A FOUCAULDIAN AND MARXIST ANALYSIS OF REPRESENTATIONS AND SERVICE USER NARRATIVES OF PEOPLE WITH MENTAL HEALTH DIFFICULTIES WHO CLAIM BENEFITS

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Copyright statement

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Publications Arising from the Thesis

Papers

Scott, B. (2017). The Impact of Austerity on Welfare Reform and Mental Health Services. *PsyPAG Quarterly*, (105), 5-7.

Scott, B. (2017). Conference review: Social Psychology Section Annual Conference 2016. *PsyPAG Quarterly,* (103), 63-65. Retrieved from http://www.psypag.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/PsyPag-103_WEB-002.pdf

Scott, B. (2018). Postgraduate Column. *Social Psychological Review*, 20 (1), 42. Retrieved from https://shop.bps.org.uk/publications/publication-by-series/social-psychological-review/social-psychological-review-vol-20-no-1-spring-2018.html

Paper Presentations

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Scott, B. (2019). "A Foucauldian/Marxist discursive analysis of media representations of claiming benefits in regard to mental health". Engage Research Conference, Huddersfield, June 2019.

*Although some of the conceptual material and findings from the thesis have been presented previously above, they have been rewritten for the thesis and there is no incorporation of previous writing.

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Abstract

Discourse on benefit provision has long been a point of contention within political rhetoric. Although research has demonstrated the damaging impact that welfare cuts have had on people with disabilities (Weston, 2012), there has been a focus on the material impact of the deprivation such cuts have caused. In the context of welfare, mental health has received little attention in the research literature, often contextualised within the wider remit of disability, with little regard for the nuances of distress. There is a need to consider this in the context of discourse, exploring issues of subjectivity, identity, power relationships and economic concerns.

The first empirical study discursively explored how newspapers represent and position mental illness in regard to claiming benefits, neoliberal practices and the capitalist political economy. In 'Shame, Tragedy and the Neoliberal Ideal'. the social and political function of shame as a response to neoliberalism was explored. 'Class and Classlessness' explored how discourses of shame were deployed in regard to class and their implications for identity, citizenship and selfhood.

The second empirical study discursively explored how mental health service-users who claim benefits negotiate identities and construct accounts of accessing the benefits system. A discourse of malign surveillance in the benefits system was explored, considering issues of deviance and social control. A discourse of 'Consumerism and Alienation: A Breakdown in Society' was also explored, where participants positioned themselves as 'distanced' and 'outside' of 'human'. The data from both empirical studies were analysed using an innovative discursive method that was developed to engage with the ideas of both Foucault and Marx.

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The legitimisation of taken-for-granted assumptions regarding those with mental health difficulties who claim benefits was interrogated in a critically geared manner, whilst opening up spaces for empowerment, resistance, and social change. The thesis produces new knowledge regarding the interdiscursive relationship between disability and distress in the context of the welfare system, whilst exploring the potential of innovative and nuanced discursive methods.

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List of Abbreviations

BPD – Borderline Personality Disorder

ESA – Employment and Support Allowance

DLA – Disability Living Allowance

DWP – The Department for Work and Pensions

FDA – Foucauldian Discourse Analysis

FOI – Freedom of Information

GP – General Practitioner

HRA – Health Research Authority

JSA – Jobseeker's Allowance

LCWRA - Limited Capability for Work-Related Activity

PIP – Personal Independence Payment

PTMF – Power Threat Meaning Framework

SG – Support Group

SREP – School Research Ethics Panel

UC – Universal Credit

WCA – Work Capability Assessment

WRAG – Work-Related Activity Group

1. Chapter One: Introduction

The research aimed to explore the discursive construction of people with mental health difficulties who claim benefits. The thesis begins with a broad discussion of disability in the context of benefit provision, before moving on to discuss disability with specific regard for mental health. The rationale for this approach was that whilst it is difficult to assert whether mental health difficulties are disabilities, the notion of disability plays an important role in the social construction of mental illness in the context of the benefits system. Benefit-related practices are informed by traditional models of disability; therefore, disability is always relevant to how discourses on distress are constructed in reference to the benefits system.

Both distress and disability are intangible, given that they are historically and socially situated because of the interplay between talk, text and power. In the context of welfare reform, constructions of disability and mental illness share many affinities, but may also be constructed in widely different ways.

It is not within the scope of the thesis to assert whether mental illness is a disability. From my reflexive position, I take both mental illness and disability to be social constructions. Furthermore, I wish to distance myself from claims of absolute truth, which I feel should be avoided in both a reflexive and theoretical capacity. However, it is necessary to explore how disability and mental illness may become intertwined. Current welfare reform assesses capability for work for people with mental health difficulties in a way which is always underpinned by naturalised assumptions of disability.

There were two empirical studies in the thesis; the first explored newspaper representations of people with mental health difficulties who claim benefits. The second explored how mental health service-users, who took part in focus groups, made sense of political rhetoric,

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media representations and wider societal discourses on claiming benefits in the context of mental illness.

My reflections on what I saw to be problematic and disempowering rhetoric around the welfare system following the 2008 economic recession inspired the research. Whilst announcing a four-billion-pound reduction to benefit provision in 2010, George Osborne, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, reflected upon the proposed impact of welfare reforms:

> *People who think it is a lifestyle to sit on out-of-work benefits…that lifestyle choice is going to come to an end. The money will not be there for that lifestyle choice (Wintour, 2010, para.2).*

A representation of benefit claimants was produced which broadly construed people on benefits as unwilling, rather than unable to work. The media has long played a particularly damaging role in the representation of mental health, producing discourses of danger (Stuart, 2006). When this is coupled with disempowering rhetoric around claiming benefits, the position of people with mental health difficulties becomes increasingly contentious, given that they likely face various forms of stigma at once. By extension, such subjects are simultaneously positioned within multiple discourses on benefit claiming, distress and unemployment. Therefore, it is important to explore representations of people with mental health difficulties who claim benefits.

