providing "insufficient information." No written details were provided to respondents about what information they allegedly failed to provide and calls to the office often resulted in waiting two or three days to get an explanation from their worker. On some occasions, the letter had reportedly been sent in administrative error, and on other occasions, there were what respondents believed to be exceptionally trivial bureaucratic technicalities, with Roxanne's case being the most blatant,

> *A couple months after my twins were born I got a letter in the mail stating that I was cut off for "insufficient information." I had no clue what they were talking about and I was completely hysterical because this was my only source of income and I have kids to take care of. And what made me the angriest is that I am good with keeping up with everything that they ask. So I called my worker and I don't get a call back. I call again. No call back. Three days later I get a call stating that they need to see the original copy of the birth records and not the copy I gave them. That's all it was. Meanwhile for three days I am going crazy thinking that my only source of support is gone.*

Receiving these types of letters, with little detail, was a common occurrence among respondents. Adrienne, for example, reported,

> *I get letters saying I am cut off every few months. But the letters are never clear what for. They just say that your benefits have been terminated based on section so and so. The first few times it happened I was freaking out about it and I called in and eventually got it straightened out.*
>
> And what needed to be straightened out? [Interviewer]
>
> *Really stupid stuff. Like they claimed that I wasn't reporting income from my insurance company. I told them, "you guys must know something that I don't because I am not getting money from any insurance company." Eventually it all got straightened out and they said it was just an administrative error. Just stupid stuff like that.*

Form letters terminating benefits were quite common. Several respondents told other stories of bureaucratic challenges they felt were frustrating. Loretta, 28, for example, advised,

> *It was a month and a half before I received my first check and I waited until I had nothing before I even went there. If it wasn't for my landlord I would have been homeless. So it was the middle of April when I got my first cheque and there were a lot of misunderstandings with that. The intake supervisor when she did my application did several errors.*
>
> Can you tell me about that? [interviewer]
>
> *She misread my financial statement and she thought that I had $600 in the bank when all that was was my overdraft. So she misread that and then she did not take into account my bills of the hydro and gas in my expenses. I was in rent geared to income and she thought that my rent was all inclusive but I told her that it wasn't. So my first cheque was a lot less than what it should have been and with the bills piling up and no money that was a lot of stress. Now they did make that up later. But then after they made it up I began receiving all these letters saying that I had not submitted statements. But as it turned out they were all their mistakes.*

Darryl told a comparable story,

> *Over the years I have had so many suspension letters putting my benefits on hold, and for what? It is ridiculous. It's like, OK, what did I do now?*
>
> What do the letters say? [interviewer]
>
> *They don't say anything. They just tell you that you are suspended and that you have to call.*
>
> So what happens when you call? [interviewer]
>
> *OK, well the latest one, somebody must have called in and told them that I am working and not reporting my income, so I get a letter saying that I'm cut off. I know that I have not done anything wrong and I have done everything that they told me to do and I still get these letters. Like I told my worker on the phone, 'if I was working I would tell you. Actually, you would be the first person I would tell. You have got all my letters from the doctor and you know I can't work, you know I'm on oxygen, so what am I put on hold for?'*
>
> You mentioned that this was the latest incident. Can you tell me about other incidents?
>
> *There were times when they cut me off for no friggin reason and I would have to go without for three friggin months. I was like, OK, when I was living on London Street I gave them proof of where I was living and how much rent I was paying. And all of a sudden when I moved they claimed that I had been over-paid $3000. And so I went there and I was hopping mad and at the same time I am trying to keep my cool. And I said "why do you guys think I owe you $3000?" And they said, "there was no proof of where you were living and if you were paying rent or not." And I said, "excuse me I gave all that to my worker and I gave you guys everything you asked for."*

Daryl reported that OW is taking $35.00 of his check every month to pay back the $3000.00 they claim he owes them.

Diane reported facing a comparable frustration whereby a confounding debt she allegedly owed to OW was being taken of her already minimal check,

> *There was me and I have my two children. They had me living on less than $1100 / per month. And when we were on welfare before they reported that something had happened with some mix up and we owed then $1000.00. But I don't know what happened and I don't know what they are talking about. But then they took $100 off my cheque every month to pay it back. And they have to change the petty things they do. Like if you are a day late with your income statement – even when they know you have no income – you are cut off.*

It was also common for respondents to report feeling frustrated with having to regularly check into the office to provide updates on their job search. There was no regular pattern as to the frequency of check in requirements. The range of required job search check-ins varied from daily to monthly. A few of the prospective applicants awaiting to hear about their eligibility to ODSP, and a few others who already had employment, were exempted from job searching at the time of our interviews.

Training Placements (or lack thereof)

Given that one of the rationales supporting the notion of workfare is that participants will receive training that will enable them to secure employment – and this argument was certainly trumpeted loudly by the proponents of the common sense revolution – respondents were asked about their experiences with workfare placements. Training placements were so rare among respondents (none of the twenty four people were currently in a placement and only three reported ever having been) that many did not even understand the open ended question "Can you tell me about your OW placement?" and confused mandatory job search requirements (which have always existed even prior to OW) with training. In short, nobody gained marketable skills or met important contacts through training that did not exist except via political optics and rhetoric. This finding confirms those from the Social Planning Council of Toronto (1999).

When Alice was asked about her placement, she replied,

> *I am not in placement at this time. I have been. But I am not at this time.*
>
> When you were in placement what kinds of things were you doing? [interviewer]
>
> *I went through the intake and they gave me a log sheet that you need to fill out -- a participation activity log.*
>
> And is that the same as job training or is it just verifying that you went to look for work? [interviewer]
>
> *No. It's just saying that I went to look for work. I didn't get job training.*

Donna's comments were also typical, "*That's the thing. They don't give you training. They just send you out there to look for a job.*"

Darryl advised that a few years earlier, "*they had me pruning trees*." When asked to elaborate on this training he said, *"well the exact same thing that I was doing for three months other guys were making $13.00 or $14.00 bucks an hour for."* When asked if he received meaningful training Daryl advised, *"it takes five minutes to learn how to prune a tree. The training I received was five minutes long to work for less than minimum for three months."* When asked if he had made important connections at placement Darryl advised that there were no connections there that could assist him, and that making it known that he was on welfare in the first place was the antithesis of assistance.

Loretta advised that she had formerly done a brief placement as a dish washer at a soup kitchen that she was forced to used. Loretta reported that she took the initiative to arrange the placement herself and OW approved it, and a worker came out to see her placement on one occasion. When asked if she gained new skills, Loretta advised "*No, I already knew how to wash dishes. I have been doing that since I was eight.*" When asked if she met important contacts via placement Loretta advised, not surprisingly, that she hadn't. Soup kitchens tend not to attract very many potential employers. The reported lack of meaningful workfare training via OW confirms the findings of Herd, Lightman, and Mitchell (2005), Quaid (2002), and the Social Planning Council of Toronto (1999).

Attempting to Exit Social Assistance

Given the material and social harshness that respondents reported having to endure, it was common for virtually all conversational partners to express a desire to get off of social assistance. There were often barriers that reportedly precluded this from happening. Daryl talked about some of the obstacles he faced to employment.

> *like I will look at the London Free Press at the library just around the corner because it's close and the paper is free and London's where the jobs are. But, hello, how exactly am I supposed to get there? Ideally, there would be work for me in Woodstock but there isn't.*

The lack of work where he lived, and the lack of material means to drive or relocate to where he may find better work undercut Daryl's job search. Darryl continued utilizing free resources (i.e. newspaper at the local library) to continue looking for work and thus he was not without agency despite having very limited means.

When asked what barriers Adrienne faced to employment she listed two,

> *My health. And a lack of money to go there and do it and to even get there. You know because even if it is a job where they want you know a criminal record check or you know when you work with children or when I worked at a shelter it costs money and if you don't have it you are out of luck.*

If health problems are a factor that bring some people to social assistance, it stands to reason that if adequate health supports are not put in place to make people better, then illness and injury will remain barriers to achieving "self sufficiency." Further, there are monetary costs to securing and getting to work and if those costs extend beyond the means of job seekers then they will be, as Adrienne mentioned, “out of luck.”

Alice articulated what she felt were exceptionally frustrating barriers for her,

> *I am supposed to be computer literate*?[sighs / sneers with a look of disappointment]. *I am 59 years old. We never had computers growing up. I don’t have a computer now. I have explained to them [OW] that I don’t know how to use a computer and that cuts me out of a lot of jobs. And they say, you know, we will help you when you come in. And then when I go there and ask them to help me they go too fast. I don’t even know where the pointer or the disk is to help me find what they are looking for. And they just click on here and click on there and I can’t even understand what they are clicking on to so I am not able to keep up with it. I am from a generation that didn’t have computers growing up and I don’t have one now and that makes it more difficult. Plus my arthritis and carpel tunnel -- that also makes it very difficult for me.*
>
> Do you have any health supports?[interviewer]
>
> *Well it is all out of my pocket but I can claim it on income tax. I wear compression stockings for circulation in my legs and those are $112 each pair. And I have another pair coming in the mail shortly which I put on my Visa bill. And I wear $400 orthotic insoles in my shoes to walk without pain in my feet. And the chiropractor allowed me to have them for free so I didn’t have to declare those on my income tax. And I wear wrist supports and they are $40.00 each and I pay those out of pocket until I declare them. And I wear the [medical device that was not audible in audio recording] and I have worn it for three or four years now and that is $80. And I take whale cartilage for my arthritis because if I don’t there is pain radiating up my back and that is $27 for 100 capsules.*

Alice felt that expectations for her to re-enter the labour market were unfair, and what was making her even more disenchanted (and adding to a host of stressors presented by her ill health) was that the limited computer training that she was provided was not suited to her capacity, health, or interest. There was reportedly a profound lack of empathy for her situation. Interestingly, most respondents reported receiving no practical training whatsoever and this is consistent with (Herd, Lightman, and Mitchell, 2005) and the (Social Planning Council of Toronto, 1999).

The barriers that brought Alison to social assistance, and kept her in a scooter for most of her waking moments, also kept her out of the workforce,

> *I am not doing very well. I have gotten worse. The radiation on my back weakened my spine and I have rheumatoid arthritis. I am in extreme pain a lot and have to take a lot of medication.*

Alison was the woman who was vilified for her former worker for owning a cat. She recounted her extended work history that entailed almost a quarter century of being a Foster Mother,

> *All I have ever done is take care of kids. That's all I know how to do. Like I said, I would be a foster mom again in a heart beat if I was in better shape. I had to quit two years ago this spring. I look like I am in good shape right now. I have gained so much weight. But I can't get up and move and walk very fare because it is extremely painful doing it and it hurts for days afterwards.*

In addition to the stigma of being a social assistance recipient that reportedly handicapped his capacity to secure work at MacDonald's, Daryl also reported health problems as a barrier to securing employment.

> *Last year I had lung failure twice. I have only one lung. When I was first born my left lung collapsed. They had to destroy my left lung. Right now it is just sitting there doing nothing. My left lung don't work.*

Do you have any health supports? [interviewer]

> *Yeah, I am on Oxygen 2 right now because if I wasn't I wouldn't be here. I have got my big machine I use to sweep with that I wear around the house and when my oxygen is low I can really feel it so I have a tank that I carry with me when I need to use it.*

Diane's health had recently taken a turn for the better, and because her children were now young adults she no longer had child care barriers. Diane was happy about returning to work but recounted challenges she had faced earlier in her life,

> *Well one of the things I had to consider when looking for work was my hours because when my kids were younger they needed me and my life revolved around them. So I had to consider them and work as much as I could when they were in school and try to be home when they were going to be home. Even when they were early teens I didn't want them home alone – especially at night in our neighbourhood. My husband was a truck driver and I never knew when he was coming or going so there was not much help there and they needed adult supervision so that was a big factor for me finding a job. Days was the only thing that worked for me and when I got it at Tim Horton's I took it.*

Dorothy articulated what she felt were impediments to moving from part time employment on the front line of the service sector, to full time employment that would enable her to leave social assistance,

> *My age. The fact I have fibromyalgia. And even if I was younger and had my health, if I had gotten a bachelor's degree instead of a diploma I would have had a better chance of full time work instead of part time at $12.00. I have gone online at my daughters and looked all over. The government website. OACAS.org, charity village.com, all the nearby papers version on the computer for job like CMHA and community options for justice, and to get good work you need your bachelors. I am close to retirement age so it doesn't make sense now. They are not going to hire me. And now there is no retirement age. People can stay as long as they want. How the hell are people like me gonna get in?*

While Dorothy was certainly correct in that a bachelor's degree in social work would certainly have made her more marketable than a social service diploma, it must not be forgotten that we are now living in the first generation where university educated graduates are unemployed and underemployed in large numbers (Duffy, Glenday and Pupo, 2005).

Frances was pretty clear about why she felt she could not secure employment and why her situation, and well being, was looking very bleak,

> *To get out there again I would need to have my health back. I just can't work. I really miss my bartending and waitressing job but i just can't do it. I am dying sitting here right now actually.*
>
> Would you like to get up and stretch? [Frances had earlier advised that she can't sit for long periods]
>
> *Yes, I better.*

Gloria echoed the sentiments of several earlier respondents when asked what she would need to re-enter the labour force,

> *With the operations I've had, and especially, I have never recovered from having a tipped uterus. And I have live like this for so long I don't think anymore that there are any miracles in store for me. And with the way I have lived it has worn on me. There is so much stress that I have gone through it is impossible to cover it all, but let me just say this and this is what I want you to promise me that you will write into your report: more support when I needed it would have given me more life and more of a chance.*

Gloria's views clearly oppose the perspective that making poor people poorer is helping them by given them a needed push into the labour market. Her perspective is entirely consistent with a compelling editorial by a woman named Susan Scruton in an anti-poverty journal called "Perception" (Vol. 25 # 3, 2002), "I know from experience that people need more, not less, in order to extricate themselves from poverty."

Roxanne detailed what she felt was an employment barrier by articulating how she feels impoverishment impacts people,

> *I think that anyone living in poverty, well I think you are affected by depression because that's exactly what it does. Like to be starving and have no food or just crappy food and realize that there another week and a half before you have any money. Financial stress can knock me right down. People think that's just physical but it is also emotional. It can be hard some days to just get out of bed because that takes energy you don't have. Once you had your breakfast, if you even get that, you might not be eating again until tomorrow. And when you force yourself to get out of bed anyway there is nowhere to go, no money to get there, and if you walk you are burning your energy that you might not be able to put back.*

There could be a compelling comparison, here, to an earlier respondent's predicament when she formerly owned a car, and reportedly could not run it when she could not afford gas. People are comparable to cars in that if they are not properly fuelled they will not operate effectively or, perhaps, not at all.

Connecting Subjugated Knowledges to the Subaltern Literature on Poverty

"The majority of Canadians don't understand what poverty is, what it does to those who endure it, how it effects their children and grandchildren" (Capponi, 1999: ix)

Jacqueline Homan (2007: 4) writes that,

> Much of what has been said or written [about poverty] has come from those who have never personally experienced the negative effects of classism and the social injustice of poverty in particular. Thus, their writings and opinions are from the perspective of being on the outside looking in.

Sheila Baxter (1997: viii) articulates her personal frustration with directly experiencing this phenomenon,

> We, the non-academic working class poor don't have many books that speak our true voices. Often when somebody like me writes, our thoughts are re-constructed by others who feel that education brings the authority to interpret our meaning. I have so many memories of speaking and being interpreted. People say things like, 'What Sheila is trying to say is . . .' or 'What Sheila means to say is . . .'or 'What Sheila meant was . . .' When I speak from my working

> class perspective, I know what I say and I know what I mean.

In analyzing Baxter's comments I could not help but reflect upon her claim that poor people don't have many books that speak their true voices. While it must be acknowledged that impoverishment is experienced in different ways by different people, and it is fallacious to assumed that there is one truly representative voice, there are also some common themes that emerge when one examines the interpretive phenomenological literature on poverty as written by those who have experienced impoverishment. As a PhD candidate writing about poverty, I was well aware of how the voices of poor people are rarely heard in the academy and attempted to compensate for this reality early in my doctoral studies by putting together a PhD comprehensive exam reading list that included the experiential insights of poor people. My list was ignored by faculty and the eventual reading lists through two sets of comprehensive exams totalling the equivalent of one hundred books included only one source (albeit a powerful one, Kelley, 1997) written about poverty from the perspective of a person who had actually experienced impoverishment.

In fairness, there was much scholarly and analytical value in the other ninety nine sources on my reading list and I can't lose sight of the fact I could not have completed this dissertation without the academic knowledge base I accumulated making my way through those reading lists. I maintain, however, that the academy could, and should, be doing a better job desubjugating subjugated knowledge as it relates to impoverishment. As we noted early in this monograph, Kelley wrote about his disenchantment with the academy, journalism, and organized politics for producing "culture of poverty" views of urban ghettoes that were harsher than the game of "the dozens" he played in those urban ghettoes. Other authors have written to make their voices heard, so let's examine what they have said.