This rationalises the necessity for exploring rhetoric, which is ideological and in turn has material effects. In the research literature, there has been little recognition for the spaces mental health occupies inside and outside of disability. There is a need to explore how mental health service users negotiate their positions, given how contemporary political and media rhetoric has created what are hostile, contentious spaces for people with mental health difficulties to live within.

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1.1   Theoretical Resources

This provides the motivation and inspiration for drawing upon a critical psychological framework in challenging such rhetoric. The research takes a critical psychological approach, and as such, it is necessary here to define what a 'critical' approach means.

Parker (2015) argues that the 'problem' for critical psychology is the relation of modern society to psychology. Drawing on Parker's suggestion, I examine here the space that psychology takes up in modern society and the spaces that modern society takes up regarding psychological research. 'Space' should be taken to mean how psychological knowledges are taken-up, used by, and function in society. For example, how psychological knowledges are used to inform the governance of subjects in institutions, or how naturalised assumptions in society, such as distinctions between 'can't work' and 'won't work', inform psychological practice. Therefore, from here on, critical should be taken to mean a deconstructive approach. This critical approach considers what psychology means for people with mental health difficulties, not only concerning how psychology has been taken up in the capitalist political economy, informing discourses on work, but also the potential for mainstream psychology to maintain the status quo.

In the context of the thesis, this critical psychological approach serves multiple purposes; it 'turns the gaze back on the discipline' (Parker, 2007a:1), by considering the role of psychology and how certain ways of doing psychology have been privileged historically, often to the detriment of the people it studies. Here, critical psychology also concerns itself with the 'everydayness' of the social world, intended to illuminate the potential for oppression. This is done to broaden ways of understanding phenomena, which may otherwise be taken for granted. I take up the above stance to build an argument which acknowledges that contemporary psychology may shape the representation of subjects.

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A critical psychological framework is further drawn on because negative rhetoric about the unwilling, dependent subject who claims benefits as a lifestyle choice must ultimately have material, psychological and emotional effects on people. This needs to be deconstructed and held to account if it is to be adequately challenged. Psychologists have a responsibility in challenging the status quo around UK welfare reform.

Furthermore, whilst rhetoric around benefit claiming does indeed seem to be largely negative, critical psychology has the potential to engage with struggles over inequality. By highlighting instances of oppression, which may occur on an unconscious level, an awareness of how language can function to oppress is made conscious through deconstruction. In being aware of how language can work to oppress us, it can be resisted and challenged, creating opportunities to dismantle an unjust status quo. Given the 'everydayness' of language, there is potential to reclaim the very resources and vocabularies that are used to oppress; activism in the mental health community such as 'Mad Pride' and 'Recovery in the Bin' represent useful examples of reclaiming oppressive rhetoric as a site of resistance.

Whilst the foundations of critical psychology are decidedly political, always engaged in a battle to topple systems of inequality, it also prevents the researcher from getting too bogged down in negative rhetoric. Such a practice could otherwise function as a barrier to working towards genuine social change by focusing on negative assumptions, rather than opportunities for resistance.

In taking a critical psychological approach, where language serves a political function, the researcher can consider the impact that language might have on people and its implications for subjectivity. For example, the potential for positive change that may come about by highlighting problematic assumptions veiled in rhetoric. As Prilleltensky and Nelson (2002) note, the overarching goal of critical psychology is to create alliances with disadvantaged

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groups, taking steps to identify and reconfigure power imbalances in society, exploring ideas of oppression and empowerment. Therefore, critical psychology is a practice of seeking out and taking steps towards transformative change. Thus, the researcher is always looking for opportunities to illuminate points of light by making a real commitment to social change and the empowerment of others.

The thesis draws upon the philosophies of Foucault and Marx, utilising lenses that facilitate the deconstruction of talk around benefits, disability and mental health. A Foucauldian lens is used to consider how power affects people. A Marxist lens gives due consideration to the important role that the economy plays in shaping how people who claim benefits are spoken about, whilst simultaneously deconstructing these ideas in regard to economic forces. Marx (1990 [1867]) also provided a useful route through which to examine the role of disability in historical and contemporary capitalist political economies.

These lenses were used to inform a set of analytical steps which brought together Foucault's ideas about the function of discourse in society and Marx's understanding of the role of the capitalist political economy. In the first empirical study, these steps explored how language is used to represent and position people in newspapers, considering the role that economic forces play within this. In the second empirical study, I took a similar approach, exploring how service-users represented and positioned themselves within wider discourses around mental illness and benefit claiming. Attention was paid here to how they take up, resist and negotiate talk.

In terms of the literature review, a broad focus was taken, structured as a means to capture the broader discourses that are at play and their situated context in contemporary society, rather than, for example, specifically limiting these discussions to Foucauldian and Marxist insights. Similarly, the empirical work discussed in chapters seven and nine explores theoretical ideas beyond those of Foucault and Marx as a means to extend this work and

enrich the arguments made, attending to issues of affect (Ahmed, 2004), posthumanism (Braidotti, 2013; Kurzweil, 2005) and ideas about what it means to live in and be human in late-stage capitalism (i.e. Halberstam, 2011; Fromm, 2002 [1995]; Berlant, 2007). Given that the inclusion of such analytical ideas was not anticipated until the analysis was written, they do not feature within the wider overview of the literature, given that they were unexpected, yet useful insights that enriched the use of the methodological framework used in the thesis.

1.2 Thesis Overview

Chapter Two provides an overview of the key events, both contemporary and in recent history, which have shaped the political and economic climate of the UK, such as late-stage capitalism, consumerism, work, changes to welfare reform and the underpinning political philosophies of these changes, such as neoliberalism, austerity and paternalism.

Chapter Three considers the political rhetoric that surrounded the welfare state. I consider how responses to neoliberalism have produced a discourse of individual responsibility, further drawing upon paternalism to introduce the different claiming subjectivities. This introduces the role of the media as a discursive system of representation, where audiences, ownership, power, and a struggle over truth are considered, drawing upon the work of Foucault and Marx in reference to contemporary media.

I further argue that discourse is always in flux and consider that societal concerns about poverty, disability and unemployment are nothing new, but are constantly reified in discourse throughout history. I suggest that it is the liminal periods in history that are of interest if one is to find resistance and detach truth from hegemony.

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Chapter Four explores representations of mental illness, disability and claiming benefits. These three sections are considered separately, as there is little research which considers broader discourses on people with mental health difficulties alongside those of disability and benefit claiming simultaneously. I then move on to consider dominant models of disability. This was done in order to situate discourses of mental health in regard to claiming benefits in the context of disability, which the research literature to date has not addressed.

Chapter Five overviews the theoretical framework which informed the thesis. The chapter begins with reflections on locating a discursive method within a critical psychological framework, before moving on to discuss how the work of Marx and Foucault was brought together in a transformative way, considering issues of power, capitalism, truth, work, neoliberalism, liminality, materialism, biopower and consumerism.

Chapter Six begins with a statement of the research aims for the first empirical study. I offer a rationale as to why newspapers were analysed in the work, considering the social function they serve. I outline the method regarding data collection and study design. I also set the groundwork for the analytical approach, where the methodological steps that informed the analysis are explained in the context of the empirical work carried out.

Chapter Seven entails the first empirical study, featuring the analysis of newspapers. This chapter includes two sub-sections. In 7.1, 'Shame, Tragedy and the Neoliberal Ideal', I explore the social and political function of shame as a response to neoliberalism and the implications this has for identity, citizenship and selfhood.

In 7.2, 'Class Struggle and Classlessness', I explored how discourses of shame are deployed, redeployed and constructed in relation to class within wider power relationships, asking what this means for selfhood and identity as an 'everyday' practice of resistance. I

further consider how poverty is rendered invisible by drawing upon class representations and tropes available in popular culture. I conclude with my reflections on the findings in 7.3.

Chapter Eight sets out the methods for the second empirical study. I offer a reflexive account before introducing the research aims. I then provide a rationale for the use of focus groups and further discuss study design and ethical permissions. The chapter ends with an extension of the analytical approach from Chapter Six; I offer that the approach is much the same as the first empirical study, though features some minor amendments given the use of focus groups.

Chapter Nine is the analysis of focus groups. In 9.1, 'Surveillance', I explore how surveillance was constructed by participants as being malign and how this was troubled, disrupted, reconstructed and reclaimed. I further explore how participants positioned themselves and others towards surveillance and how surveillance positioned them, considering responses to late-stage capitalism and neoliberalism.

In 9.2, 'Consumerism and Alienation: A Breakdown in Society', I explore how participants troubled and constructed a perceived lack of value that is placed on human life, exploring discourses of consumerism, alienation and distance. The sub-section explores how participants constructed 'human', the growing role of technology and selfhood whilst offering new knowledge on theories of consumerism and individualism. I conclude with my reflections on the findings in 9.3.

In Chapter Ten, I discuss the empirical, theoretical and methodological contributions to knowledge in the thesis. I offer some reflections on the challenges I faced, incongruences of the research and recommendations for future research, before offering a personal reflection. To close, I draw inspiration from popular culture to draw out messages of hope going forward.

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2. Chapter Two: Contextualising the Thesis

Before exploring rhetoric around benefit claiming, it is first necessary to contextualise contemporary rhetoric within the wider political, economic and social background of changes to welfare reform. In doing so, this offers insight into not only how rhetoric was produced and reproduced, but how this translated into practice, such as how people were governed as a result. I offer specific examples and critical appraisal of such practices with regard to the political economy throughout the rest of this chapter.

When exploring rhetoric on benefits, it is first necessary to explore the impact of the 2008 economic recession. Journalists and politicians used the consequent economic downturn to rationalise and legitimise changes to welfare reform:

> *…when the crash came, we in Britain did not just have over-indebted banks, over-indebted households and a big budget deficit, we had the most over-indebted banks, the most over-indebted households as well as the biggest budget deficit of virtually any country anywhere in the world…And the growth achieved in these years of the so-called 'boom' was far too dependent on unsustainable factors: excessive government spending, housing boom and uncontrolled immigration. None of these is a sustainable way to deliver long-term economic growth. When you look now at the reality of what happened in these years, you can see the true picture. Even at the end of the so-called 'boom', there were five million people in our country of working age on out of work benefits (Cameron, 2013, para.6-8).*

The portrayal of a growing need to reduce the budget deficit helped to legitimise an ideology of collective responsibility for the state of the welfare system. In this chapter, I focus in particular upon rhetoric around the economic crash, its consequences and the economic philosophies which thrived in this period[1].

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[1] This chapter also serves a further purpose of informing discussion of rhetoric on welfare, which is discussed in 3.1 in regard to rhetoric which began to identify people and groups who were deemed to be a hindrance to the reduction of the budget deficit. Groups such as benefits claimants began to be positioned within discourses about the budget deficit, which in turn shaped media representations of claimants.

2.1 Historical Context: The 2008 Recession

In the run-up to the economic crisis, the Lehman Brothers, a global banking company, took out several unpopular, inordinate, taxpayer-funded bailouts (Ball, 2018) and were later allowed to declare bankruptcy by regulators. Many European banks eagerly borrowed from American markets, whilst American mortgage lenders leant out irresponsible sums of money to homeowners with excessively poor credit histories. This was known as the 'sub-prime mortgage crisis' (BBC News, 2007).

The crisis resulted in a slump in housing prices. Trust in the world banking system began to crumble. With this trust gone, other banks stalled their lending. Regulators were forced to begin the bail-out of many other world banks to avoid further stock market panic, exacerbated by banks teetering on the brink of collapse.