Stephen Oates, a Martin Luther King, Jr. biographer, notes that in his later years King became more determined to merge the Civil Rights Movement with stronger anti-poverty activism and recounted the challenges that emerged when the King's voluntarily relinquished several trappings of an upper middle class existence to temporarily simulate the discomforts of economic disenfranchisement,

> Coretta and the children had moved into the [ghetto] apartment with King, intending to stay until the fall. Right away, the [normally well behaved] children started whining. There was nothing to do except play outside in patches of black dirt. Even the pitiful playground was black dirt. The streets were too congested and dangerous for them to release there stored-up energy there. Because the ghettoes had no swimming pools or parks, there was no place for them to escape the torrid heat. Confined too often to King's small, suffocating flat, the children fought and screamed at one another and even reverted to infantile behaviour. 'I realized that the crowded flat we lived in' King said 'was about to produce an emotional explosion in my own family' (Oates, 1982: 394).

Perhaps the strongest commonality that runs through the subaltern literature on impoverishment (Kelley, 1997; Capponi, 1999; Baxter, 1997; Homan, 2007) that can be connected to the subjugated knowledges of the 24 respondents interviewed for this study, would be that poverty can perpetuate itself when the lack of material (including health) resources to move forward are absent and the extreme discomforts of impoverishment compromise the well being necessary to escape poverty. Those who have written about their experience with impoverishment, and virtually all 24 conversational partners who took the time to discuss their lives with me, were consistent on two key themes: there were undesirable factors other than "personal irresponsibility" that brought them face to face with poverty and a lack of material and health supports are undercutting their capacity to escape impoverishment.

In arguing that the effects of the daily living realities of impoverishment are often mistaken for the cause, Homan (2007: 126) argues "These [disabling effects of poverty] are all critical factors ignored by the so called expert politicians, think tanks, and society at large." While neoliberal images of rugged individualism are posited as solutions, and tenets of 'personal responsibility' is written into welfare policy, Homan perceptively notes, "You simply can't pull yourself up by your bootstraps – you have no boots to begin with" (Homan, 2007: 176). Homan's metaphor is powerful and it is worth considering why the legitimacy of her logic, evidenced by many of the embodied stories we have examined in this chapter, has not been recognized in public policy.

"Privileged Irresponsibility"

Tronto (1993: 120-21) suggests that "privileged irresponsibility" can be seen when "those who are relatively privileged are granted by that privilege the opportunity to simply ignore certain forms of hardship that they do not face." Given that material and cultural hardship is "distorted in the discourse" (McCormack, 2002) of welfare reform, grounded insights in the final sections of this chapter will attempt to counter this undesirable reality.

The Interfaith Social Assistance Reform Coalition (1998: 107) solicited input from grade four and five students in North Bay. This input was solicited not only because there was an glaring gap in the literature ignoring the voices of children in poverty, but also because "One of the hardest things for these mothers is to see the hardship of their lives affecting their children" ISARC (1998: 107). Here is how children at a school in a disenfranchised North Bay community responded when asked to talk about being poor.

Poverty is . . .

Wishing you could go to McDonald's
getting a basket from the Santa Fund
feeling ashamed when my Dad can't get a job
not buying books at the book fair
not getting to go to birthday parties
hearing my Mom and Dad fight over money
not ever getting a pet because it costs too much
wishing you had a nice house
not being able to go camping
not getting a hot dog on hot dog day
not getting pizza on pizza day
not going to Canada's Wonderland
not being able to have your friends sleep over
pretending that you forgot your lunch
being afraid to tell your Mom that you need gym shoes
not having any breakfast sometimes
not being able to play hockey
sometimes really hard because my Mom gets scared and she cries
hiding your feet so the teacher doesn't see that you don't have boots
not being able to go to cubs or play soccer
not being able to take swimming lessons
not being able to take the electives at school (downhill skiing)
not being able to afford a holiday
not having pretty barrettes for your hair
not having a backyard
being teased for the way you are dressed
not being able to go on school trips.

(Source: ISARC, 1998: 107)

It seems very reasonable to conclude that the overwhelming majority of children who are not deprived of the experiences listed above are probably going to have a happier and healthier childhood that translates into academic achievement leading to higher education and retention of their middle class status as they become adults. In 1989 the Canadian House of Commons unanimously pledged to "achieve the goal of eliminating poverty among children by the year 2000" (Hurtig,1999: 57). By the deadline date nearly one in five Canadian children lived in poverty – an increase of 564 000 since 1989 (Hurtig, 1999: 57). Today, the goal of ameliorating child poverty is not even on the agenda. The province of Ontario has set the goal of decreasing child poverty by 25% over the next five years. The headline for the Ontario "Growing Stronger" campaign is "breaking the cycle".

Conclusion

By examining the qualitative data from these twenty four respondents, and connecting their insights to other economically disenfranchised people writing about their disenfranchisement, it is reasonable to draw the grounded conclusion that (for many) the undesirable factors that bring people to social assistance, the material and cultural harshness of everyday life on the system, and the barriers to escaping impoverishment are all obscured by policy directives that espouse de-contextualized notions "personal responsibility" as the primary solution to poverty reduction.

Every single respondent in this research positioned themselves as worthy and deserving amidst the cultural and policy practices that too frequently suggest otherwise. Examining the specifics of these discursive strategies of resistance is revealing. To concisely sum up respondents' stories,[23] 41.6% of people who participated in this research (n=10) cited some form of health problem as a primary barrier to labour force participation. Almost half of this group stated that their poor health was a direct result of their participation in the labour force, and in doing so strongly rejected the dominant notion associated with welfare receipt that they were afraid of work. Several of the people living with poor health made a point of stating that their doctors were fully supporting them and this strategy did seem to lend an aura of credibility to their claims. While poor health was the most frequently cited employment barrier among the respondents in this study, injury and / or illness was not experienced as a singular or discrete challenge. A lack of material resources was cited as problematic by 23 of the total 24 respondents, and for people with poor health living in poverty often frustrates attempts to have health restored. For three women in this study, health breakdown coincided with relationship breakdown.

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[23] The numbers in this concluding summary (quantifying the discursive strageies of conversational partners) were secured by going back through my coded data in N6 after it was determined that my write up did not cover each of the 24 respondents' perspectives on every issue. The write-up included the most compelling illustrations of a given theme and the omissions were similar variations of the same theme.

People would also push back against the dominant discourse to point out that they did not leave their job, but for reasons that were clearly beyond their control their job had left them. This was the case for 33.3% of conversational partners (n=8) and peoples' detailed stories effectively re-negotiated the disembodied stereotypes linked with social assistance receipt: for several respondents, part of this renegotiation seemed to directly counter the "culture of poverty" perspective when conversational partners made a point of emphasizing that their parents had taught them the value of work. Like the problem of poor health, job loss was not experienced in isolation as a sole problem. Three of the nine respondents who were laid off, or let go because of company closure, also stated that their age was working against them in attempting to secure other work. One women had job loss occur at approximately the same time she became a widow. All nine respondents who had lost their jobs stated, with slightly different variations of the same underlying theme, that the discomfort of economic deprivation was undercutting their well being and capacity to transcend their present circumstances. One respondent was clear that cuts to her health supports “were the worst thing they possibly could have ever done.”

Relationship breakdown was cited by 16.6 % of respondents (n=4) in this study as the primary reason for having to access social assistance. All four of these respondents were women. Two of the four had health problems coincide with relationship breakdown and all these women were, or previously had, devoted a significant portion of their lives carrying out the demands of caregiving. Two of these four women also suggested that present child care challenges precluded a secure attachment to the labour force as they argued it was not practical to hand over a sizable portion of their minimum wage check to a stranger so that their children would receive less care than they were giving them. Notably, only one of these four women (and only one out of a total of twenty four respondents) inferred that caring labour should be valued more than it is. All of these women talked about how poverty negatively affected themselves and their children.

Two of twenty-four personal stories from conversational partners seemed to have a notably less compelling rationale describing the factors precipitating the initial application process. One respondent was quite candid stating that he was young and foolish when he initially applied for social assistance as a teenager. Another respondent acknowledged that he had a drug problem, precipitating harsh treatment from his boss, which lead him to voluntarily exit his job. Yet both of these weaker rationales for the initial application process were buttressed by qualifications that, after having made mistakes, there was significant effort put into rectifying them: i.e. “going back to high school” to graduate and “pounding the pavement” looking for work.

We have established that public policy, public opinion, and the "perversity thesis" have been oblivious to the daily living realities of poverty that are frequently associated with "the inability to pursue well being precisely because of the lack of economic means" (Sen, 1992: 110). Not one respondent in this research, nor any of the subaltern authors who have provided similar insights, reported that life was comfortable living on social assistance and many were clear about the unrecognized discomforts of impoverishment. The graphic stories people told to get their points across were compelling.

Yet there was a recurring, and quite remarkable, phenomenon whereby respondents would marginalize their own experiential knowledge about coming to OW, subsisting on the system, and attempting to exit social assistance and privilege the mainstream "words of welfare" when talking about "the other" lazy and fraudulent social assistance recipients. The stories respondents told about "Others" often had a much different tone. As we established in chapter four, stories are frequently told with a purpose and are often a reflection of how people see the world.

The proceeding analysis in Chapter 6 will confirm insights from The Survival of Domination in that, "members of inferiorized groups become the target not only of aggression from the superordinate, but from fellow members" (Adam, 1978: 112). Further, I will show how "Domination constructs its own underpinnings with this 'poor man's snobbery' (Adam, 1978: 106) that is invoked when dominant hegemonic[24] discourses are adopted.

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[24] This monograph concludes by suggesting that the theoretical legacies of Foucault and Gramsci should be merged to better understand that discourses are frequently hegemonic and this is patently clear examining the words of welfare.

Chapter 6

Respondents' views of the "Other": Taking Up Dominant Discourses

"Welfare recipients' views of welfare [and taxes] are not much different from those of the general public. These ideas about welfare mothers are reproduced among recipients, despite the difference that their experience suggests to them" (McCormack, 2002: 171).

The aim of this chapter is to examine the impacts that the predominant public discourses of welfare reform and the everyday practices of OW – which have functioned to constitute a deeply ingrained problematic of pathology and fraudulent immorality among the poor -- have on the subjectivities of social assistance recipients. Welfare discourse is firmly embedded in a larger neoliberal cultural narrative primarily attributing material success to an unbridled (and de-contextualized) individualism and ultimately operating under the logic of Thatcher's (in)famous dictum that 'There is no such thing as society'. Failure, particularly in the form of unemployment and impoverishment, is ultimately interpreted as a reflection of some form of personal or moral deficit: twenty one of twenty four respondents in this research attributed the impoverishment of others to some form of personal trouble. In addition, these deficits are portrayed as an unduly excessive burden on the upstanding citizen who is a hard working taxpayer: twenty one respondents bought into this argument. Further, welfare discourse delivers the message that labour within the labour market is valued, caring labour beyond the labour market is of minimal value: the work of production matters, but the work of reproduction is of little worth (Bezanson, 2006). Only one respondent seriously questioned the perspectives that devalue caring labour. The everyday practices of OW are ultimately about person-reform that decontextualizes the person being reformed from the structural and material barriers that they face. In this chapter we examine the effects of the signifying systems, symbols, and images that are part and parcel of the classifications associated with "words of welfare".

A central finding of this research is that while respondents would overwhelmingly resist and discredit the dominant narratives of impoverishment and welfare receipt in relation to their own circumstances, there is a frequently recurring (and I would suggest, quite remarkable) about-face phenomenon when respondents spoke of "others" living in poverty. Many respondents accommodate, draw upon, and thus reproduce the same cultural narratives – about the work-shy, fraudulent, 'welfare scrounger' (Hall, 1988) -- they had earlier deemed inaccurate and unfair when applied to their personal circumstances. The disjuncture between respondents' embodied knowledge examined in the previous chapter and the impact of disembodied public discourse in this chapter will set the stage for exploring "the question of the nexus between power and subjectivity [that] has been a central preoccupation of philosophy and social theory for a very long time" (Adam, 2002: 100) in the final chapter concluding this monograph.

Prior to delving into the substantive content of this chapter, a brief return to an important aspect of Allport's theorizing is necessary to contextualize much of the qualitative data under investigation here. If two of the defining traits of prejudice are definite hostility and rejection that is based on categorical group membership – "people are judged not as individuals but rather on presumed group membership" (Allport, 1954:5 – then it becomes difficult to see some of the particular stories respondents provided as prejudicial. In some cases respondents were articulating what they perceived to be reprehensible behaviour about an individual that was grounded in what they knew, or directly observed, about a particular person. In some cases this was a snapshot moment of observation, and in other cases it was grounded in an understanding generated by a longer acquaintance with a person whom the respondent stated that they knew. In some cases, the antipathy respondents expressed towards others was quite draconian. Perhaps because the very nature of classifications /categories (Bowker and Star, 1999) and stereotypes (Allport, 1954) draw our attention to some aspects of social life and concurrently avert our gaze from other angles, it was common for respondents to lose sight of the fact that – even based on their own accounts – the people whom they were describing were certainly not living a desirable or enviable life.

My analysis of these stories zones in on the generalizations and judgements that were posited by respondents – particularly their attributions for the impoverishment of others and concern for the 'taxpayer' --in light of the inductive evidence they presented to arrive at their conclusions. It is insightful to interrogate what respondents did not notice, and / or did not say, in their accounts about others living in poverty. Perhaps the most remarkable phenomenon that occurred on several occasions throughout many interviews, is that respondents would subjugate their own knowledges (which they articulated early in the interviews) about the route that they had taken to welfare receipt and impoverishment. This curious omission in their poverty attributions amounted to respondents articulating stories about others who purportedly fit the stereotype of the 'welfare scrounger' (i.e. who didn't really need to be on the system and was living the good life at the expense of taxpayers). Notably, stories about others living in the disabling circumstances of impoverishment, through no fault of their own, were a rarity.

Allport himself articulates an important point that is germane to the qualitative data we will examine later in this chapter,

> It is not easy to say how much fact is required to justify a judgement. A prejudiced person will almost certainly claim that he has sufficient warrant for his views. He will tell of

> bitter experiences he has had with [people whom he has had contact]. But, in most cases, his facts are scanty and strained. He resorts to a selective sorting of his own few memories, mixes them up with hearsay, and overgeneralizes (Allport, 1954: 7).

Through the use of interview probes, it became patently clear that in some cases this is precisely what respondents were doing. In other cases, it seemed that respondents concerns about particular individual engaging in self destructive behaviour had more merit. Allport's insights from The Nature of Prejudice include the important proviso that,

> we can never hope to draw a hard and fast line between 'sufficient' and 'insufficient' warrant. For this reason we cannot always be sure whether we are dealing with a case of prejudice or non prejudice (Allport, 1954: 8).

Allport (1954: 19) further acknowledges that sometimes stereotypes originate in a "kernel of truth." While I seldom question the facticity of what was observed and reported by my respondents when they spoke about "others" on welfare, I could not help but feel that many of the assessments and conclusions respondents drew from these observations were concurrently informed by, and reproduced, the rhetoric of the common sense revolution and the cultural logic of neoliberalism. In the verbatim excerpts of qualitative data that follow, I will present the respondents' views supplemented additional analysis showing how cultural beliefs had infiltrated their perspectives.

Picking Up and Reproducing Public Narratives

Public narratives about individual pathology and medicalized attributions of poverty, widespread welfare fraud, and "tax rage" -- whereby the meaning imbedded in the very categorization "taxpayer" denotes being unduly victimized (McQuaig, 1995) -- were taken up by virtually all respondents. Clearly, many respondents shared something of a common meaning regarding impoverishment, welfare, and taxes and this common meaning seemed to transcend (and be larger than) the individual subject positions of the people expressing their views. In other words, culture had a coercive influence on shaping meanings, interpretations, and the perceptions that respondents frequently came to adopt, verbalize, and ultimately reproduce. Neysmith et al (2005: 170) posit a profound theoretical observation that is inextricably linked to the logic and reasoning behind my central argument analyzing the perpetuation and "survival of classism",

> as participants draw upon available discourses to make sense of the world around them (media, government messages, texts and images) they are, at the same time, challenging and producing them. All of the stories rely on the way in which people "make meaning" and on our capacities, as researchers, for hearing these practices at work. While experiences have a material reality, once they are communicated and continue to be retold, they take on a new shape.

Building upon the work of Neysmith et al (2005), this chapter examines the regularly patterned meaning making practices at work in respondent's stories that are shaped by the discursive field upon which those stories are told. Ultimately, in the final synthesis of this dissertation (grafting post-structural theory on discourse with the social psychological theory on prejudice) I account for what this culturally sanctioned meaning making amounts to. The self-reported material realities of impoverishment clearly take on a new shape when stories about welfare "Others" are told. Classism, I contend, is so deeply and insidiously embedded within this re-shaping process that it goes unrecognized.

While the dominant narratives were not entirely absolute, there was minimal defence of "others" who were "on the system". Many respondents, perhaps as a strategy for dealing with their oppression, were careful to explicitly distance themselves from those "Others". This finding is entirely consistent with Kingfisher (1996), McCormack (2002), Hays (2003), and Copeland (2003) who all found notably comparable variations of the “bad-people-exist-but-I-am-not-one-of-them” (Kingfisher, 1996) account of welfare receipt from single mothers on social assistance. Specifically, many respondents who participated in this research detailed the particulars of their circumstances exonerating themselves from the common charge that they were irresponsible, but it was common for respondents to add some variation of the caveat “but there are people like that out there.” This argument rejects the dominant narratives (i.e. “this doesn’t apply to me”) yet also accommodates and reproduces mainstream meaning and the resulting stereotypes (i.e. “but those kinds of lazy people who ‘scam the system’ are out there – and I’ve seen them”). As we examined earlier in this manuscript, the ratio of welfare fraud investigations relative to criminal convictions under the Harris regime was 122: 1. No respondent argued that the extent of fraudulence in the welfare system is grossly overstated in public discourse. Power was clearly operating, here, by the repressive presence of what it did not say.

The stories that respondents told to evidence the existence of “those lazy scammers” are presented throughout this chapter. On some occasions the stories were detailed and on other occasions vague. Through the use of interview probes some claims, as one would expect, appeared to have more substance than others. While I do not call into question the facticity of most of the stories that were reported by respondents when they invoked their accounts of “bad-people-exist-but-I-am-not-one-of-them” (Kingfisher, 1996), I note that vilifying others on social assistance was infinitely more common than drawing the conclusion that others also had an undesirable route to OW works, an undesirable existence on the system, and intractable barriers realistically precluding a return to the work force.

In comparing my findings with the studies listed above (Kingfisher, 1996; McCormack, 2002; Hays, 2003 and Copeland, 2003), it is reasonable to draw the conclusions, as we will in the final chapter, that subjectivities are not unencumbered by institutional discursive structures and those institutional discursive structures are insidiously embedded with (and conduits of) classism. This phenomenon was clear particularly when respondents were asked to explain the impoverishment of others.

Explaining Poverty

"When problems arise, do participants view them as personal issues and / or do they point to the influence of social, economic, and political forces?" (Neysmith, et at. 2005: 170)

There was one question that provided more intriguing, and perhaps more revealing, answers than any other during interviews: "Why do you think poor people are poor?" While this question was not initially included in my semi-structured interview guide, during the course of my first interview it became clear that it would be worth posing. Tina's story about ill health bringing her to OW when she argued that she should legitimately be on ODSP, curiously, did not lead her to draw the conclusion that maybe other people also had an undesirable route to impoverishment that was beyond their control. It was truly remarkable how common some variation of this phenomenon was throughout the course of twenty four interviews.

The indelible imprint of both personal responsibility discourse and the medicalization of dependency were consistently prominent, albeit in different variations with different levels of intensity, in virtually all of the respondents' causal explanations for poverty. In short, to answer the profound, and revealing, question posed by Neysmith et al (2005) in the epigraph above, poverty attributions were overwhelmingly seen as a personal issue by virtually all respondents. The natural corollary is that respondents ignored larger sociological and economic attributions for the causes of impoverishment and uncritically accepted the logic of a gender blind social policy devaluing caring labour. The lack of economic or gendered analyses, I will contend in the next chapter, is deeply embedded in personal responsibility discourse that permeates neoliberalism in general and welfare reform in particular (being written directly into welfare policy). Let us now examine these accounts. In some cases it is very possible to draw a hard and fast line between prejudice and non prejudice.

Respondents' Attributions for the Impoverishment of Others

"As many studies have documented, the distinction between the deserving and undeserving poor is an enduring aspect of political culture" (Steensland, 2008: 232).

Adrienne's highly medicalized, and "culture of poverty" perspectives – presented in a general and disembodied way -- held that impoverishment exists essentially because,

> *Some people have mental illnesses and some people have physical illnesses. I think that some people have personalities where they don't have the drive or stamina. I mean we are all different and we all function differently and we all have different personalities. You know I think that some people have been born and raised on the system and that seems normal to them you know. And I have seen that. And that is sad. But you know I think that a lot of poor people are poor because they are sick or are missing something.*

When probed for details, Adrienne advised that she did not presently know other people on welfare, yet the long-standing cultural dichotomy between the deserving poor who can't work (i.e. those who are ill) and the "undeserving" (Steensland, 2008) who could work but "have been born and raised on the system" (and allegedly not socialized into the morality of work) was clear in Adrienne's perspectives. Despite the fact that her own story suggested precisely the opposite -- her parents had reportedly instilled "the value of hard work" in her -- Adrienne felt that poor people were incapacitated by how they have been culturally socialized: yet the incapacitating material realities of impoverishment, that Adrienne had directly experienced herself, were not mentioned. Further, Adrienne ignored her harsh experiential reality that society opts to not adequately provide for many enduring an illness. As we examined in chapter 3, discursive fields are marked by boundaries about what can, and cannot, be understood. Adrienne was clearly answering this question from within the boundaries of a culturally sanctioned discursive field and made no reference to the caring labour that she had carried out herself when her children were younger.

Alison initially posited a medicalized conception of poverty and suggested that, "*I think that most of them* [poor people] *have mental health problems*." Alison was one of the few respondents who argued that there may be a number of reasons why poor people are poor, however, she was among the many whose perspectives were oblivious to structural explanations for poverty. Alison was surely drawing upon the discursive field in articulating several potential reasons for poverty (familial socialization, alcohol abuse, low self-esteem) and simultaneously added a personal anecdote evidencing her disenchantment with how she was treated during her formative years,

> *Well, there's a number of reasons you know. It could be the way that they grew up. It could be problems with alcohol abuse. Not having self esteem. It took me a long time to get out of what I grew up with. Like I said, I went to a class reunion a few years ago and I said to my grade 8 teacher 'I told you I didn't turn out to be a bum.'*

The "culture of poverty", alcohol, and low self-esteem are all key players of the discursive field and Alice's perspectives, here, were clearly drawing upon culturally sanctioned explanations. Alice acknowledged that since her health had took a turn for the worse she had been quite isolated (with the exception of regular contact with her children) and did not presently know anyone else on social assistance. Again, impoverishment, *ipso facto*, was attributable to some form of a personal trouble and not considered to be a social issue. Allport (1954) reminds us stereotypes draw our attention to only certain aspects of available information. Categories (Bowker and Star, 1999) like "poor person" similarly draw attention to the cultural meaning and symbolism embedded in a given classification. The cultural meaning and symbolism embedded in the categorization "poor person" includes the assumption that there is some form of personal deficit. Alison was quite clear that she had spent her entire adult life caring for children: first, her own and then for many years as a foster mother to 28 different foster children. Alison made no mention of the fact that caring labour is undervalued.

Daryl had a unique observation and I initially thought I might have located a case of counter discourse, but he concluded with repeating a mainstream narrative that ran directly counter to his personal experience. When asked why poor people were poor Daryl replied,

> *For the ones who can't work, because we are not getting enough money. That, and because there are some people who choose to spend their money in different ways.*
>
> Can you expand on that? [interviewer]
>
> *Well, you need a roof over your head. So you got to pay the rent. That should be your first thing, but for some people it's not. And then you need electricity to cook with and see with. You need heat to keep your ass warm in the winter time. And you need to eat so there is food. So those should be your four main bills that you should pay. And clothes. And anything after that, well, cable is just a pleasure, the telephone is just a pleasure, those things should come last but some people just don't get that.*

To be sure, Darryl was initially rejecting the harshness of the common sense revolution, here, by pointing out that there are people who are not able to work and they are "not getting enough money." At the same time Darryl also inferred that others were mired in an undesirable plight because of their inability to budget carefully. Darryl was able to evidence his views by stating that he knows people in his low income building who "just don't get it" when it comes to finances. I asked Darryl how common he felt this problem of poor money management was among poor people, and he initially replied with an uncertainty, "I don't know" but then suggested "but if I had to hazard a guess I'd say it's probably pretty common." Logic suggests that there probably are people from all walks of life, especially in a consumer culture, that could do a better job managing their finances. But this logic should be qualified by making reference to Daryl's earlier contention echoed by virtually every respondent, and replete with detailed specifics, that it was literally impossible to live on a social assistance income. Daryl's own claim was later superseded by the perspective that other people budget irresponsibly and are incapable of deferring gratification. Despite the reality that Daryl essentially emphasized that his welfare check provides absolutely no gratification to defer, he still explained the poverty of others by making reference to the spending habits of the poor. It appears that the publicly released Tsubouchi "welfare diet" that we examined in chapter 2 was not really questioned when the circumstances of the "Other" were discussed. Given the benefit levels of social assistance presented in chapter 1, it is fair to presume that not having sufficient resources to manage in the first place is a far more prevalent phenomenon (as opposed to not being able to budget) for most people on social assistance.

Diane's individualized attributions for the causation of poverty were both overt (seeing laziness as the problem) and covert (seeing a lack of ability as a barrier), and almost seemed like a public advertisement for the "Common Sense Revolution",

> *Some of them it is because they don't want to work. Because there is people out there that are like that. They are just too lazy to get up and go to work and try to better themselves. There are some people who don't want to do it and then there are some people who don't know how to do it. Some people don't know where to look or how to look but some people just don't want to look. And sometimes to get a job anywhere it's not what you know it's who you know.*

Diane's disembodied generalizations could not be supported by embodied evidence from her social circle. While concluding with the view that social capital matters, at the heart of Diane's attributions was the indelible imprint of long standing cultural beliefs about the nature of poverty and the poor. The logic of welfare reform as posited directly by Harris himself suggested that most people who are out of work don't know how to find a job or they don't want one. The idea that there are not enough jobs for everyone, or that everyone's job does not pay a living wage, did not enter into the causal attribution for impoverishment. Impoverishment as a 'personal trouble' prevailed in this attribution as well. The gendered work Diane had carried out caregiving as a single parent was not mentioned.

Gloria seemed to feel that poverty was primarily attributable to limited cognitive functioning and poor academic achievement, and accepted PC views on both the culture of poverty and associated providing foreign aid with domestic poverty,

> *Well because, number one, not everyone has a good memory to breeze through school. But there are a lot of them who are born into a poor family and the pattern keeps going on and on. And our government should help our own before we help these other countries.*

Gloria's inference that a limited capacity leads to educational, and thus career, struggle seemed to overlook the well established patterns of social stratification within both the educational spectrum and the labour market. The fairness and openness of educational and occupational success was implicitly assumed. Interestingly, the first hint of an explanation for poverty that transcended some form of the "personal deficit" perspective associated domestic impoverishment with providing too much foreign aid. While disenfranchised populations sometimes lash out at each other via in-group hostility, at other times other out-groups bear the brunt of hostility (Bishop, 1994). Gloria also had spent some of her earlier years as a single mother, but she also did not question the work / care dichotomy.

Heather espoused similar views that are quite common,

> *I think that it has got to be education. Education has got to be a huge thing. And it's got to be the desire and the ability to take chances. People get themselves stuck in ruts. Like stuck in situations where they can't advance and then they just give up. And I got to tell you, I have paid taxes myself and it pisses me off.*

Heather did not discuss the dispiriting material conditions that she herself had experienced when discussing the poverty of others, and shared the "new right's" sense of outrage regarding taxes. I asked Heather how she felt about those people who are highly educated but still cannot secure a living wage because of unemployment or underemployment (Livingstone, 1996). Her response was quite remarkable in that she maintained that unemployment, even among graduates of post-secondary education, was attributable to some kind of personal deficiency i.e. not adequately researching the labour market or being unreasonably inflexible about re-location,

> *But then at the same time are those people doing their research? Like finding out the amount of jobs that are available in their field? And if they are not in the right area and are not willing to relocate what do they have to bitch about before they go off and spend tens of thousands of dollars at university? It's great, go to school and be what you want to be – I am all for that but you also have to be willing to bend and flex too. Like if you want to be a*

> *Hollywood movie director, you can't live in Woodstock. And if you don't want to move to pursue your dreams, then don't complain.*

Heather had clearly internalized notions of personal responsibility and perhaps stretched them even farther than most conservative proponents. Most intriguing is her perspective that educated people should be researching the labour market prior to becoming educated, while simultaneously exonerating the inadequacies of the market to produce full employment that pays an adequate living wage. Again, mainstream discourse worked, here, by effectively pre-figuring what was, and was not, important. The belief that everyone can pursue their dreams successfully if they are just prepared to sacrifice had clearly infiltrated Heather's subjectivity as she was awaiting her return to service sector waitressing job.

John also reproduced a public narrative in that he had little patience for those "alcoholics and druggies" who "allow [irresponsible] excuses" to sidetrack what easily could be their route out of poverty,

> *And then you got these guys, like I said, that just don't care. You know, and I get sick of all those people and we do have to kick them off the system. Because you come from an alcoholic family that is what you are going to be. You got your drinking and you got your drugs and you got everything else out there. And you know that is what they are going to do.*

When probed to elaborate on his perspectives, it seemed to become clear that John's understandings were deeply infiltrated by cultural mythology and not particularly in tune with what he had directly observed,

> In your direct experience how many people do you know on social assistance? [Interviewer]
>
> *I would say probably about 6 or 7 that I know, and maybe a few more.*

> And of all of the people you know on social assistance, how many have a drinking or drug problem? [Interviewer]
>
> *Maybe one or two*.
>
> Can you take a moment and think? Is it one person or two people? [Interviewer]
>
> [pause / look of bewilderment] *It's just one I guess*.
>
> And can you tell me about that person? [interviewer].
>
> *Well he is the kind of guy who will spend his check on beer even when his fridge is empty. If he has to choose between beer or food, he'll choose beer. I don't think he has ever worked a day in his life and he probably never will. He just loves his liquor too much.*
>
> You mentioned that you know about six or seven people on social assistance, can you tell me about them? [Interviewer]
>
> *Well there are some people who are just down on their luck. Like they just got a bad break or whatever but they will turn things around*.

It is revealing to note that despite the reality that John knew only one person on social assistance with an alcohol problem, he was reportedly was "*sick of all those people*" and supported the conservative stance of "kicking them all off the system." John's perspectives were clearly based on a "selective sorting of memories, mixed up with hearsay" (Allport, 1954: 7) culminating in a harsh prejudicial overgeneralization. Based on John's own account, it would be safe to draw the conclusion (from the fact that the person repeatedly had an empty fridge) that the person who had made John so angry does not have a desirable life or an enviable material existence. Yet this part of his friend / acquaintance's life did not seem to infiltrate John's subjectivity. Here, we may have located an example of a stereotype originating in a kernel of truth, but what John noticed (and did not notice) was partly pre-given by the symbols and meanings of "welfare recipient" and "alcoholic".

As I did with all twenty four respondents, I asked John to tell anyone he knew on social assistance about my study and provided him with extra flyers which included my contact information should any of his friends or acquaintances wish to participate. Unfortunately, the person John spoke of did not contact me and thus I was not able to access any details of his life. It would have been interesting to hear his story. Notably, it should also be observed that amid John's harsh accommodation of neoliberal discourse, there was also a moment of resistance when he acknowledged that in other instances some people, "*just got a bad break or whatever but they will turn things around*." Again, the cultural influences of new right discourse were powerful, but not absolute.

Ryan's response was perhaps the most intriguing, given than he had detailed putting extensive effort into a job search and drawing the conclusion that there wasn't much out there, yet he proceeded to individualize unemployment. Ryan had, a few months before our interview, completed a 6-month construction contract and had been out of work since that time. He briefly, but only briefly, began his explanation for poverty through considering econometric / structural factors, but the neoliberal personal-deficit view of impoverishment came to the forefront and, ultimately, dominated the covertly classist logic and reasoning informing of his answer,

> *I would say lack of employment. Um, why are poor people poor? I think, no I don't think that. I think that it is the choices they make in life more than anything. It really is. I think that poor people are poor because, I don't know, they don't want to strive to get ahead any further than they are. So what it comes down to really is that it's their own fault.*

> At the start of your answer you mentioned a lack of employment and then you changed direction, can I ask . . . ? [Interviewer]
>
> [replies before I can complete probe] *I think it comes down to, honestly for me, the way I used to be, I think it comes down to self esteem too. People have been poor for so long that think they don't deserve anything better. You get stuck in that rut of being comfortably numb and just getting by instead of striving to get towards something else I think. I don't know, that's a hard question. Why are poor people poor? That's really hard question.*

Ryan's thoroughly neoliberal response (almost as if speaking through the ghosts of Franklin or Reagan) maintained that a better work ethic, combined with a strong dose of entrepreneurialism, could solve unemployment,

> *Absolutely. Um, and why would there be more work for everyone? Well that is a good question for me because there is so much snow out there right now. Why am I not out there with a shovel shovelling people's laneway at 4am in the morning so they can get to work for 7am if they need to get out of the laneway at 6:30am? Why am I not walking around with a shovel going door to door and making $10 a drive-way. You could make $100.00 a day. And I mean everyday is not like that but in the summer time, well, why wouldn't Ontario Works do this though? This goes back to that other question -- I would set things up like they had us doing work, like workfare, and stuff and we'd have to go out there and we'd have to pick up garbage off the streets.*
>
> So you did that? [interviewer]
>
> *Yeah, I did. But I also felt that was no other way of them just proving to us that this sucks and you are going to have to get off welfare.*

In rhetorically asking why he was not at his neighbours' driveways at 4am[25] making work for himself, Ryan's response was unique in that he was inferring that he (and not just

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[25] Because Ryan was not engaged in the work of social reproduction, he would have one less barrier to getting up at 4am to engage in make-shift work that could produce a minimal monetary return.