It is revealing that the breakdown of a handful of financial institutions eventually resulted in a worldwide collapse of economic markets. It is my view that the fallout of the economic recession unveiled the very fragility of capitalist political economies. Such economies are not only dependent on borrowing and a need to maintain profit but also rely on the full participation of consumers to uphold the system. Such consumerism was difficult to maintain, given that profit rates had not fully recovered from the recessions of the 1970s and 1980s.

Kirkland (2015) argues that Thatcher laid much of the groundwork for the 2008 recession through her economic policies, such as the 'Right to Buy Scheme', which meant that mortgage prices rose far more quickly than wages, which risked exposing the public to potential debt, should an economic crisis occur. Embracing neoliberalism granted the UK access to the global economic market, given that trade had the potential to become

uninhibited by tariffs and restrictions, as is characteristic of free-markets, but this would

inevitably expose the UK to further losses in the case of a global downturn.

Neoliberalism is made up of an agenda of economic and social policies and institutional

arrangements that are geared towards the enhancement of free-market economics. The

goal of free-market economics is based on the notion of supply-and-demand, which is

relatively unregulated by the state. However, providing a complete definition of

neoliberalism is difficult:

> *The philosophy of neoliberalism has been widely debated and contested in the research literature, largely because neoliberalism has been thought to be beyond definition – 'there has never been one neoliberalism' (Gamble, 2009:71).*

To understand how neoliberalism operates, a broad definition is necessary before

contextualising neoliberalism within contemporary rhetoric. Harvey (2007) offers a useful

definition of neoliberalism:

> *[Neoliberalism is] an ethic in itself, capable of acting as a guide to all human action, and substituting for all previously held ethical beliefs, it emphasises the significance of contractual relations in the marketplace. It holds that the social good will be maximised by maximising the reach and frequency of market transactions, and it seeks to bring all human action into the domain of the market (Harvey, 2007:3).*

In an attempt to resolve the 2008 economic crisis, many corporations cut the wages of

workers to maintain profits (Romei, 2017). However, the consequential boom was only ever

temporary. A lack of real economic growth for several decades meant that workers who

either lost their jobs or had wages cut were now less able to take part in consumer

activities, such as paying interest rates on mortgages or buying luxury items. It is of no

coincidence then, that companies like Ford recorded losses during this period (Vlasic, 2009)

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and that banks, such as Northern Rock, faced closure over the mortgage crisis (Dunkley, 2017).

When attempting to rescue the economy from collapse, many governments simply increased borrowing. This meant that banks were essentially given more money to lend out as a means to foster economic growth. Many banks took increased risks, aggressively pushing loans and mortgages to consumers and repackaging poorly constructed loans to be sold to financial institutions in other countries. There was little consideration for their ability to repay, often at a loss to both the banks and their customers, exposing lenders to further losses (Scanlon, Lunde and Whitehead, 2011).

In the UK during the economic crash, the Labour government, led by Gordon Brown, along with the Bank of England, were blindsided by their misplaced esteem in the brilliance of free-market economics, which largely involves deregulation of economies and their respective labour-markets – a neoliberal response. They failed to anticipate the potentially disastrous effects of the economic downturn. A neoliberal response to the crisis was undertaken, involving very little regulation or intervention on the part of the government. This had implications for the benefits system, which transformed in response to concerns about individual benefit claimants and a perceived need to reduce the budget deficit.

2.1.1 The Economic Downturn: Responses to Neoliberalism

When considering how contemporary governments respond to neoliberal concerns and what this means for benefit claimants, it is necessary to contextualise changes to the economy within the development of neoliberalism within recent UK history. In understanding how the treatment of benefit claimants changed in practice, it is then possible to explore the discourses that were produced, shaping such practice, exploring first the material, tangible changes, then the ideological.

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Hostile rhetoric around the role of trade unions, alongside the gradual deregulation of financial industries during the 1980s, played an important role in the state accepting the neoliberal order (Kirkland, 2015), where profit and capital were favoured (Gamble, 2009). Responses to neoliberalism are important when considering how people with mental health difficulties who claim benefits are located in discourse. This is because it allows insight into how contemporary society positions the individual in relation to the free-market and how this relationship transformed, particularly for the individual in receipt of benefits.

An example of this changing relationship in the context of the benefits system is the Work Programme - the UK government's now-defunct welfare-to-work scheme. Claimants were expected to work for their benefits, entailing a specific focus on the individual, blurring the lines between work and welfare, ability and disability, legitimate benefit claiming and masquerading as entitled. This represented reified narratives of 'hard work', where claimants were expected to comply with the programme, yet paid significantly less for their 'work' than if they were in employment. Nonetheless, employers benefited from the relatively cheap labour it produced. One might view the scheme as a practice of instilling a strong work ethic, whilst demonstrating the exploitative consequences of failing to appreciate the importance of contributing to the success of the free-market, regardless of ability to do so.

2.1.2 Capitalism and Consumerism

Given the material and ideological implications of the recession, economic and social life began to change for ordinary people. This change had implications for how people practised consumerism and participated in capitalism. Capitalism is an economic system characterised by a free-market and the notion of supply-and-demand, where trade is unregulated by the state and private companies control assets and capital.

Haug (1986) argued that capital depends upon the necessity for false needs. Cushman (1990) referred to a similar phenomenon, coining '*the empty self'*, where the self is soothed when filled up with consumer goods, such as advertising. However, Gergen (1991) suggested that contemporary capitalism plays a somewhat different role in the construction of identity, proposing '*the saturated self'*. Gergen proposed that as technology moves forward, modes of communication reach further than ever, meaning that the social capabilities of people continue to expand. Thus, people find themselves experiencing far more contact with other people, cultures, systems, relations and institutions than before.