"Others") was perhaps held back by an irresponsible lack of drive. This perspective subordinated his earlier reports that he had "pounded the pavement" looking for work and "lack of employment" is a significant problem. Despite the fact that Ryan personally had a negative experience with workfare, and his views are consistent with qualitative reports from the Social Planning Council of Toronto (1999) in that a meaningless placement seemed more like an excuse to cut people off support, he was still supportive of different workfare initiatives aimed at responsibilizing participants. Ryan concludes that workfare is warranted because a "lack of enthusiasm" is the primary problem and explains why he re-directed his initial answer suggesting that a lack of available employment accounts for impoverishment,

> *At the same time why wouldn't they set up some type of program in the summer: cut lawns. You get 4, 5, or 6 people together and you cut lawns and you know, pay them. And then you get programs like that, um, whitewashing buildings, helping at seniors' homes. Clean up the grounds, lawn care, and stuff like that. I mean if there was more employment out there, but there really isn't a lot of employment in Woodstock. I mean with Toyota coming and stuff that's great, but I find that usually poor people are less educated people and they are not going to find a job at Toyota – there is just no way. At the same time, the more jobs that open when people go to Toyota, there's gonna be jobs opening somewhere else. Um, the only reason I switched off from that, yeah, I did kind of say lack of employment then I switched off of that is because a lack of employment I think is a lack of enthusiasm more than anything and the people that are on the system they just, I don't know, they just get into this routine of not, well, just get used to money being given to them and that's just what they feel they are doing. So yeah, it is a mistake to coddle them. That's the reason why I switched off of that, because it's the lack of enthusiasm more than it is the lack of employment.*

Ryan's perspectives were a prime example of public discourse acting as a conduit of classism: in his final analysis, "personal responsibility" is what mattered and it is wrong to coddle the irresponsible people because that will destroy their enthusiasm for work. Here, the disjuncture between embodied self reports, and the views of 'others', was enormous.

James initially suggested that some people become poor due to bad circumstances that they will later be able to transcend. While many respondents' explanations for poverty accounted for some form of personal deficiency as the primary causal component of impoverishment, after his initial explanation James similarly drew upon the centuries old cultural distinction between the deserving and undeserving poor,

> *A lot of them it's just because they have been put in a bad situation. Given the chance they will get back on their feet. And the other ones, yeah, they are just looking for a free handout and they are never going to change. It's knowing what the difference between the two is that I imagine is the hard part for them.*

James was not clear what he meant by a "bad situation" (and in reviewing the interview data I regretted not probing at this point) but was one of the few respondents who began his answer explaining poverty in a situational context. This line of thinking was qualified by the caveat that others were looking for a free handout: clearly, James also moved between moments of accommodation and resistance. Speaking almost as if he was one of the architects of welfare reform, he spoke about the challenges of being able to distinguish between the worthy and unworthy poor. The "hand up not hand out" mantra of the common sense revolution seemed to have remnants in James view. The blatant material inadequacy of the "hand out" is clearly not part of the imagery that is evoked by the symbolism – even among people who have subsisted within the inadequacy.

Janet explained her culture of poverty views and followed up with her spiritual strategy for coping with her situation,

> *I think that it is just basically to do with your background. How you were raised and what you were taught. Who your parents were, where you came from, and most important how you were raised. I even believe that some people are rich and some people are poor and it is just meant to be that way. Sometimes I ask God, the creator "Why do you keep me here? Why do you keep me this way?" Maybe it is just all meant to be.*

Janet's account about impoverishment being a reflection of how people were raised, again, was inconsistent with her earlier self report that she was now very poor even though she and her brothers were always taught to work and "fend for [our]selves." The culture of poverty perspective ignores the reality that the same disabling material conditions (experienced intergenerationally) can sometimes lead to impoverishment reproducing itself: cause and effect are frequently confused in mainstream reasoning.

Donna's explanation for poverty initially alluded to the incapacity of the poor but then considered the material contexts that have a proclivity to impede upward mobility. When asked why poor people are poor Donna suggested,

> *Because they just can't get ahead. You can't get ahead if you don't know how. It's impossible if nobody's taught you. And then the price of everything is ridiculous. There is no way that poor people are going to get ahead when the price of everything goes up and they are just getting less and less.*

While initially attributing impoverishment to incapacity, Donna later suggested that poor people can't get ahead when the cost of living rises and they are simultaneously getting less. This argument was somewhat unique among respondents in that impoverishment was not solely individualized. Yet Donna's subject position was not at all unique in that she did not see (or at least she did not suggest) the caring labour that she was doing for her three children as worthy of a more adequate remuneration.

Keylee similarly alluded to the cost of living as a problem, but also felt that an inability of the poor to defer gratification was, among other factors, also a significant problem,

> *The price of everything is too high. And then there is some people who just want everything and can't afford it but they go out and get it anyway. So I mean, you got a lot of things to consider.*

Keylee's personal experience, as she was very clear to make explicit, suggested that not having enough resources was a constant problem. While acknowledging that the cost of living poses difficulties, her inference that others are impoverished by their spending habits seems to side step the reality many people like Keylee herself simply do not have the resources meet living arrangements no matter how carefully they budget. The inability to live within a reasonable budget was taken to be a class related issue. Keylee had become widowed approximately one year prior to our interview and had carried out the caring work for her children by herself, yet this exceptionally undesirable route to impoverishment did not impact her views when asked why poor people are poor.

Lori's explanation for poverty combined conservative welfare discourse with the "common sense revolution's" notorious "crisis in education" (Sears, 2003) stance and added the "deteriorating family values" argument that appeared to be echoing the sentiments of Dan Quayle,

> *Well for some of these kids they have had both parents working and so they have just basically grown up on their own. They don't get the extra time spent with family members. And I mean they have these weaknesses in reading and math and because the teachers coddled them in school when it comes time for the real world they can't do it. And they don't have quality time with community members who can keep them out of trouble, you know.*

Even when both parents work, Lori felt, “these kids” can be prone to impoverishment by poor parenting and deteriorating schools that aren’t preparing them for the real world. Lori could not expand on, or evidence, her vague and disembodied perspectives when she was probed. Earlier in the interview, Lori had was clear that she had done the best she could for her children when they were younger but did not seem to feel that most Mother’s and most parents usually do try to do what is best for their children, nor did she suggest that the caregiving she provided for her children was worthy of remuneration.

Mike replied to the question “Why do you think that poor people are poor?” with a candid response that initially seemed grounded in a simple but compelling logic, “*I don’t know. No money I guess*.” Mike then elaborated on his take on the local situation,

> *They opened a shelter here in Woodstock a little while ago. The rent is so high here and on welfare you only get $500. I wouldn’t mind helping the people out but I can’t afford it either. Like the shelter you have to get in there at 7pm at night and they kick you out at 7:30am in the morning. It’s really hard on a person. But then some people just don’t want to work.*
>
> You mentioned that poor people are poor because they have no money and I think that’s undeniably true, but why do you suppose they have no money? [interviewer]
>
> *They just give up I guess. You know. They went through the system growing up and stuff like that and they just don’t care anymore. That’s my opinion anyways you know. Cause I got a lot of people jobs. See I build tents in the summer time. So you want a job? C’mon, I’ll get ya over here – ten bucks an hour and that’s a lot better than nothing. But then they work for one day and got the money and see you later. To me it’s laziness. That’s my opinion anyway.*

Like most people, Mike attributed impoverishment to a lack of drive. Laziness was the presumed rationale for why people cannot, or will not, keep a job. This is the *sine qua non* of the logic underlying workfare and the message had clearly been received, and driven home, in the subjectivities of most respondents and when those subjectivities were verbalized, classism was reproduced. It did not seem to occur to Mike that there may be a reason (other than just laziness) why the people who had worked for him briefly were not able to maintain full time employment. Further, Mike seemed oblivious to the very high probability that the people he was referring to are not living a life of enviable luxury when they patch together infrequent work projects at $10.00 / hr. Here, discourse was clearly operating by emphasizing what should, and should not, be noticed.

Anomalous Structural / Circumstantial Explanations for Poverty

"Not everyone, of course, is taken in. Demagogy, when it goes too far, meets with ridicule" (Allport, 1954: 186)

While some form of personal deficit accounted for the overwhelming majority of answers respondents gave to explain poverty, this phenomenon was not entirely absolute. Frances, for example, consciously mocked the mainstream view that blames the poor. When asked why poor people were poor Frances initially replied in a facetious tone, laughed, and then provided her serious answer,

> *Because they just want to be [laughs]. I am poor because I have a disability and it took me four years to finally get on disability. I can't go out there and get a $100 000 a year job. I can't get a $20 000 a year job because I can't work anymore. And so I am going to be poor unless I win the lottery.*

Dorothy's answer suggested that there may be something other than personal deficits that impoverish people. Her answer, unlike most, indirectly hinted that there may be something undesirable happening in the labour market that is creating a problem. When asked why poor people were poor she replied,

> *Circumstances. Let's face it, nowadays everybody lives on credit cards. And these days everybody is one pay check or*

> *maybe three pay checks away but they all are not too far from having to live in poverty themselves.*

In suggesting that many people were bordering on impoverishment Dorothy's reply came the closest of any respondent to incorporating a what C. Wright Mills (1959) called the sociological imagination. Dorothy was the one case who hinted at poverty being a social issue as opposed to merely a personal trouble.

Gina also felt that unfortunate circumstances (other than simply lacking a work ethic) can bring people to poverty and explained by talking a little bit about her background,

> *Some people run into difficulties in life. Sometimes you just run into a rut. Stuff happens. When we moved to Canada my Mom didn't have nothing after the divorce so she had to go on Mother's allowance and raise two kids. When I grew up I wasn't planning on being a single Mom, but stuff happens you know. I can't work right now with my kids. It wouldn't make sense.*

In addition to directly stating that people sometimes face unforeseen circumstances, here, Gina was also inferring that the demands of caregiving, particularly after an unanticipated divorce, should be valued more than caring labour is at present. Gina was unique in that she seemed to suggest that the work that her Mother did caring for her, and the work she was doing caring for her children, should count for more than it does. This response was also unique in the sense that a respondent's personal route to impoverishment infiltrated their subjectivity when making attributions for the impoverishment of others.

Of the twenty four different attributions for poverty I secured via interviews, coded, and analyzed via N6 qualitative software, Dorothy, Gina and Frances were the only respondents who did not explain poverty by making reference to some form of personal deficit. Overall, the cultural logic of neoliberalism was predominant in the subjectivities of respondents' in that poverty was perceived as a "personal trouble" and not a "social issue." This predominance was overwhelmingly common, yet not entirely absolute. The salient impact of neoliberal thinking, intertwined with anomalous moments of resistance, was also discernable with respect to other issues embedded within the "words of welfare" (Schram, 1995).

Welfare Fraud and "Tax Rage"

"Has a week ever gone by in Canada in recent years without a strident cry from big business, the C.D. Howe and Fraser Institutes, the Canadian Taxpayers Federation, and / or the National Post that taxes are far too high in Canada?" (Hurtig, 2008: 18).

The obvious answer to the question posed by Hurtig from the epigraph above is "no". Tax rage is, at minimum, a weekly ritual in contemporary Canada. During elections, at all levels, it becomes a daily ritual. In the discourse of the new right excessive taxation is associated with welfare (and welfare fraud) which has in turn been linked to allegedly excessive and unsustainable spending. In this new right discourse anger becomes directed not just at the spend-thrift politician, but at the lazy welfare scrounger who takes what he or she has not earned. It is the hard working taxpayer who allegedly gets stiffed in this scenario. Because caring labour does not command an income, the caring labourer is denied the social status of a "taxpayer" and the associated moral meanings embedded within that cultural symbol. If narratives are repeated often enough, people stop questioning them.

Prior to examining what the respondents in this study said about taxes and welfare fraud, let's first consider what is not considered at all in neoliberal discussions of taxation. There are some exceptionally important realities about taxation that are simply not a part of the public consciousness precisely because rational analysis is subjugated in public discourse. First, by far the most important distribution of wealth and income clearly takes place before taxation (Teeple, 2000: 39). Tax rage pre-supposes that market distribution was fair in the first place and thus warrants no re-adjustment. This pre-supposition (i.e. the unquestioned logic of market distribution) is so deeply embedded in discourse that it is unrecognized. Third, what has been obscured by contemporary neoliberalism in recent times is that significant personal tax increases for the working class population have been necessary to fund corporate tax decreases and tax breaks for higher personal incomes (Mishra, 1990: 98). So when the average working class person is angry at 'welfare scroungers' for personal tax increases, this is a reflection of a phenomenon articulated in Globalization and the Decline of Social Reform,

> As the tax burden on the working class grows, the trend reinforces certain negative ideological views . . . An increasing tax burden can be [and is] used, then, as a rationale to build pressure for the dismantling of the welfare state . . . (Teeple, 2000: 101)

Fourth, Mishra's (1990:31) assessment of tax restructuring in the era of neoliberal globalization suggests, "Stripped of rationalization and rhetoric, the government's [neoliberal] tax policies are part and parcel of a major program of upward redistribution of income." Finally, the (giving) taxpayer / (taking) welfare recipient binary whisks away the care-giving labour that is devalued in a gendered discourse and ignores that taking (and devaluing) of caregiving labour that permits some "taxpayers" to compete within the market. Let us now examine the impacts of new right rhetoric. The linguistic tag "taxpayer" clearly has cultural and symbolic meaning.

Respondents' Views on Taxation

"*I got to tell you, I have paid taxes myself and it pisses me off.*" (Heather)

After explaining that her stress related challenges legitimately brought her to Ontario Works, and expressing excitement about the prospect of returning to work in the near future, Heather explicitly distanced herself from welfare "others",

> *I am not going to say that everybody on Ontario Works is like me. You know there are people out there and they are using and abusing the system – just being lazy and using their checks for drugs, alcohol, and a good time. Those people don't want to work. They are just going to take their check and squander it. It's people like me who do want to work who are getting a job.*

Notwithstanding the reality that Heather expressed detailed concern about trying to live on a social assistance income (even with "about twenty five free meals a month from Mom") she asserted that others squandered their checks on "a good time." Heather's views, here, were perhaps the quintessential example of the "bad-people-exist-but-I-am-not-one-of-them" (Kingfisher, 1996) phenomenon that was prevalent among many respondents.

I asked Heather how she felt about the general public's views on welfare, and she gave an extensive (and overtly classist) answer that is a powerful illustration of McCormack's contention in the epigraph opening this chapter that welfare recipients' views often mirror those of the larger society despite the disjuncture between the mythology and their direct experiential knowledge,

> *Oh God, welfare bums. Welfare people are just like poor bums. They're dirty. It's funny though, when I went on it I was doing what I had to be doing. I was never once embarrassed. It was my life and I had to do what I had to do. I didn't care. But especially working in a restaurant you do get those people. I'm sorry but you can definitely tell, you can tell that they are on welfare because they act like it. And you know what? I could probably almost guarantee that the people I served were on welfare because they just demand everything. Demand it, demand it, demand it. And no tip or maybe a loonie. It is pretty sad but I think that the general perception is that we are lower – lower class type people.*

Although Heather called the public perception of poverty "pretty sad", she clearly did not question that perception: she reproduced it in quite a draconian way. Being cheap and unreasonably demanding were taken to be a class related issues. Ironically, a poor person leaving a large tip would be seen as irresponsible. When a middle class person is demanding it is unlikely that this will be taken to be a class related issue. Heather's analysis of the reportedly rude customers she served, whereby she "could probably almost guarantee" that they were on welfare , and that "welfare people are just like poor bums", seems to illustrate Allport's (1954: 8) contention that "given a thimbleful of facts we rush to make generalizations as large as a tub." I do not question the facticity of Heather's claim that she may have experienced rudeness from a person, or people, who presented as economically disenfranchised, but I do question the deductive reasoning of her conclusions. Heather had reportedly worked in the service industry (at a casual dining facility patronized largely by middle class customers) for several years, and thus it would be informed speculation to suggest that she had probably encountered both politeness and rudeness from all walks of life.

James also drew some harsh generalizations from very limited information, in a manner that clearly appeared to be bringing Reagan's racialized American welfare queen north of the border,

> *I watched an Asian couple pull up out front [of the welfare office]. She got out of the passenger's side of a brand spanking new Mercedes. And yeah, I know, OK, it was probably leased but that is still $500 a month. Plus she was wearing a fur coat. Now it may or may not have been real fur. But my sister is big into animal conservation and she owns a couple faux furs and they are like fifteen to twenty grand for a good one. She struts up and puts her income card in and she is wearing heals and a gown. She did not look like she was hard up for money. I know that there are a few people around town who are driving very new cars and working under the table. They are dealing drugs. Whatever they are doing, one way or another, technically it's illegal. If you are earning money when you are on*

> *social assistance and you are not claiming it you are stealing, and it is stealing from the hard working people.*

Again, while I do not call into question the facticity of what James reportedly witnessed[26], there is a great deal in this excerpt that warrants observation. First, James expressed concern that the lady he was describing pulled up in a Mercedes. He recognized that she probably did not own it (stating that it was probably leased) and cited what the monthly cost of a lease would be. Although James stated that the lady exited the passenger's side of the vehicle, he still presumed that she was financially responsible for the vehicle. Given the improbability of being able to hide a new vehicle from welfare authorities, and that virtually all of a monthly social assistance income would be taken up by one lease payment, it is highly improbable that James' concern was founded. James acknowledged that the fur coat the lady was wearing was probably fake, but still very expensive. In James's eyes this lady was living in luxury. I opted to ask James how common he felt the problems he just reported were, and in his inductive reasoning we can draw a hard and fast line suggesting that his conclusions are patently classist. He estimated the extent of "fraudulence", pointed out that there are also good people on the system, and then proceeded to tell another extended story with a very clear purpose,

> *You know I imagine that it is probably more than 50%. But there are good people who will get off it quickly too. I don't know, I might be shocked to find out that it is probably closer to 70% long term. Yeah, we are here and we are never getting off it. Yeah, we're here and bring me a case of beer. And I let my kid go running around the neighbourhood without his diapers on because the beer was more important than his diapers were. Let me tell you this*

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[26] While I believe that James was reporting an actual incident he had witnessed, it is difficult to truly ascertain if he really did know "a few" people on social assistance driving new cars. Social assistance regulations prohibit ownership of vehicles valued at more than $10 000. In the course of carrying out this research, working for several years in human services, and meeting people throughout the course of my personal life, I can estimate with absolute certainty that I have had contact with over 100 adult recipients of social assistance. None of these people drove new cars and most had no vehicle.

> *story. I almost got myself charged with an assault. I was at a grocery store and there was a pair of drunken parents and a baby. And yeah, the grocery cart was full of chips and cookies, and mix for their drinks. Just add liquor and it's a long island iced tea type-thing. And there was a case of pop and one case of canned baby food and a bag of diapers. They were standing in front of me at the till and the girl is ringing all the junk food in and she read out the total and they looked at each other and said 'we don't have that much, we'll put something back'. So Daddy picked up the diapers and said 'oh here, put this back. We won't need this, he can go running around.' I probably would have been up for murder if he had grabbed the baby food. But as it was I just looked at the guy and said 'excuse me?' At the time I wasn't on social assistance. I was a taxpaying citizen and he was going let his kid go without diapers so he could have a case of beer.*[27]

James explained why he was so enraged by the grocery store incident he reported, interestingly by drawing upon the work ethic as a pre-requisite of citizenship and responsible parenting. James' went so far as to state he supported a revival of eugenics,

> *I was raised to believe that if you wanted something and your parents weren't Rockefeller then you got off your ass and worked until you got it. That is what an upstanding citizen does. Nobody was just going to give it to you. And there is no way that you should be bringing babies into this world unless you can show them the value of work by example. You know they had a rule years and years ago that if you were a 3rd generation welfare family the doctor could sterilize you. I think that they should bring that back because that's the only way they are going to break the cycle.*

James also accepted the argument of fraudulence "in the system" by suggesting that people who "pose" as homeless can make a great living from the scam. James sounded genuinely disenchanted when he articulated his belief that,

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[27] I did not seek clarification regarding the facticity of James' story, but it should be noted that grocery stores do no sell cases of beer. Earlier in the story James mentioned that the couple was purchasing liquor mix and I have taken this claim at face value.

> *All you see in the news now-a-days is these supposedly homeless people and they are out there panhandling. I had a friend of mine do that down in Toronto. Not only was he not homeless but he brought down five hundred or six hundred bucks a day panhandling. There was a City TV reporter who tried it and she brought down $120 in two hours work. She was like, 'I am tempted to quit my job'.*

It is next to impossible to gauge the facticity of each claim, but it is hard to imagine that there are fortunes to be made by panhandling. I would suggest that it is logically sound to posit that this argument (about the fraudulent homeless generating high incomes from their scamming) draws attention away from the inhumanity that the economy and contemporary social policy have created.

After Diane explained that the she feels that harsh public perceptions of welfare are wrong-headed, I asked her why she felt there are negative views of poor people. Her reply initially reproduced the views that she had just herself stated were wrong, and then proceeded to caution against premature judgment. Her initial remark, here, may partially explain the intensity of in-group hostility that was prevalent throughout the qualitative data,

> *Because there are people out there giving people like me a bad name. That happens. It is because people see some groups of people who are on welfare and they think that we are all the same way. And it happens that people get prejudiced thoughts. It happens whether no matter you are on welfare or you are a certain religious group or a certain ethnic background you think of people in a certain way and people tend to think that way with a one track mind. They don't see the whole picture.*

Diane's reply, here, was the only one that invoked the word prejudice. Diane was the only respondent to show insight into how the phenomenon of prejudice operates, "*they think that we are all the same*." This is remarkable given that virtually all respondents spoke of being on the undesirable end of prejudicial / classist judgments, but the discursive field from which they articulated their stories contained no space with which to specifically name this phenomenon. I would suggest that the prejudice of classism has escaped being named in public discourse, in part, because the words of welfare predispose an uncritical acceptance of the "common sense" views of poor. Schram argues, "common sense operates as a lexicon of signs, symbols, and images used to reinforce prevailing relationships of power" (Schram, 2000: 8).

I asked Diane to give me an example of *"they are all the same"* thinking,

> *Like there are certain areas of town here where you go and people will point and say 'Oh that's the welfare district.' And just because you lived in that building everyone thought that you were on welfare. It looked like a bit of a dive and people go 'oh, that's the welfare people and that's why the place is a dive.' That is one of the first things people think of.*

While Diane's facial expression suggested a certain level of distress in telling this story, and this distress was again palpable in listening to her voice in the audio recording, she was not immune from reproducing the perspectives that apparently caused her distress. Diane was one of many respondents who claimed that poverty exists because *"they don't want to work."*

Despite the fact that Diane (at various stages of our conversation) presented as one of the most insightful and progressive people I interviewed, and despite the reality that had been a single Mom after her divorce (her children were young adults at the time of the interview), the gendered aspects of poverty did not infiltrate her subjectivity. The neglected cultural aspects of social reproduction were uncritically reproduced in Diane's perspectives by virtue of what she failed to discuss.

While Daryl expressed a number of concerns about the realities he endured on OW, he offered no counter discourse of the deeply embedded institutional discourse on taxes,

> *Well we can’t really hide from that. I mean you gotta pay taxes so what can I say. I don’t know too much about taxes but I mean if I was a taxpayer I would probably be ticked off myself.*
>
> You are not a taxpayer? [interviewer]
>
> *Well, not right now. No.*
>
> Do you pay any taxes? [interviewer]
>
> *I haven’t for some time.*
>
> When was the last time you made a purchase? [interviewer]
>
> *Well a couple days ago I brought a few bags of groceries home from Price Chopper.*
>
> Was there tax on those groceries? [interviewer]
>
> [Stunned look] *Well I guess there was*.

This exchange partially illustrates that the taxpayer / welfare recipient binary is so firmly entrenched and unquestioned that the reality that people on social assistance are also taxpayers is invisible even to those paying tax. There are rare moments in political debate when a politician will step outside of the parameters of the discursive field. From within the provincial legislature, MPP Gilles Morin perceptively pointed out, "In attempting to be accountable to the taxpayers of Ontario, there is an implication that people receiving income assistance and individuals with disabilities do not pay taxes like everyone else in Ontario. We know that this is not true" (Ontario Hansard Issue, 1997: LO1112). Certain actions and behaviours come to be associated with categorical labels. The reality that people on social assistance pay taxes is too frequently ignored.

Diane emphasized that she had previously been a taxpayer herself and thus did not really question a tax backlash,

> *Well I don't know how they can say they are being fair to taxpayers. I was a taxpayer for many years and even though I have to be on welfare now I have put far more into the system than I have ever taken out. I ended up paying for welfare. No matter how you look at it.*

Like several others, Diane invoked the desirable status of "taxpayer" from her earlier years to suggest, and highlight, that she had "given" and not just "taken" from the system. The ingroup / outgroup binary that accompanies the symbolism of the linguistic tags seemed to be at the forefront of Diane's perspective.

Donna's views, as had been the case with several respondents at numerous junctures through the interview process, almost seem like they were taken straight from an advertisement from the Common Sense Revolution,

> *How is it fair to taxpayers? If they want to be fair to taxpayers then get the people off the system and get them a job. Otherwise the taxpayers will keep paying for these people who are going to be on year after year. How is that fair? Even flipping burgers at McDonald's is a job. And that is something. And I know some people won't do that but others would. I know that if I was paying into the system I would be really cheesed off.*

Heather's response to the OW policy directive of taxes initially asked for a clarification of the question, then affirmed the right wing view, but then proceeded to add an important qualification,

> *How? I don't really understand? How do they want to be fair to taxpayers? Like fair how? By only taking a small percentage of their tax? Is that what you mean?*
>
> The argument, from some peoples' perspective, is that taxpayers are treated unfairly and it is presumably that line of thinking that got written into the OW Act. How do you feel about that? [interviewer]
>
> *That is understandable. Definitely. But you can also follow that up with -- you never know what is going to happen. I started working and had my first job when I was 12 years*

> *old. And I mean you do see those deductions when you get your pay check that you worked hard to earn you know. And finally I became a person that had to take instead of give but that was through no fault of my own. So it is a hard question to think about really.*

Frances also joined the concern over taxes by stating "*I don't think that it is fair, but who am I? I am not the government."* Gloria also positioned herself among the "worthy" category by stating *"I have paid taxes so I do see their point."* Perhaps the most extreme example of neoliberal discourse predominating the subjectivity of any respondent came when Gloria explained poverty by stating that the poor pay too much tax,

> *You got all these people paying the government taxes but they are not helping them in return. You said something about people being poor – well that is why the poor are getting poorer because they are paying too much tax. They are really paying too much tax.*

I recall that at this point in the interview feeling a strong surge of incredulity that was probably palpable in my facial expressions because Gloria proceeded to add the qualification that poor people are also poor because "*their wages are too low*." But in her initial line of thinking, redistribution doesn't ameliorate poverty – it causes it. Her views reiterated those expressed in the potential solutions to homelessness articulated in the Provincial task force report (Carrol, 1998: 17), which suggested lowering taxes as a provincial initiative[28] remedy to homelessness: this solution, of course, pre-supposes (with absolutely no rationale evidence to substantiate the claim) that people are taxed into homelessness.

Rick suggested that,

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[28] The provincial Tory report stated that they have taken the initiative on providing "more supports for at-risk families, children and you" and that "the provincial tax cut has relieved 655 000 low income Ontarians of paying any tax at all. Taxes have been reduced by 41% for those earning less that $14 900 per year."

> *I think that for the taxes that people in Ontario pay they could take better care of their people. We are the highest taxed people in the world per capita. You know what I mean.*

In the rhetoric of the new right taxes are pejoratively linked to spending and the term "tax and spend" creates images of godless socialists pick pocketing hard working people. When Stephen Harper announced his intention to seek leadership of the federal conservative party in 2004 he claimed "Canada is the highest spending country in the world" (Hurtig, 2008: 274). The inaccuracy of Harper's statement did not undercut his political success (Hurtig, 2008: 274-282).

When Alice was asked how she felt about the Ontario Works Act's pledge to be fair to taxpayers, her reply was typical and quite revealing,

> *I don't know the whole tax system. I don't think that I could comment in detail but I do know that there is a problem. I will say that?*
>
> And what would you say is problematic specifically? [interviewer]
>
> *Well the taxes people pay are too high – it can get ridiculous and for a lot of people it does. Again, where is the incentive to work hard if they are just going to take it off your check anyway and you are no further ahead.*

James shared a comparable view and proceeded to place culpability on people who abuse the system,

> *They are trying to provide a decent service and for all the taxes we pay they should be able to but I am not so sure that it is fair to taxpayers. You got all these guys making good money, like I said, under the table and they are still taking more and more from the system and it is not right. It's the same old story you know. Put them in jail. Take their stuff. Put it back into society and get us our money back. The funny thing is, when I was paying taxes I didn't care, but then when I needed help it wasn't there.*

Chunn and Gavigan (2004: 228) argue that “the discourse and politics of welfare fraud have obscured the imprecision of what is considered to be fraud, and by whom” and thus dominant narratives about rampant fraudulence persist. James attributed the inadequacy of the assistance he was receiving to the problem of others scamming the system. Interestingly, the popular line in public discourse is “and those people cheating the system are taking away from those who really need it.”

Ryan articulated mixed views on taxation, again drawing a sharp distinction between himself and “others”,

> I don’t know, I think I am kind of torn on this because I know guys who have been sitting on welfare for three or four years and it makes me crazy that somebody is just sitting in their house doing nothing and having no job searches and basically you and me are paying, like right now your taxes are going to me and welfare. So I don’t know. But then again I get $206 per month after I get my rent paid [Ryan rented a bedroom in a home for $270.00]. So basically it is just over $50.00 / week and it’s not enough. I am not exactly living the high life here. They have soup kitchens and stuff to help you out too and sometimes you have to go.

Again, Ryan’s harsh material realities took on a very different shape when he spoke of others “sitting in their house doing nothing”. Ryan was certainly aware that his life and present circumstances were nothing to be envious of, and yet he was angry (and made “crazy’) by others on social assistance while expressing sympathy for the exploited taxpayer who pays for them.

Exceptions to Tax Rage

Adrienne was one of only two respondents who offered a counter-discourse on taxes,

> *I was a tax-payer for many, many years and I am telling you that if I knew then what I know now I would have*

> *gladly paid more taxes. I would have willingly given more of my paycheque so that other people don't have to go through what I have went through.*

Adrienne explained that because she was not exposed to poverty during her formative years, she did not fully appreciate what it means to live without resources until her health took a turn for the worse and her marriage simultaneously dissolved. While certainly having a more compassionate perspective on redistribution, Adrienne's account seemed to directly associate tax levels with welfare rates.

Janet seemed to hold perspectives that were more informed than the ideas embedded in public discourse,

> *It's not going to make much of a difference. I have actually seen bumpers stickers that say 'Get up and go to work today. Thousands of people on welfare depend on you.' I don't agree with all that. You are going to be taxed anyway. Your money is just going to go somewhere else. I think that if you look at the piece of the pie, the government pie, it is actually very little of that money goes to welfare. We have our school. We have our roads. We have our military system. It [welfare] is a very small piece of the pie really.*

An "Oxford County 2007 Expenditure Distribution" analysis from the municipal publication "What's On Woodstock" (City of Woodstock, 2007: 16) confirmed Janet's views were quite informed in that many of services were funded by taxation (i.e. public health, public works, the library, planning, information systems, Woodingford Lodge, grants, and miscellaneous along with social services and housing. Interestingly, according to "What's on Woodstock" (City of Woodstock, 2007: 16) the average county cost per *household* in 2007 to fund *both* social services *and* municipal housing was $258.50 (or significantly less than a dollar per day).

Other Questions that Induced Culturally Sanctioned Responses

The predominance of cultural narratives (that "take place within moral and symbolic orders" Steensland, 2008: 232) also made their way into the subjectivities when they were asked to address a variety of other questions throughout the interview. For example when Alice was asked what she would do for social assistance recipients if she were the minister of community and social services or the manager of OW, her treatment suggestions medicalized and pathologized welfare receipt (Schram, 2000: 59-88), drew upon the worthy / unworthy distinction, and yet concurrently offered a strong critique of current practices,

> *I would especially start counselling and support group for people who are on social assistance. I also believe that they should treat older OW applicants differently than they treat the younger ones because their conditions and situations are different and the younger ones should be out working. And I would make counselling completely mandatory for people on OW. The staff with OW now are not mandated to do counselling. They are mandated to get you off assistance. That's their goal. They are not there to help you in your life. They do not know your struggles or your difficulties.*

When detailing her personal story, Alice suggested that a better material standard of living and stronger health supports would be of tremendous value to her, but her suggestion for program reform started with the suggestion to provide counselling, divide the caseload into the worthy (old recipients with employment barriers) and the unworthy (younger ones who "should be out working"). Interestingly, Alice went from reproducing public discourse to offering a critique of OW service delivery, "They do not know your struggles or your difficulties."

I also asked people how they felt about the "perversity thesis" (without using that term directly) by posing the question,

> Some politicians and some people feel that having very low social assistance rates and restricting access to social assistance forces people to work and is therefore helping them. Could you comment? Is that idea fair or unfair, and why? [Interviewer]

Alison's views were not uncommon, and like on several other occasions during data analysis, it was quite possible to hear remnants of conservative political campaigning,

> *I think that they should be working if they are able to. If they are emotionally and physically able to work, then yeah, of course they should be working. If they have problems with drinking or anything like that then they should get help for that. And then do small jobs even. Like just helping out with anything, to make themselves feel like they are useful.*

When Diane was asked the same question about the "perversity thesis" she reproduced a common refrain and an illustration of the (worthy) self / (unworthy) other dichotomy,

> *Well you know what? In some ways it is fair and in some ways it definitely isn't.*
>
> Can you explain what you mean by that? [interviewer]
>
> *Because I know that there is people on welfare and they take the system for every dime they can. And there is no reason why they are not working. They are healthy and they could be out working but they are just too lazy to be. But when it is somebody like in my case who wants to work but couldn't work – it makes it hard. It makes it hard for the honest person to get welfare because they are so nit-picky because of the lazy ones.*

Janet was critical of OW, yet at the same time spoke in a familiar narrative about training, empowerment, mental illness, and self esteem,

> The OW Act claims that one of its aims is to effectively serve people on social assistance. How do you feel about that? [Interviewer]
>
> *No, I would say that they are not serving people. I think that they are just putting a band-aid on a bad situation.*

> Can you explain what you mean by that? [interviewer]
>
> *Well I think that there are so many sick people and mentally ill people. It's just hopeless. And the worse things get, the worse their lives get they just keep digging a hole deeper and deeper and burying themselves in it. People need positive workers. They need positive things going on in their life. They need training that is going to empower them to feel good about themselves. I think that a lot of people on welfare are often people who are suffering from low self esteem.*

Nietzsche (2004: 84) once suggested "there arises a certain habituation to a certain causal interpretation which obstructs and even prohibits an investigation of the cause" and went on to argue that mistaking the effect for the cause is a common problem in everyday reasoning. Janet's insights seem to have mistaken some of the effects of impoverishment for its cause. The observation that it is common to mistake effects for causes becomes even more profound when alloyed with Dean's (1999: 64) assertion that "we should not underestimate the role of language in constructing worlds, problems and persons as governable entities."