Consequently, identity is constructed with regard to the many varied relations participated in, which may include changes in one's financial and personal circumstance. This causes individuals to split themselves across various self-investments, referred to by Gergen as 'multiphrenia'. Multiphrenia refers to the relations existing within a complex network of conflicting thoughts, beliefs and opinions, which may pose dilemmas. These relations construct the self. When the self becomes fully saturated, any sense of an existential self, autonomous from cultural relations, disappears. Gergen suggests that once saturated, there is nothing truly existential in identity that can be known beyond these relations. The true, or authentic self, has been decentered, created by the negotiation of these varied investments. This introduces the defragmentation of the self to everyday psychological and social life.

This notion of multiphrenia can be considered in regard to the impact of the economic recession, as this embedded a rapidly changing form of economic and social life within contemporary culture, to which people ultimately had to transform themselves to adapt. Given Gergen's suggestion of the saturated self, social class may play an important role when people construct their identities in regard to certain events and relations, such as the economic recession.

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This is pertinent to the study of identity, given that the recession did not happen in a vacuum, but was intertwined with other institutions when constructed, such as government and the media. For example, (Fiske et al., 2012) argue that socioeconomic status shapes many aspects of daily life, such as interactions with authority, whilst Mullainathan and Shafir (2013) argue that a mindset of scarcity is produced when living in poverty, consequently pushing people to focus on salient issues at the expense of others. It would be reasonable to anticipate that public discourse also shifted, particularly towards more individualised concerns, such as one's financial or work situation.

In this subsection, I considered the recent historical context of the thesis, in particular, how the economic recession shaped material, ideological and discursive transformations around the societal role of work and the welfare system, entailing a magnified focus on the individual, who was positioned firmly within narratives around economic concerns. In 2.2, I consider what these changes meant for people with mental health difficulties when navigating the benefits system.

2.2 Benefit-Related Policy and Practice

2.2.1 Work

Following the financial crisis, many people found themselves unable to take up full-time paid employment, often due to increased redundancies, a move-into self-employment, or the take-up of flexible working patterns. For those who did stay in employment, work became increasingly precarious due to the proliferation of zero-hour contracts, where low-wage jobs and underemployment flourished (Grady, 2017). At the beginning of the recession, the UK unemployment rate was around 1.6 million, 5% of the population. By 2009, as the

recession ended, the UK unemployment rate had risen to 2.5 million, 8% of the population (BBC News, 2015).

A growing trend of flexible, vulnerable work emerged out of this deregulated labour. The TUC (2015) defines vulnerable work as low paid, highly insecure jobs, which place people at risk of continuing poverty due to an employer/employee power imbalance. Consequently, workers are no longer guaranteed a minimum level of work and are often at risk of exploitation due to breaches of minimum wage legislation (Besse et al., 2013). Flexible contracts are traditionally targeted at those in low-paid employment (ONS, 2014).

Whilst it is difficult to quantify how many people currently take up zero-hour contracts or temporary work, there was an increase in insecure employment in the aftermath of the recession. Though nearly two million public sector jobs were lost as a result of the recession, the UK labour market rapidly weathered these losses through job creation (Myant, Theodoropoulou and Piasna, 2016). However, the workforce produced largely consisted of insecure work, resulting in an increasingly polarised labour market (Myant, Theodoropoulou and Piasna, 2016). Coulter (2016) refers to this increase in zero-hour contracts as a regrettable consequence of a lightly regulated labour-market.

Though presented as a flexible mode of employment which empowers and frees workers, those employed on zero-hour contracts often find themselves at risk of exploitation. Zero-hour contracts mean that the line between 'employee' and 'worker' is often blurred, which in turn may limit employment rights and restrict opportunities to take-up membership of a trade union. Also, many people may receive below the minimum wage in real terms, given that they are paid for time on duty, but not down-time, such as preparation for work duties or work which takes place outside of agreed hours.

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Nonetheless, the current benefits system expects that people on benefits should accept the offer of a zero-hour contract. As Minister for the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), Amber Rudd confirmed her position on the matter of zero-hour contracts for benefit claimants in a DWP select committee meeting. Here, Rudd confirmed that benefit claimants who do not take up opportunities for work, including zero-hour contracts, could face sanctions. In response, a member of the committee asked Rudd if such flexible work should also include prostitution, given that it reflects the reality for some vulnerable claimants (Bulman, 2018).

Zero-hour contracts may also put benefit claimants at risk, given that the Universal Credit (UC) system penalizes jobseekers who turn down zero-hour contracts. Claimants may face the prospect of having their benefits reduced or removed completely. People who claim benefits due to a mental health difficulty may be disproportionately affected by this expectation. Thus, the mental health of people with existing mental health difficulties may be exacerbated by flexible work, given the psychological impact of these work experiences, such as insecurity.

Referring to a collective need to make sacrifices to reduce the budget deficit, George Osbourne, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, spoke of '*fixing the roof when the sun is shining*' (CCHQ Press, 2014). This referred to a collective responsibility to resolve the UK's economic deficit whilst conditions were favourable. During this time, many cutbacks to welfare reform were enforced to 'make work pay':

> *Under the last government, the safety net became a cage, but today marks another step towards ending that trap…The benefit system should be seen as a means of temporary support for those who fall on hard times, rather than a lifestyle choice…We are witnessing a shift in behaviour as many are finally beginning to realise that a life on welfare is no longer an option…This is precisely what our reforms are designed to do: create a welfare culture that incentivises work and limits those high benefit payments so that hard-working taxpayers can feel that the system is fair to them, while bringing to an end Labour's damaging culture of dependency (Duncan Smith, 2012, paras. 7-14).*

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Political rhetoric suggested that the previous welfare system had left people dependent upon social security and better off than those in paid employment, largely due to the privilege that the previous system had encouraged and allowed. The 2008 economic recession played an important role in shaping the labour-market. It also produced a useful way through which the budget deficit could be used to rationalise and legitimise welfare reform within political rhetoric. Such rhetoric described the welfare system as bloated, entrenched and systemically abused as a 'lifestyle choice', which in turn has important implications for how people with mental health difficulties are positioned within benefits-related discourse.

It is necessary at this point to specifically explore how welfare reform was rationalised and introduced. In 2.2.2 I outline the key changes to the welfare system. The following section (2.2.3) considers how neoliberal practices were adopted to encourage benefit claimants to take up subject positions that were conducive to the functioning of the capitalist political economy. I consider the changing parameters of benefits eligibility and conditionality and by extension, how responses to neoliberalism in the benefits system functioned to transform the notion of 'disability'. This provides a useful route through which to consider how practices of governmentality were borne of contemporary economic, social and political circumstance, which informed neoliberal discourses of mental health in the context of claiming benefits.

2.2.2 Welfare Reform

To consider the structural, systemic and psychological effects of welfare reform, it is first necessary to broadly understand how welfare reform affects people with disabilities more generally. This understanding will be scaffolded upon to understand the nuanced implications that welfare reform may have on mental health difficulties in 2.2.3.

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Substantial changes to welfare provision were introduced in the 2012 Welfare Reform Act. This included the gradual rollout of Universal Credit (UC), the Under-Occupancy Penalty, known as the Bedroom Tax, and the benefit cap, which limited the total amount of benefits which could be claimed. Disability Living Allowance (DLA) was abolished and replaced with Personal Independence Payments (PIP), which cover assistance of daily living requirements and mobility costs associated with a disability.

O'Hara (2013) argued that increasingly harsh and punitive sanctions, repeated attacks on health-related benefits, benefit delays, and the Bedroom Tax, are the key reasons for the recent explosion in the use of food banks. The Joseph Roundtree Foundation (2015) estimated that young single adults who were placed in the Work-Related Activity Group (WRAG) would experience an estimated shortfall of £4,730 from the £17,000 necessary for a basic, socially acceptable standard of living. The New Policy Institute (2013) stated that 2.6 million families would be affected by at least one benefit cut. The Child Poverty Action Group (2014) further suggested working families would face a significant shortfall in the income required to meet a minimum standard of living. Furthermore, Unison (2013) suggested that people with disabilities could be simultaneously affected by up to ten different reforms at once.

Such changes occurred alongside reductions to Employment and Support Allowance (ESA), which began to incorporate increasingly stringent assessments for eligibility. ESA is the main out-of-work sickness benefit in the UK.

ESA has been focused upon specifically in the thesis because people with disabilities and mental health difficulties are anticipated to have been impacted by changes to provision. As DLA was abolished, it gave way to the rollout of ESA. Many who had previously received life-long support were consequently reassessed for eligibility. The assessment for ESA eligibility is known as the Work Capability Assessment (WCA).

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The assessment criteria for ESA has changed multiple times over its history. These changes have been subtle, though have had profound implications for people with disabilities. In 2008, a claimant was expected to mobilise 'unaided by another person' with reasonable use of aids that are normally used by the claimant, such as prosthesis (Legislation.gov.uk, 2008). In 2018, the assessment handbook guide for Maximus[2] assessors made specific reference to the use of wheelchairs as a 'reasonable aid', whilst making a distinction between 'walking' and 'traditional walking':

> *The descriptors should not be confused with the traditional concept of walking (i.e. bipedal locomotion)…those who could reasonably use a* **wheelchair**…*to mobilise distances in excess of 200m would not be awarded any points for their inability to walk (Maximus, 2018:82).*

Nonetheless, the handbook discussed above makes some promising references specific to mental health, something which was distinctly lacking in the 2008 eligibility criteria (Legislation.gov.uk, 2008). However, with increased inclusion and recognition of mental health, some concerning assumptions have followed in the advice to assessors, at the expense of meaningful consideration of mental health difficulties. This is particularly evident where assessors are advised to approach mental health difficulties with scepticism. It is suggested that the occurrence of mental health problems must only be considered when corroborated with medical reports, diagnosis and evidence of taking up therapy. The same scepticism is not encouraged in an assessment of physical disability. In the handbook (Maximus, 2018), a person having someone in attendance with them at an assessment is evidenced as a lack of ability to plan daily living. However, in a later section, a claimant having someone in attendance with them is offered as evidence of a lack of anxiety.

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[2] Maximus is the name of one of the key contract holders in the benefit system. They currently oversee Work Capability Assessments.

The WCA is made up of two parts; the Limited Capability for Work Assessment, which decides whether a person can claim ESA, and the Limited Capability for Work-Related Activity (LCWRA), which decides the level of ESA someone can claim. When applying for ESA, it is necessary to complete a Limited Capability for Work Related-Activity questionnaire (ESA50) which includes questions on the nature of the individual's disability, mobility, and cognitive and intellectual function. Claimants must also provide supporting information such as evidence of medication, hospitalisation and medical appointments. Once the questionnaire has been returned, a claimant will likely be invited to a WCA.

When attending a WCA, eligibility for ESA depends on how many points are scored during the assessment. The assessor asks the claimant questions about their health, what a 'normal' day looks like, as well as more general questions. On each question either 0, 6, 9 or 15 points can be scored. To qualify for ESA, claimants must score at least 15 points in either the 'physical' or 'mental' sections of the assessment. Points cannot be combined across both sections.

Before 2017, when a person was awarded ESA, there were two levels of award; the Support Group (SG), where a claimant has no further obligations until the renewal of ESA, and the Work-Related Activity Group (WRAG), where a person is judged unfit for work but potentially fit for work in the future. Restricting the scope of benefit eligibility and conditionality has served to shift the parameters of what constitutes disability. A key example of this is the WRAG, which in line with government policy, asserted that a person had a 'legitimate' disability and thus was unable to work, but may have been able to work in the future.