Conclusion

In "Welfare Mothers: Discourse, Discipline and Resistance" (McCormack, 2002: 15) demonstrated that,

> At the same time that the narratives of welfare recipients construct their identity as different from the stereotype of the 'welfare mother', they re-inscribe those dominant meanings by telling stories about women who take advantage of the system and are lazy. The space in which stories are told is not open, unencumbered by institutional structures. Rather narratives, like all social actions, operate within these structures. Because narratives operate like all social practices, they are as likely to bare the imprint of dominant cultural meanings and relations of power than any other social practices.

Notably, other research (Copeland, 2003; McCormack, 2002; Kingfisher, 1996; Hays, 2003) has also pointed to comparable findings in that single mothers on social assistance would distance their identity from the dominant cultural meanings of “welfare mothers” yet also re-inscribe and reproduce that identity with what Kingfisher called the “bad-people-exist-but-I-am-not-one-of-them” strategy.

Conversational partners who participated in this research frequently posited views reflecting dominant cultural meanings with respect to various issues. In particular, the most indelible imprints of the cultural logic of neoliberalism were clearest in respondents’ poverty attributions for “Others” and their perspectives on excessive taxes. Specifically, 87.5% of respondents (n=21) cited some form of personal deficit as their explanation for why poor people are poor. Virtually all of these attributions were some variation of the culture of poverty perspective: people were born and raised on the system and nobody ever taught them any different, some simply won’t defer gratification, others just love their drugs and alcohol too much. The notion that poverty was a systemic or structural problem was all but non-existent in the perspectives of respondents. Incredibly, almost every respondent ignored the route that had personally brought them to OW when talking about the impoverishment of others.

With respect to taxes, 87.5% of people (n=21) who participated in this research posited views suggesting that taxes were too high and reproduced the view that the “taxpayer” is getting stiffed. Even respondents who acknowledged that they did not know much about the tax system claimed that they knew enough to assert that high taxes are definitely a problem. Many conversational partners held a favourable prejudice towards “the taxpayer” and felt that the welfare system would be much stronger if other people using it would just stop scamming the system. Not one person suggested that the amount of fraud in the welfare system is grossly overstated. Virtually everyone in this research reported that they had to secure additional resources from family and friends in order to survive given the inadequacy of their income support from social assistance. Yet stories about “Others” on welfare living too extravagantly were common.

The findings from this chapter with respect to a pronounced “self / other” dichotomy confirm those of McCormack (2002), Copeland (2003), Hays (2003) and Kingfisher (1996). My analysis, however, will conclude with adding two unique dimensions to what previous studies have established and this research has confirmed. First, I suggest that the stigma that respondents in all of these studies were trying to avoid, and the public narratives taken up when respondents presented their perspectives (particularly when explaining poverty), are grounded in a publicly unnamed phenomenon of classism. Second, I suggest that this form of prejudice is replete within welfare policy and welfare discourse acts as a latent conduit of classism. In the final chapter we will return to, and assess the merits of, the central argument of this monograph.

Chapter 7

Conclusions and Discussion: Understanding the "Survival of Classism"

"*Mysterious are the cases where the individual is hopelessly barred from assimilation and yet mentally identifies himself with the practices, outlook, and prejudices of the dominant group*" (Allport, 1954: 151).

This dissertation asked, ***"How does Ontario Works, its accompanying discourse and cultural logic of neoliberal welfare reform, impact the subjectivities of OW recipients?"*** The threefold purposes of this research were to examine the impacts of predominant mainstream discourse on subjectivity and perception, explore the counter discourses of respondents in the wake of "new right" social policies and cultural beliefs, and explain the consistent pattern of a self / other dichotomy that resonated through the research literature and was confirmed in the qualitative data gathered for this work. In this final chapter, I posit a concluding synthesis discussing my contribution to the scholarly research literature which was carried out analyzing qualitative interview data through the lenses of social psychological theory on prejudice grafted with poststructural theory on discourse.

Synthesis begins by returning to – and assessing the merits of -- the central argument of this monograph that was laid out in the opening chapter, and proceeds to a concluding review discussing the larger significance (beyond just welfare policy) of what was discovered throughout the process of fulfilling the threefold purposes of this research. The mysteriousness noted by Allport in the epigraph above should become less enigmatic by the conclusion of this work. Increasing an understanding of how prejudice operates, however, is most useful and practical when it is coupled with a heightened awareness of the functions categorical prejudgment serves.

Increasing material inequality is legitimized by the institutionalized prejudice of overt and covert classism. Ultimately, lean state and tax restructuring mean that wealthy people are made wealthier while poor people are made poorer. Culturally, everyone is made to believe that they are the authors of their own fate. Perhaps more importantly, everyone is made to believe that others are the ultimate authors of their own fate. This is the “meritocratic” *sine qua non* of the cultural and market based logic of neoliberalism, ultimately translating into punitive welfare policy and regressive tax policies. Legitimate barriers to employment (i.e. child care responsibilities, health, incapacitating impoverishment, and a lack of work paying a living wage) languish on the sidelines of the discursive field. One apostle of the neoliberal view, Peter Drucker, concisely summed up the cultural logic and reasoning for policy shifts, “No more salvation by society” (Bauman, 2000: 3). Notwithstanding this reasoning, neoliberal society *does* now offer salvation to the saintly (in-grouped) “taxpayer”, who has been unduly crucified by the evil and slothful forces of the welfare state for far too long. In this context, considering systemic forces larger than individuals is perfectly acceptable.

Punitive welfare policies, regressive tax policies, and even the criminalization of the poor (Bezanson, 2006: 44) have clearly played a role in reproducing the cultural logic. As Soss and Schram adeptly reminds us,

> Policies do more than satisfy or dissatisfy; they change the basic features of the political landscape. Policies can set political agendas and shape identities and interests. They can influence beliefs about what is possible, desirable, and normal. They can alter conceptions of citizenship and status. They can channel or constrain agency, define incentives and redistribute resources. They can convey cues that define, arouse, or pacify constituencies (Soss and Schram, 2007: 113).

My research shows that policies not only “can” do all of these things – they clearly do, and those espousing progressive social change in our current era of neoliberalism must become more cognizant of this. Whatever else dominant discourses do, they clearly limit and define the scope of the issues and options that people are likely to perceive. The overwhelming majority of participants in this study were not able to channel their disenchantment with the material and social realities of disenfranchisement into any form of collective agency because they were constrained by the perception that most others on social assistance were irresponsible, *ipso facto*, because they were on social assistance. Thus, attempting to collectively support others who really don’t deserve support would not be considered normal or desirable. If there is just one point I would like the reader to add to their knowledge about welfare policy in the contemporary era of neoliberal globalization, it would be concisely stated thus,

> We must recognize that the constitution of subjects in discourse and the structural arrangements that leave so many behind go hand in hand (McCormack, 2002: 253).

While this argument may have had merit even prior to reforms, it is more relevant today. The natural corollary of this view is that a counter discourse to the currently predominant “new right” rhetoric is a prerequisite to halt the policies and “structural arrangements that leave so many behind.” As Weber initially posited, for authority to remain authoritative, it has to be made to appear legitimate (Morrison, 1995). Understanding how power has operated is a prerequisite for de-legitimating inhumane social policies and exposing them for precisely what they are. If one can step back from the discourses of neoliberalism, and step into an understanding of what has happened, and is happening, in the everyday lives of people being governed, it becomes much easier to see the inhumanity and the injustice in the reality that being out of work “became rhetorically synonymous with stealing from a hard working, taxpaying Canadian public" (Bezanson, 2006: 44). A very real difficulty lies, however, in stepping back from the dominant discourses of neoliberalism. This is much easier said than done. It would not be fair to "blame the victim" for "blaming the victim" in analyzing the qualitative data in this report. The discursive field itself is the problem, and "for any single individual to work himself out of the life under tutelage which has become almost his nature is very difficult" (Kant, 2007: 30). Even highly educated people who have been afforded the opportunity for a critical education, myself included, often fail to work themselves "out of the life undertutelage which has become [seemingly natural]."

Given Mills's insight that explaining "Just how and why I decided to do such a study may suggest one way in which one's life experiences feed one's intellectual work" (Mills, 1959: 200), I conclude with a brief epilogue that details "why I decided to do such a study" and posits directions for future research. Incorporating the "sociological imagination" (Mills, 1959), situating my biography within my historical era, I point out – with as much honest introspection as I can -- that if I had materially endured the draconian nature of welfare policy that started in the mid-nineties, (instead of enduring a less draconian but still inadequate system of support during my formative years) I believe that I would never have attained a Ph.D. My epilogue closes explaining why I believe this to be the case and asks the reader to assess the merits, and consider carefully the implications, of my reasoning.

Returning to the Central Argument about "The Survival of Classism"

"Culture is not only received by people . . . it is produced and reproduced by the same people in everyday life." (Mullaly, 2002: 72)

In A Brief History of Neoliberalism David Harvey (2005: 39) has argued that,

> Common sense can be profoundly misleading, obfuscating or disguising real problems under cultural prejudices. Cultural and tradional values and fears can be mobilized to mask other realities. Political slogans can be invoked that mask specific strategies beneath vague rhetorical devices.

The common sense revolution, then, disguised the true sources of poverty and unemployment under the cultural prejudice of classism. The traditional value of "personal responsibility" was mobilized to mask an inhumane decline in public responsibility. The political slogan that people should be given "a hand up, not a hand out" was a remarkably successful rhetorical device.

A central contention of this monograph is that the "regimes of practice" (Foucault, 1991: 73-86) associated with Ontario Works and the public "words of welfare" (Schram, 1995) that were integral to the success of the conservative "common sense revolution" operate on a "discursive field" that exacerbate a latent and under researched institutional form of "prejudice" (Allport, 1954) called classism. By examining the "workings, effects, and the 'how?' of power" (Foucault, 2003: 274) I showed that both overt and covert classism survive in, and are reproduced by, the dominant public discourses – and signifiers -- of welfare reform which create uncritically accepted binary and disembodied "cultural categories that undergird the [neoliberal] social order" (Schram, 2000: 1): namely, that of "the lazy and immoral welfare recipient" and "the hard working and exploited taxpayer." The connotations, inferences, and meanings, culturally inscribed in the term "dependency" (Handler, 1995), had clearly gained a prominence in the subjectivities of many of the participants in this research. Likewise, respondents overwhelmingly held views on taxes suggesting a favourable prejudice for "the taxpayer". Adopting, and paraphrasing, Foucault's seminal insights on power, this research showed that classism, via the discourses of personal responsibility and excessive taxation, insidiously “passes through the individuals it has constituted” (Foucault, 2003: 30).

The verisimilitude (Denzin, 1997: 10) of my central argument hinges on empirically demonstrating a notable and pronounced disjuncture between the “subjugated knowledges” (Foucault, 2003: 7) respondents utilized to articulate their embodied experiences about coming to, living on, and attempting to exit social assistance, and the cultural influences of the mainstream public discourses that were invoked to describe (and attribute causation to) the poverty and unemployment of disembodied “other” welfare recipients. Respondents would frequently detail their personal circumstances and push back against the dominant narratives to buttress their image, yet would just as frequently take up the images they had earlier resisted. In sum, the challenges in the daily living realities embodied in the experiential knowledge of research respondents, curiously, did not rise to the level of visibility when those same respondents spoke of the disembodied “other” coming to, living on, and “*not”* attempting to exit social assistance. Power operated, as Foucault (2006: 27) assured us that it will, through “the repressive presence of what it does not say” and concurrently passed through the individuals it had constituted.

To thoroughly understand this intriguing phenomenon of a marked self / other dichotomy, one must merge the strengths of Foucault’s theorizing with those of Allport: the signifiers of welfare discourse acted as labels of primary potency and emotionally toned labels so that the challenges faced by “others” were de-emphasized and lost to sight, while cultural presumptions of personal irresponsibility frequently came to the forefront of meaning making. Antipathies were grounded in categorical group membership sealed by signifiers such as “welfare recipient” and “poor person.”

Following Schram's (2000: 3) allusion to "cultural software", it became evident that the subjectivities and perceptions of conversational partners had, to a very large extent, been effectively programmed by the symbolic order that is invariably constituted in discourse. In mapping this symbolic order, I contend that classism survives by stealth and remains, to borrow the words of Schram, "hidden in plain sight" (Schram, 2000: 28). To fully appreciate and assess the merits of this claim, it is necessary to further discuss what was discovered throughout the course of fulfilling the threefold objectives of this study.

Examining the Impact Of Dominant Discourses on Subjectivity

"What specific phenomena do they reveal in the field of discourse?" (Foucault, 2006 [1969]:29)

The first and second chapters of this work provided numerous empirical examples of a recurring phenomenon that has accelerated since the formative years of neoliberalism. New right "poor bashing", as Baxter (1997) calls it, reached new heights during the political campaigning of "common sense revolution" (see also Bezanson, 2006). When OW was successfully being sold to the Ontario electorate, it was common for,

> Stern-faced politicians [to] face TV cameras and point the finger at poor people, saying no more welfare fraud, no more lazing around on welfare, no more free rides for people who don't want to work, no more free money for drug addicts and alcoholics (Baxter, 1997: 40)

Further, we reviewed examples – from people like Harris, Reagan, Thatcher, and Limbaugh – of the hyper-individualist cultural logic of neoliberalism that transcended Ontario,

> Politicians at all levels assure taxpayers that they are being taken advantage of [and suggest] that poverty, homelessness and addiction are just lifestyle choices made by those who simply choose not to pull their weight in society (Capponi, 1999: ix).

This scapegoating is made possible by the semantic illiteracy fostered by “the tyranny of words” (Chase, 1938) and the symbolic images and meanings embedded in the process of classification (Bowker and Star, 1999).

The theoretical linchpin I adopted and utilized in constructing my argument about “the survival of classism” was concisely articulated by Neysmith et al (2005: 170),

> While experiences have a material reality, once they are communicated and continue to be retold, they take on a new shape. Discourses also operate at an institutional level. The meanings and values of an institution [like OW] are expressed in systematically organized sets of statements. These are also picked up [and repeated] by participants.

My analysis of the qualitative data showed that the systematically organized sets of statements uttered by the most outspoken proponents of neoliberalism were frequently picked up by the participants in this study who, in invoking culturally sanctioned discourse unwittingly reproduced “the casting [of] suspicion on ‘special interests’, notably the poor” (Bezanson, 2006: 41). These recurring institutional statements frequently met the threshold of prejudice (categorical judgment coupled with a feeling tone) in general, and classism in particular. Power (2006: 5) reminds us that classism is composed of three components: 1) stereotypical thinking that entails a set of beliefs about poverty and the poor that are widely shared a socially validated; 2) prejudice, or negative attitudes and emotions felt toward the poor; 3) discrimination, distancing from, or vilifying the poor.

A review of the research literature suggests that this (self / other) phenomenon was not unique to this research, but rather that similar discourses (about welfare, the poor, and taxes) do, in fact, operate at an institutional level. In other words, there was much more to the subjectivity and perceptions of respondents than just 24 different “self” and “other” perspectives. As Denzin astutely reminds us,

> Humans live in a second-hand world of meanings. . . Reality as it is known is mediated by symbolic representation . . . stand[ing] between the person and the so called real world (Denzin, 1997: xvi).

The symbolic representation embedded in the words of welfare produce a meaning making that constitutes and evokes prejudice, as Allport (1954) defined it, in the form classism as delineated by Homan (2007) and Power (2006). This patterned meaning making was frequently discernable, to greater and lesser degrees, when exploring the subjectivities and perceptions of virtually all respondents. Overt classism resonated through the outright in-group hostility posited by several respondents, and covert classism was even more prevalent, particularly when examining conversational partners’ attributions for impoverishment. While asking the question “Why do you think poor people are poor?” seems reasonably open ended, perhaps the question – as it was phrased -- is more culturally loaded than a cursory analysis suggests. “A term “such as ‘the poor’ . . . reflects a view of people that is depersonalized and dehumanized because the words used are impersonal adjectives or descriptors” (Mullaly, 2002: 89). Then again, if I had asked “What makes people available for work and work available for people?” (Clement, in Duffy et al, 2006: vii) it is unlikely that the substantive content of the answers would have been much different. The cultural logic of neoliberalism is pretty clear about the causes of impoverishment.

Aversive and hostile attitudes towards “poor people”, the “unemployed”, and “welfare recipients” are spawned by their group membership: once people are linguistically categorized, they are “presumed to have the objectionable qualities ascribed to the group”

(1954: 7). The power of classifying predominates and the very act of classification "forces us to overlook all other features" (Allport, 1954: 178) that should not be overlooked. The stereotypes and fixed ideas embedded in the cultural logic of neoliberalism appear too firmly ingrained right now for most people to answer, let alone consider the significance of, Clement's question in a thoughtful way. Both forms of prejudice (overt and covert) exhibited by respondents are latently institutionalized in welfare policy and discourse.

Remarkably, almost every respondent's perspective (there were a few exceptions) held a favourable prejudice (Allport, 1954: 6), and expressed sympathy towards, the culturally designated victim in "new right" neoliberal discourse --"the taxpayer." Capponi (1997: 72) has demonstrated that "this burning sense of the taxpayer as the true victim" was exploited by politicians and has not been adequately questioned. Again, a close examination of the qualitative data reveals that it is possible to discern the indelible imprint of the dominant cultural meanings spawned by a linguistic tag. Allport reminds us that "scores of everyday phrases are stamped with the flavour of prejudice, whether the user knows it or not" (Allport, 1954: 182). The contempt many expressed for the "other" on "welfare", was frequently matched by a concern for "the taxpayer" who was clearly, in the minds of many, being ripped off (see also Bezanson, 2006). To directly answer the question posed by Foucault in the epigraph above: the phenomenon of classism is revealed in the field of welfare discourse,

> Language may be oppressive simply by the choice of words used in communication. And some words that reflect and maintain oppression are so well established that their usage is taken for granted and their oppressive connotations not recognized. (Mullaly, 2002: 89)

The taxpayer (in-group) / welfare recipient (out-group) binary that is written into policy and prominent in public discourse is significant. "Until we label an out-group, it does not exist clearly in our minds" (Allport, 1954: 183), but once an out-group is labelled the linguistic tag often has a predominant salience. "To have enemies, we need labels" (Allport, 1954: 183). Culturally, perhaps one of the best things we could do for welfare recipients is to stop referring to them as welfare recipients. And surely answering Foucault's call to question the categories with which we have become so familiar could assist in realizing that just because one is a "taxpayer" does not mean that one has been given a raw deal by our system of resource distribution. Merging Foucault with Allport, "any program for the reduction of prejudice must include a large measure of semantic therapy" (Allport, 1954: 187). Pre-dating Allport, Chase (1938) initially posited that demagogues thrive on semantic illiteracy. Part of that semantic therapy would entail naming classism. The logic of this academic analysis, however, was not readily apparent in subjectivities and perceptions of most respondents.

Exploring Subjugated Knowledges

"Given that the stereotypical image of the welfare mother is such a powerful force in shaping public welfare policy, it is critical that research make alternative discursive practices visible, as well as to suggest alternative directions for welfare discourse and policy making" (Copeland, 2005: 13).

In "Welfare Mothers: Discourse, Discipline, and Resistance" McCormack (2002: 3) noted,

> Making ends meet with a welfare check is virtually impossible. Welfare payments are not generous enough to sustain a family through a month . . . This difficulty is compounded by the stigma attached to welfare through the discursive practices that constitute welfare Mothers as immoral, dependent, and lazy.

The subjugated knowledge that was de-subjugated in chapter 5 by considering the perspectives held by the respondents in this research (and by examining the subaltern literature written by others who have experienced impoverishment) is remarkably consistent with the findings of McCormack. Coming to, subsisting on, and attempting to exit social assistance were, overwhelmingly, not experiences reportedly resulting from personal irresponsibility. Virtually all respondents pointed this out in graphic detail. Further, the daily living realities of these experiences were not reported as being anything remotely close to enviable. Running directly counter to the ungrateful and mercenary image of "the welfare bum", several respondents were thoughtful enough to point out that some countries have absolutely no form of assistance and listed the mere existence of any form of support to be one of the strengths of OW.

Perhaps the most bullet proof logic posited by respondents held that their harshest critics should be forced to "walk a mile in their shoes." The public perception, an image flamed by the new right, that too many people unduly have the freedom to "sit at home and do nothing", ran counter to accounts specifically detailing the material and social constraints inherent in "the unfreedom of being the 'other'" (Power, 2006: 643). The significance of material constraint cannot be overstated. The "perversity thesis" – the notion that providing aid has perverse effects on the poor and making benefits levels exceptionally low and hard to access thus is a desirable 'tough love' that helps people escape poverty (Block and Somers, 2003) – has a long historical lineage, starting with Speenhamland (Polanyi, 2001) and reincarnated with the conservative scholarship of Murray (1984). Suggesting that it defies logic to truly believe that making poor people poorer is helping them, Block and Somers note 'In the Shadow of Speenhamland',

> the contemporary lesson is obvious. It is time to reject the ideological claim that the best way to fight poverty is by imposing stringent conditions on ever shrinking transfer payments to poor households (Block and Somers, 2003: 314).

The detailed particulars of each respondents story, and the subaltern literature written by several authors would certainly lend credence to Block and Somers claim, yet "their voices are rarely heard or adequately appreciated in society" (Little, 1998: 166) and equally subjugated in the formation of social policy. Copeland (2005: 188) suggests that,

> Policy formation must be grounded in the voices of those who have lived and / or working knowledge of welfare reform – those who have direct knowledge of these policies.

The one question that solicited more consensus than any other among respondents pertained to the amount of material support they received from OW: benefit levels were consistently described as woefully inadequate, and specifics were provided detailing the deleterious consequences this had on various aspects of respondents' well being. Further, not one respondent reported receiving meaningful training for OW, and only three acknowledged ever having received any training at all. Yet welfare discourse makes certain "truths" (Schram, 2006) predominate even when lived experience defies what is made to appear real in discourse.

While most of the resistance during interviews was posited in relation to respondents' personal stories, there were also some more totalizing rejections of the dominant narrative when conversational partners would suggest that the dominant narratives of neoliberalism are wrong-headed. One respondent, Dorothy, told more than one story whereby she emphasized that an esteemed person in a prominent position (i.e. her Doctor and an OW Manager) supported her when she experienced patently degrading treatment as a result of her impoverishment. Dorothy not only was positioning herself as worthy, she claimed that others were worthy too. The impact of neoliberal discourse was strong, but certainly not total or all encompassing.

Explaining the worthy Self / unworthy Other Dichotomy

"In their words, we can begin to uncover the constitutive nature of the dominant discourse in the formation of identity and the possibilities for resistance, in the mundane, quotidian practices of daily life" (McCormack, 2002: 10).

Writing about three different axes of domination (based on race, sexual orientation, and religion) in The Survival of Domination, Adam (1978: 106) noted,

> *Differences may be exploited to pass the 'composite portrait' onto other inferiorized people in an attempt to 'exonerate' oneself.*

This phenomenon, then, was not unique to my study of social assistance recipients. There is much to suggest that "in-group hostility" (Adam, 1978: 106-114; Bishop, 1994) often tends to manifest itself for people dealing with social exclusion of various forms. Perhaps one of the most crucial insights offered by a discourse analysis, is understanding how a discursive field constitutes, constructs, and reproduces domination – all the while escaping critical public scrutiny.

Consider the following political exchange I participated in shortly after the data collection stage in this research. Momentarily, I will contextualize this exchange utilizing Schram's (2006) conceptualization of "truth" which is grounded in Foucault's foundational insights in The Politics of Truth (2007). During the 2007 provincial election, I attended the Oxford County riding leaders debate and posed the following question to the incumbent conservative MPP, Ernie Hardeman, who was seeking (and received) re-election for a fourth term in office,

> Mr. Hardeman, we began this evening with our moderator stating that he hoped we could have an informed and constructive debate. I think that we can all agree that

> informed and constructive debates are a good thing. My question has to do with social policy, and specifically social policy as it pertains to our poorest and most vulnerable people. Mr. Hardeman, I would suggest that the welfare policy shifts your party enacted 12 years ago – that ultimately amount to making poor people poorer -- have been very uninformed and destructive. I could cite research showing that as the depth of poverty grows deeper, it becomes more difficult for people to escape poverty. But it is unlikely that I can get my point across by citing work that policy makers repeatedly choose to ignore. So what I am going to do instead to get my point across is issue a public challenge. If you are re-elected, would you personally commit to trying to live, for just one month, on a social assistance income? Now, if you are willing to accept this challenge, I'll do it with you and then together we can report back to the people of Oxford County what that experience was like. If you are not willing to accept this challenge, will you please explain to the people of Oxford County why you are not willing to accept it?

My question evoked an unsolicited applause from the audience. Mr. Hardeman initially appeared upset by this question and had a pronounced look of flustered concern on his face. For a brief moment, he appeared like the proverbial "deer in headlights." He began his answer with the predictable political response to difficult questions by thanking the questioner. To his credit, and to my surprise, Hardeman then stated that he did not want to pretend that social assistance incomes were anywhere close to adequate and that living on an income that low would be very difficult on anyone. Maybe that look of concern I had seen on his face a moment earlier was sincere? I was pleased that Hardeman at least had the decency to acknowledge what I was hoping – at minimum – would be acknowledged in the reply to my question. It is not very often that a Conservative politician, or any politician for that matter, acknowledges openly that welfare incomes are woefully inadequate.

But my initial satisfaction with the beginning of Hardeman's reply quickly dissipated when he declined to accept my challenge by arguing that "it wouldn't accomplish anything"[29], and then proceeded to invoke a public discourse about welfare that is not true in the sense of being factually correct, but was made to appear to contain "truth." Hardeman argued that the caseload numbers of people on social assistance were down as a result of his government's policies and that he would support initiatives to have workfare expanded to get people the training that they need to get back to work. The "truth" of welfare discourse – and this is my primary point in analyzing this political exchange -- is that declining caseloads are uncritically seen as positive and workfare as undeniably successful. If most people exiting social assistance were escaping poverty and meaningful training was provided to people, the rhetoric would cease to be rhetorical. But this is not the case.

The same audience that applauded my question also applauded Hardeman's reply – and equally loudly. What passed for "truth" was patently misleading rhetoric: meaningful training is virtually non existent in Ontario welfare policy (i.e. according to OW Oxford during the months of this research was carried out the number of training placements taking place in all of Oxford County ranged from 30 – 40) and declining caseload numbers do not correspond to escaping poverty for many leaving the system. Clearly this political exchange could be considered a quintessential example of "the politics of truth." Unfortunately, the nature of this political forum was such questioners had no opportunity for follow up statements after the candidate's reply. Mr. Hardeman's "truth" stood with most members of the audience while the harsh realities of social policy were off the agenda in this election. The “politics of truth” as Foucault (2007b) described them were clearly in operation here. In reflecting upon Hardeman’s counter argument that having a welfare policy maker actually try living on a social assistance income would not accomplish anything I could not help but considering the seemingly timeless merit in Mydral’s (1944: 1029-1030) claim that,

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[29] Had this challenge been accepted and carried out in good faith, it would have brought some attention to what is thoroughly subjugated in welfare discourse: an inadequate material existence undercuts one's capacity to function. Meeting material needs has been abandoned as an aim of welfare policy.

> It is an experience of every social scientist, who has been working on problems of social policy and has taken some interest in people’s reactions, that the strongest psychic resistance is aroused when an attempt is made to teach the better situated classes in a society about actual lower class standards of living and what causes them. This particular type of moral escapism works, sometime with extraordinary effectiveness.

In fairness, Hardeman did not attempt any form of escapism when he openly acknowledged that social assistance rates were very low and would be difficult for anyone to live on. But like has happened every time the Conservative proponents of welfare reform are challenged to “walk a mile” in the shoes of the people they are trying to reform – a suggestion endorsed by many in this research – there is an underhanded psychic resistance and a moral escapism. I recall, very clearly, during the early days of the common sense revolution that Harris denied the challenge of trying the “welfare diet” for himself by stating that he would be hard at work cutting people’s taxes and that his critics can rest assured that he will cut their taxes too. Hays (2003: 9) has argued that “in the case of welfare reform it is clearly important to consider the power and financial resources of the politicians primarily responsible for designing the law relative to those who are its central targets.”

The point of recounting Hardeman’s reference to lower caseloads and workfare training is to point out that new right “truths” also stand with people whose life experience should indicate to them that there are many untruths that pass for sound policy. Making poor people poorer is not helping them, and people who possess enormous material wealth have not been given a raw deal by our system of distribution: what should seem patently obvious is badly obscured. While respondents made it clear that poverty was frequently disabling in reference to their personal circumstances, many of those same people still bought into the “common sense” and “tough love” policy approaches with others and expressed sympathy for “the taxpayer”. How this happened warrants further discussion.

The Legitimizing Functions of Prejudice in the Context of Neoliberalism

“One major way in which the dominant group reinforces its position of power and privilege and, coincidentally oppresses subordinate groups is through the use of stereotypes.” (Mullaly, 2002: 84)

In chapter 2 we noted Cruikshank’s (1999: 106) contention that “the stereotype does not justify or legitimate welfare practices; rather, those practices justify the stereotypes.” One could certainly argue that there is probably a more symbiotic relationship between welfare stereotypes and the OW regimes of practice in that each functions to justify the other. But leaving aside this ‘chicken and egg’ conundrum, stereotyping and welfare policy can, and should, be seen in a larger context in the contemporary era of neoliberal globalization, because the impacts are significant both materially and culturally.

Jost and Hamilton posit what they suggest is the most important, yet under-appreciated, achievement of Allport’s classic work, but also perceptively note that Allport did not extend his social psychological analysis into a larger socio-political understanding of the role prejudice plays in systemically justifying and legitimizing structural inequality. Their thoughtful critique suggests that Allport had an,

> uncanny ability to meaningfully link societal and cultural levels of analysis to a psychological investigation of the thoughts, feelings, and behaviours of individuals and groups. This is perhaps the most important achievement of *The Nature of Prejudice*, although it is underappreciated. At the same time Allport did not integrate his ideas concerning rationalization, the internalization of inferiority, prejudice and ideology and the deleterious consequences of inequality in society into a comprehensive theoretical framework. In short, he did not recognize that system justification (in addition to ego justification and group justification) is an important motive for individuals . . . In retrospect, we can say that the justification function of stereotyping was incomplete [because] stereotypes are used – implicitly and explicitly – to justify much more than 'love prejudice' and 'hate prejudice'. They imbue existing forms of social arrangements with meaning and legitimacy; they preserve and bolster the status quo (Jost and Hamilton, 2005: 220).

Jost and Hamilton's insight is crucial to understanding how material inequality (and gender imbalances) has been exacerbated – or the status quo bolstered – in the era of neoliberalism. In Challenging Oppression, Mullaly notes "Questions of need among poor people are seldom considered because they are portrayed as the architects of their own fate" (Mullaly, 2002: 10). Extending this insight, the legitimacy of prosperity and affluence, even when it reaches what should be considered outrageous proportions, is seldom considered because they too are portrayed as the architects of their own fate. In short, as we reviewed in chapter one, the cultural logic of neoliberalism suggests that everyone is responsible for their own fate and "there is no such thing as society."

Pimpare (2004: 214) offers a powerful rejoinder that languishes in political obscurity, "the Iron Lady's famous foolish dictum notwithstanding, there is such a thing as society, and none of us exists apart from it." The anti-sociological claims of Thatcher are infinitely more prominent than the sociological insights of Pimpare. Understanding the culturally sanctioned meaning making of the ingroup (taxpayer) / outgroup (welfare recipient) binary offers a compelling explanation as to how the neoliberal perspective dominates,

> This way of constituting 'us' and 'them' is not a reflection of real differences in the choices or lifestyles of the two groups, rather, it is a means of legitimating the dominant social order (McCormack, 2002: 251)

Conclusion

"Critical sociology ought to analyze 'power language', whose abstractions mask the humanly constructed domination currently in play and screen out the realities of peoples' lives" (Burman, 1996: 17)

In The Survival of Domination: Inferiorization and Everyday Life (Adam, 1978: x) suggested,

> The story of how people survive domination through resistance, accommodation, and compliance tells us much about how domination survives and an inequitable social order is reproduced.
>
> Examining how these people make sense of the objectively constricted life possibilities of their social situations throws light upon the mechanisms of perpetuation of domination (Adam, 1978: 4)

Applied to the context of this study, this observation assists us in understanding the mechanisms and perpetuation of classism. Returning to Power's (2006:5) definition of classism, it is suggested that this form of prejudice entails three components: 1) stereotypical thinking that entails a set of beliefs about poverty and the poor that are widely shared and socially validated; 2) prejudice, or negative attitudes and emotions felt toward the poor, and 3) discrimination, distancing from, or vilifying of the poor. Allport reminds us that prejudice can also manifest itself in favourable views that are made prior to due consideration of all the facts. The categorical label "taxpayer" as frequently used in neoliberal discourse predisposes one to see a hard working and harshly treated victim who clearly deserves more than what they have.