Access to the WRAG was abolished for new claimants from 2017 onwards (House of Commons Library, 2017). To mitigate this loss, the 'Flexible Support Fund' was introduced as part of Universal Credit. The fund is intended to cover purchasing uniforms and the cost

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of attending interviews. The fund appears to be little known, a suggestion which is echoed in the quote below, taken from an interview in a newspaper article with a Jobcentre employee:[3]

> *It's a bit like Fight Club - we don't discuss what happens in Fight Club. So, you don't talk about flexible support fund either (Bennett, 2015, para. 6).*

With the WRAG group defunct, after 2017, people who would have been placed in the WRAG claim Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) instead, blurring the lines of being unemployed and being too unwell to work. It can be perceived that the fund removes a sense of 'legitimacy' by replacing the WRAG with what is essentially a hardship fund attached to an expectation to be in work:

> *…the whole idea is the punishment, that's what you've got to suffer but if you can't manage, we'll consider doing something for you (Bennett, 2015, para.9).*

Nonetheless, welfare regimes have produced very little in terms of take-up of employment and may well have exacerbated the poverty that claimants face (Banerjee et al., 2015). Many of the welfare reforms under the period of austerity have increased poverty whilst seizing the 'safety net' (Mattheys, 2015) from beneath the feet of the 'vulnerable' people, whose interests such reforms purport to be acting in. Child-tax, housing and disability-related benefits have been subjected to prolonged and repeated attacks. Claimants have been further forced to navigate their own identities and a stricter sanctioning system which punishes a lack of compliance with the prospect of complete removal of benefits.

Claimants are expected to gather medical evidence to support their ESA claim. The WCA relies on the individual's self-representation, where a 'snapshot' of their condition is created

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[3] Despite having read a lot about how the benefits system works, I didn't know about the Flexible Support Fund either!

by reliably recording what an 'average' day looks like. The DWP expects an individual will have sufficient capacity, insight, and understanding of their condition to relay it fully to an assessor. People with mental health difficulties or neurological conditions may be exempt from this rule and therefore could be asked to attend a WCA without submitting an ESA50. However, a lack of medical evidence, which would otherwise be provided in the ESA50, may be detrimental to a person's claim, given how the Maximus handbook (Maximus, 2018) emphasises that mental health conditions can only be corroborated with medical evidence.

The WCA aims to assess functional capability for work, using a computer-led tick-box system. In doing so, the assessment disregards diagnosis and prognosis (Stewart, 2018). This is somewhat problematic and contradictory to the advice to assessors (Maximus, 2018), which emphasises the need to corroborate a claimant's condition with evidence of treatment. However, access to treatments like psychological therapies may ultimately be hinged on a diagnosis. It is also possible that a diagnosis may have been made, but that therapy is not available, considering increasingly long waiting lists for psychological therapies. The assessment does not refer to prognosis, ability to take up or remain in work, how the claimant copes in the workplace or how they can be supported to do so. Rather, the assessment criteria are focused on the claimant's snapshot of an average day, largely without reference to the workplace.

Those experiencing mental health difficulties have been indiscriminately and disproportionally affected by on-going changes to benefit provision. This was supported by a decision from the Upper Tribunal (MM & DM vs. Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, 2013), which ruled that the WCA substantially disadvantaged those with mental health problems. The argument was that the system is designed with the expectation that people can accurately report their condition to an assessor with limited expertise in mental health. Reliance upon accurate self-reporting may have repercussions for people with mental health difficulties. Public Law Project (2013) stated that if the government continued to push

people with mental health difficulties through the system as it stood, more ill people would be wrongly refused support.

American insurance corporations have played an important role in shaping the current UK government approach to benefits. Whilst working for Unum Provident, an American Insurance corporation, Waddell and Aylward (2005) drew on Engel's (1977) biopsychosocial model, emphasising psychological factors of disability over biomedical ones. This informed the assessment used by Unum Provident Insurance, where the WCA was born.

Shakespeare, Watson and Alghaib (2016) argued that the DWP-commissioned research conducted by Waddell and Aylward (2005) was 'policy-based research', underpinned by incoherent theory. Also, I further argue that the use of the model was contextually dependent and situated in rhetoric on benefits of the time, marking a useful way through which to put such concerns into practice.

The use of the biopsychosocial model in the WCA responded well to neoliberal concerns, where unemployment was constructed within the vocabulary of the individual, emphasising psychological and individual explanations of unemployment. The model emphasised the personal, individual and psychological, whereas systemic and social barriers to employment were often negated, such as the societal expectation of disabled people to compete with their able-bodied peers on equal terms (Grover and Piggott, 2009) and the importance of social support, such as that of carers (Litchfield, 2013).

Such explanations were pertinent to the political rhetoric around the welfare state, as discussed previously in this chapter, where claiming benefits was construed as a lifestyle choice that is burdensome to the progress of economic recovery. Stewart (2018) contributed to the growing scrutiny of the adapted biopsychosocial model, arguing that the model was issued by the DWP to justify the intimidation of disabled people. In 2003, Unum

Provident Insurance was sued for 31.7 million dollars for producing 'disability denial factories' (Stewart, 2015).

Drawing on the principles of the Unum assessment model, Waddell and Aylward (2005) authored a government-commissioned paper, recommending that sanctions should be used to incentivise compliance by removing all access to funds. Currently, claimants of ESA and JSA can be sanctioned indefinitely in terms of removal of money because sanctions can be imposed back-to-back, should claimants repeatedly fail to comply with the claimant agreement, such as meetings with a work coach (Department for Work and Pensions, 2020).

The work of Waddell and Aylward gave rise to rhetoric such as 'revise the sick note' and 'resist diagnosis' in the UK (Stewart, 2018), which transformed the relationships between General Practitioners (GP), patients, claimants and the DWP. This transformation is exemplified in government policy. In 2015, the DWP published guidance to GP's on the matter of sick notes (Department for Work and Pensions, 2015). Notably, 'sick note' was replaced with the term 'fit note' in the advice that followed, constructing employment as a health outcome and by extension, pathologising unemployment. The WCA has lessened the role of the GP, who may well have the clinical expertise and knowledge necessary to help generate an accurate snapshot of capability (Shakespeare, Watson and Alghaib, 2016). Ultimately, the WCA focuses on barriers to employment which are deemed to be the responsibility of claimants, whilst underemphasising medical and social factors.