Classism, then, is insidiously embedded in the neoliberal signifiers of welfare policy and political discourse. This research, like previous scholarship examining the view points of people on social assistance found that respondents,

> clearly understood the language of 'personal responsibility.' And many of them said that they thought it was about time all those other welfare mothers they were hearing about, the ones who just 'sit on their butt all day,' were reminded of their responsibilities to their children and to hard-working, tax-paying Americans (Hays, 2003: 8).

The discursive strategies used by respondents in this, and other, research were consistent in exhibiting widely shared and socially validated cultural perspectives about the nature of impoverishment, welfare fraud, and taxes. Virtually all respondents invoked compelling exceptions to the stereotypes (which they seemed to know quite well) and portrayed themselves as deserving and truly in need of assistance, yet most felt that their legitimate stories were the exception rather than the rule. The public narratives, about the "lazy bums" and the "welfare queens", are institutionalized and clearly meet the definitional threshold of classism.

Welfare discipline (Schram, 2006) works by ensuring that the logic of market competition and the morality of work is inculcated and diffused through the social order. Combining Adam's insight's with those of Mullaly in Challenging Oppression, harsh anti-welfare sentiment means that,

> These groups become the Other and are marked by negative stereotypes that, in effect, reinforce notions of dominant group superiority. These stereotypes permeate society and become so ingrained that they are seldom questioned by members of the dominant group or by some members of the subordinate group (Mullaly, 2002: 85).

The resistance offered by the respondents of this (and other) research suggests that dissent was usually limited to their personal story but also accompanied by compliance in the sense that the dominant narrative was rarely challenged. In fact, ideas concerning the causes of impoverishment were clearly reproduced in the narratives of most of the people who participated in this research. When new right perspectives on poverty, welfare, unemployment and taxation uncritically work their way into the perceptions of people whose life experience should suggest alternative views, classism is ensured survival and,

> Such irrationality stains the whole process to such an extent that it is difficult to hold in perspective the core problem that cries for solution (Allport, 1954: 88).

Directions for Future Research.

Governmentality itself is a mixed substance and one that only works well when alloyed with others (Dean, 1999: 7).

While this research examined Ontario welfare reform through the theoretical lenses of poststructural theory on discourse and social psychological theory on prejudice, I would suggest that future research should define and operationalize Gramsci's (1977) conceptualization of hegemony (in a more detailed and comprehensive manner than I have) to measure the extent to which the power of welfare discourse (Schram, 2006) serves a hegemonic function, facilitating numerous power imbalances along several axes of domination. While academic proponents of Marxism and those espousing Foucault's conceptualization of governmentality have been at odds over exactly how power operates – i.e. taking the state out or putting the state back into the analysis (Rose and Miller, 1992) – Gramsci's view of hegemony and Foucault's take on governmentality are not as far apart on understanding how power works as the present debate in the academy has suggested. Specifically, both feel that state power matters, but a thorough understanding of domination must transcend a monolithic view of the state and delve into the conduits of power in civil society. Combining the analytical strengths of Gramsci's view of hegemony, Foucault's insights on discourse, and Allport's conceptualization of prejudice could posit that the hegemonic class prejudice of state institutions operates through the discourses of civil society – and these discourses advantage some groups over others. The qualitative data in this research could lay the groundwork to justify a study to examine the merits of this hypothesis with a more comprehensive analysis of what hegemony is, who it serves, and how it operates. From a practical activist standpoint, there would be much merit to the realization that a counter hegemony Gramsci deemed necessary for progressive change must be facilitated by a counter discourse that puts meeting human needs back on the policy making agenda with the realization that market distribution – by itself – does not adequately provide for everyone. But for the proposed study to generate as much useful knowledge as possible, it's usage of the concept of hegemony would have to expand on its traditional association with class dominance – as important as that issue is.

Given that the literature on intersectionality has both analytical and humane merits in explicitly recognizing the finite limits of single analytic categories, "the complexity of intersectionality" (McCall, 2005) warrants further investigation, and a more direct application, in future research. The investigation could begin by doing what neither this research nor the literature informing this research was able to do: secure a sample of respondents that is representative of caseload demographics. After a representative sample is secured, a qualitative investigation could systematically explore the commonalities and differences experienced by the respondents with different demographic traits. Once a thorough review of what those commonalities and differences are is established, the theorizing on intersectionality could be advanced by a direct application exploring the extent to which single analytic categories capture lived experience. The examination could then address the question of the extent to which hegemonic discourses impact subjectivities of different respondents in different demographic / social locations, who share the one commonality of having to endure a culturally ascribed level of worth below what the social order considers acceptable.

Epilogue: A Final Link Between the Personal and the Cultural

"Often I sit at my desk wondering how I got here when the odds seemed so stacked against me" (Malarek, 1984: 234).

Now that I have reached the conclusion of my formal schooling, I feel that it is apropos to cite a passage that probably has impacted me, intellectually and affectively, more than any other,

> We see Caples [pseudonym for one of Munger's research respondents] through a narrow lens. This is how she looks now when her children are small, at a point where she faces choices that are extraordinarily difficult for most women, whether poor or not. The particular material conditions that brought her to this moment are more or less hidden. Defined as she is, though, we think we know her. She's a welfare Mother who lives on hand outs. This snapshot is reductive, one dimensional. Truly to know Opal Caples and [people] like her and thus to deepen our discussion of poverty scholars must focus their attention across their life courses (Munger, 2002: 2-3).

A familial archaeology of what brought me to this research, and ensured that I saw it through to completion, probably has to go back to at least 1939. That is the year that my Mother, at twelve years old, dropped out of school to assist in care giving for her younger siblings. Care giving was not really valued then, and it is not really valued now. The fact that my sister and I ended up doing pretty well in life is a direct reflection of the fact that our Mother did a lot of things right -- and made many responsible decisions under some very undesirable circumstances. Like Robin Kelley's (1997) Yo Mama's Dysfunktional: Fighting the Culture Wars in America I wrote this work out of a sense of visceral disgust over what was happening to people who were experiencing comparable challenges that were once faced by my family of origin. Like Pat Capponi (1997: 19) I too "had watched in stunned silence as Ontario declared war on the poor … declared itself open for business, for the taxpayer, for the banks."

But bracketing the affective components of my legitimate contempt, and zoning in on my more analytical side, when some enormous challenges arose in getting to the finish line of a PhD, I refused to throw in the towel on this project precisely because I recognized, and agreed wholeheartedly that, even in a progressive doctoral program espousing social justice[30],

> The growing divide in wealth, life chances, and basic security that has become so pronounced in our country in recent decades increasingly distances university based poverty researchers from some of their most important subjects (Munger, 2002: 245).

As I make the transition from being a student to teacher, I pledge to try to continue to bridge that gap. It is far too big. This view necessitates a personal context.

I truly believe that I never would have been able to enter the academy if I had endured impoverishment as it is endured today, by countless people who chances for escaping poverty are being lowered. When the "new right" was again engaging in a "politics of truth" by problematizing a "brain drain" (suggesting that Canada was losing its smartest people to the US because of lower American taxes), there was invaluable research being carried out in neuroscience. “The Early Years Study: Final Report” was adeptly subtitled “Reversing the Real Brain Drain” (McCain and Mustard, 1999). The inference of the subtitle was clear: the youngest victims of spending cuts were having their capacity, and thus their future, undercut. The argument was grounded in the neuroscientific finding that “nutrition, care and nurturing directly affect the wiring and pathways of the brain in the early period” (Mustard and McCain, 1999: 5). When I read this finding, I thought about what my life would look like had I experienced impoverishment, particularly as an infant, under the Harris regime. Much like in Susan Scruton’s powerful editorial letter (see appendix #5) “I thank my lucky stars that I was poor in the 1980’s, and not today.”

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[30] When guest speaker Bill Carrol gave the inaugural address launching the University of Windsor's program in sociology (with a thematic emphasis on social justice) he argued persuasively that critical throerists, if they are to be effective, cannot be afraid of their own conclusions and they cannot be afraid of conflict with the powers that be.

Appendix #1: Recruitment Letter

Are you interested in expressing your views on Ontario Works ?

If you are a social assistance recipient in Ontario I would like to provide you with a confidential opportunity to express your views on social assistance. I am a student in sociology at the University of Windsor (www.socialjusticeuniversity.org) and this research is a part of my thesis. I am not affiliated with Ontario Works. The purpose of this research is, ultimately, to hear what social assistance recipients have to say about what is and is not working at OW.

Should you choose to participate you would be asked to give your opinions and perspectives on the everyday operations of Ontario Works. This would involve participating in an interview with me (or a female colleague if you so desire) and / or focus groups with others who will be expressing their perspectives. You would have the option to choose to interview individually, participate in a focus group, or both.

For every interview or focus group you participated in you would receive a payment of $15.00. It is anticipated that each interview would run approximately one hour and focus groups will likely take closer to two hours.

If you would like more information please contact me at (519) 536-6837 or mikebratton1@yahoo.ca

Sincerely,

Mike Bratton.

Appendix#2: Interview Guide

Name: (Pseudonym): ____________________
Age: _____

Race: ________

Marital Status: ________

Any Children: ________ # _________

Contact Info: _____________

a.) Personal **Background**: "To begin with I would like to ask you some basic questions about your recent past and about your more distant background."

1. Could you tell me about your recent background in terms of:

i.) what factors prompted you to apply for social assistance? [potential probes: employment history / employment barriers / relationship issues / care-giving duties]

ii.) What was happening in your life at that time? [Probes: expand on what respondents deem important]

2. Were the factors that prompted you to apply for social assistance new to you ?

i.) Some people feel it is necessary to understand peoples' past to make sense of their present. Do you feel comfortable telling me about your background? [Probes: Who did you live with growing up? Where did you live? Can you tell me about your schooling?]

ii.) was your standard of living better, worse, or the same as it is now?

ii.) are there similarities or differences between your life then and now? What are those similarities and differences?

a.) Work Placement/Community Participation :

1. Could you tell me about your OW work placement?
2. What kind of job-training activities do you engage in during placement?
3. Do you feel that you have met important contacts through placement?

4. Could you tell me about the relationships you have with your supervisor at placement?

5. How would you describe your experience with the welfare system?

b.) **Relationship With Worker:**

1. Could you tell me about your Ontario Works worker(s)?
2. How often do you have contact with your OW worker?
3. Have you ever brought questions or concerns to your worker's attention?
4. If so, how did they respond?
5. Would you describe your worker as either helpful or unhelpful, towards you and / or your job search. How so ?
6. Do you have any strategies for dealing with your worker or the welfare system in general?

c.**) Daily Living Realities**:

1. How do you feel about the amount of your monthly social assistance cheque?
2. Do you manage to find other ways to supplement your income?
3. How do you get to and from placement?
4. Who looks after your child[ren] when you are placement?
5. Could you talk about any financial or social supports you use outside of OW?
6. Can you tell me about some of the ways you manage to get by on such a modest income?
7. If you had to choose just one or two factors that you feel would truly assist you in gaining meaningful employment and attaining financial independence, what do you believe those factors would be?

8. Are you able to secure assistance from family, friends, or partners? Are you able to access any informal work to supplement your income? Do you ever have to access assistance from a food bank?
9. How is your physical health? Do you have health supports?

d.) **Demographics**:

1. Did you have any experiences with social assistance prior to Ontario Works?
2. How long have you been involved with the Ontario Works (OW) program?
3. How many people are you supporting via OW?
4. Different people feel that different factors affect one's ability to secure decent work. What factors do you feel have affected you?

e.) **Program Participant Input.**

1. What do you perceive to be the strengths and/or weaknesses of the OW program? The Ontario Works Act claims that one of its aims is to effectively serve people on social assistance. How do you feel about this?
2. If you were the manager of OW, or the Minister of Community and Social Services, what would you do to improve the program for participants?
3. Some politicians and some people feel that having very low social assistance rates, and restricting access to social assistance, forces people to work and is therefore helping them. Could you comment? Is that idea fair or unfair? Why?
4. The Ontario Works Act pledges to be fair to taxpayers. Could you comment?
5. How do you feel about the general public's views on welfare?
6. Why do you think that poor people are poor?
7. What are your goals for the future ? (.... & Children's future)
8. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about any aspect of the program?
9. Is there anything else you would like to add to our conversation today?

Appendix #3 [Sample Consent Form]

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Title of Study: **“Ontario Works Through the Eyes of Its Participants”**

You are asked to participate in a research study conducted by **Mike Bratton** from the sociology department at the University of Windsor**.**

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel to contact **Dr. Barry Adam *(519) 253-3000 extension 3497***

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

To assess the social assistance from the perspectives of people who are directly impacted.

PROCEDURES

If you volunteer to participate in this study, we would ask you to do the following things:

Answer questions about your views on social assistance and the factors that have influenced your views. You would be afforded the opportunity to answer questions in an individual interview, a focus group with other people, or both. You would be afforded the opportunity to assess and re-assess my analysis of the interviews after they have taken place.

Interviews would take approximately one hour and focus groups will likely run closer to two hours. If you would be interested in providing more than one interview to more fully articulate your views, this interest would be readily accommodated and my contact information will be readily available to you. Interviews and Focus groups will commence in the Fall of 2006 and conclude in the Spring of 2007. The location of interviews can be at a venue most convenient for you. Focus groups will take place at mutually convenient meeting place for those participating. Transportation and child care costs will be covered.

POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

In talking about your assessment and opinions of Ontario Works there may be the risk and discomfort of discussing personal issues. Your contributions to this study will be held in strict confidence and you will not be able to be identified when I write about your story and your contribution to this research.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO SUBJECTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY

You will be afforded the opportunity to express your views.

This study will aim to heighten awareness about the many latent power imbalances that inform social policy.

PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION

Participants will be paid $15.00 per interview.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission. Pseudonyms (false names) will be used, and features that could identify you altered, so that you will not be able to be identified.

The data will be kept in the strictest confidence and recording locked in a box that will only be accessible to you and to me. You will have the right to hear and erase any part of any recording at any time. Recordings will be destroyed at the end of the project.

PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

You can choose whether to be in this study or not. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. You may also refuse to answer any questions you don=t want to answer and still remain in the study. The investigator may withdraw you from this research if circumstances arise which warrant doing so.

FEEDBACK OF THE RESULTS OF THIS STUDY TO THE SUBJECTS

You can choose to access and audit the findings of this report at any time you choose and a final copy of this research will be made available to you if you so desire. A website will post the results of the study.

SUBSEQUENT USE OF DATA

This data will be used in subsequent studies.

Do you give consent for the subsequent use of the data from this study? ☐ Yes ☐ No

RIGHTS OF RESEARCH SUBJECTS

You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research subject, contact: Research Ethics Coordinator, University of Windsor, Windsor, Ontario N9B 3P4; telephone: 519-253-3000, ext. 3916; e-mail: lbunn@uwindsor.ca.

SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH SUBJECT/LEGAL REPRESENTATIVE

I understand the information provided for the study **Ontario Works Through the Eyes of Its Participants**@ as described herein. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

____
Name of Subject

______________________________________ ________________
Signature of Subject Date

SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR

These are the terms under which I will conduct research.

______________________________________ ________________
Signature of Investigator Date

Appendix #4: CONSENT FOR AUDIO/VIDEO TAPING

[SAMPLE CONSENT]

Child=s/Research Subject Name:

Title of the Project: “Ontario Works Through the Eyes of Its Participants”

ID# Number:

Birth date:

I consent to the audio/video-taping of interviews and focus groups.

I understand these are voluntary procedures and that I am free to withdraw at any time by requesting that either the taping be stopped or the viewing be discontinued. I also understand that my name will not be revealed to anyone and that taping and viewing will be kept confidential. Tapes are filed by number only and store in a locked cabinet.

I understand that confidentiality will be respected and the viewing of materials will be for professional use only.

____

____

(Signature of Parent or Guardian)
(Date)

Or

____

____

(Research Subject) (Date)

Appendix#5: The Letter

The next time the Ontario government boasts about reducing the number of welfare recipients in the province, we should remember Kimberly Rogers of Sudbury (See Perception, Vol.25, No. 3 and 4, 2002).
Ms. Rogers [The woman who committed suicide while eight months pregnant after being sentenced to house arrest for simultaneously collecting student loans and welfare and failing to report the latter] ***was condemned for collecting student loans while on welfare – the very thing that made it possible for me to get a marketable education, get off welfare, and become a taxpayer. Without student loans, a child care subsidy, and affordable housing, I couldn't have done it.***
I collected student loans and social assistance from 1986 to 1989. Not only was it legal then, it was seen as a sign of initiative and good character. The government did the fiscally sensible and socially decent thing by providing me with the resources necessary for me to get off welfare.
By contrast the current Ontario government has demonstrated time and again that [people on] welfare should not expect help, compassion, or even indifference from their government, but rather open and aggressive hostility.
This government stigmatizes, degrades, bullies, and punishes welfare recipients somehow believing that they can simply choose another way to live.
I know from experience that people need more – not less – in order to extricate themselves from poverty: more money, more resources, more support, more reason to hope and believe and try.
I borrowed money for an education while on social assistance, just like Ms. Rogers. I was applauded, she was criminalized. I escaped poverty; she died trying.
I thank my lucky stars that I was poor in the 1980's and not today.
(Scruton, 2002:122).

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