2.2.3 Neoliberalism, Austerity and Paternalism

To understand the discursive and non-discursive function of the reforms discussed in this chapter, the function of wider political rhetoric on benefits is considered in the context of the economic downturn (discussed in 2.1.1 and 2.1.2). That is to say, how politicians used

rhetoric on benefits and how practices were enacted in response to neoliberal concerns, such as the justification of welfare reductions in response to the recession and how people were governed as a result. This means not only looking at how language functioned but what it achieved in terms of discourse on benefits and the role that economic concerns play, for example, where benefit claiming and unemployment are framed as individual problems. This rhetoric produced practices which shaped how people were governed and socially obligated to behave as the gaze turned towards benefit claimants in the wake of the economic downturn.

Ultimately, neoliberalism's concern lies with ensuring the political economy functions as efficiently as possible, without consideration for changing the dominant system. Neoliberalism seeps into the fabric of everyday life, both public and private, producing subjectivities which are conducive to the function of the economy. This has a material impact on people, given that they are obligated to take these dominant, normative positions up.

Springer (2014) advocates for a discursive understanding of neoliberalism, considering neoliberalism as an assemblage made up of a constellation of systems and structures that are situated in a specific sociocultural context. Therefore, it is necessary to explore the ideology of neoliberalism in its given context to understand the practices that are undertaken to ensure the functioning of the free-market.

For example, UK political policy shifted towards neoliberal conservatism as part of the rejection of the '*nanny state*', which meant '*rolling back the frontiers of the state*' during the Thatcher government (Gamble, 1988: 223). This represented a move away from a belief in the efficacy and moral power of government, towards an unguarded faith in the individual and free-markets as the deliverers of freedom (Stedman Jones, 2012). Although neoliberal

practices do not aim to foster social cohesion, they do serve to elevate capitalism beyond a mode of production, towards a socially ingrained ethic.

To explore the role of neoliberalism effectively, it will be considered in reference to the implication of austerity in the benefits system. Grimshaw and Rubery (2012) argue that austerity-related changes in the UK, such as changes to the benefits system, represented a distinctive shift towards a neoliberal model. This period of austerity resulted in sustained budget and expenditure cuts, which aimed to reverse 'excessive' spending undertaken by the previous Labour government.

During this time, the many major reforms which were implemented can be interpreted as neoliberal practices, where austerity becomes a tool of neoliberalism. In restricting benefit entitlement to encourage entry to the workforce, there is an underlying expectation for individuals to renegotiate their subjectivities by moving into work. Thus, there is an expectation that claimants should transform these subjectivities into those which are conducive to the economy, by becoming productive in terms of the free-market, rather than 'dependent' upon it.

Benefits have not only become more difficult to access, given increasingly restrictive eligibility criteria but have also become harder to survive upon. Ideological scapegoating has proved to be a useful tool for neoliberalism. Drawing on the growing trend of nationalism in the UK, much of the blame for poor social conditions was shifted on to an 'other'.

Fuchs (2016) argued that Cameron strongly appealed to the UK's tendency towards English nationalist sentiments and the fetishism of hard labour. Consequently, migrants and welfare recipients became scapegoats for everything from health care to education. Within the ideological construction of problematic groups, neoliberalism takes a specific role in locating

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and stereotyping problematic traits and values such as idleness, laziness and unwillingness within individuals. These assumptions are eventually ascribed to specific groups and come to appear as true and natural. Thus, traditional conservatism has been combined with scapegoating to construct a discourse of the problematic other, who may potentially harm the social order. They are consequently pitted against the collective 'us' – the hard-working, law-abiding, British taxpayer:

> MORE than half a million people have falsely claimed sickness benefits for the last 10 years – at a cost to taxpayers of a massive £28billion…The scale of Britain's long-term sick pay claims bill was unearthed by Employment Minister Chris Grayling…'We will no longer accept a system which writes people off at a drop of the hat and expects the taxpayer to foot the bill (Little, 2010, para. 1-9).

In the Cameron government, neoliberalism drew upon individualised discourses of meritocracy and responsibility which were underpinned by a sense of morality. Fuchs (2016) further argues that such discourse of hard work threatens the unproductive 'scrounger' with the risk of coercion and self-inflicted harm:

> Thatcherism and Cameronism's meritocratic ideology sends out a clear social Darwinist message: "You can make it if you work hard. And if you succeed, a low tax regime will reward you. If not, then nobody but you is to blame. Don't expect mother and brother welfare state to help you! There will be no love lost! The state will coerce you! (Fuchs, 2016:174).

Right-wing authoritarianism veils vested interests in the free-market and capital by deflecting away from a low-wage economy, which has been created and maintained by neoliberalism (Fuchs, 2016). Therefore, in the context of the free-market, neoliberalism governs labour-power through welfare reforms, which set out an obligation to be in work. Marx (1990[1867]) argues that this governance goes on behind the backs of workers.

Marx (1990[1867]) provides a useful way through which to consider how economic relations shape discourse, by considering the distinction between 'labour' and 'work'. If the

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movement of people off benefits and into the workforce is viewed as a means to increase 'abstract labour' (work which is done as means of survival), rather than being 'work' (driven by craft, expertise, choice and passion, controlled by the worker), then the way in which the production of useful commodities which generate profit for the capitalist, who owns the means of production via surplus-value, can be considered. Surplus-value means that the worker generates more than they get back, making a profit for the capitalist. This is why, for Marx, workers are always exploited.

Thus, moving people off benefits also acts in the interest of capital. If welfare reform does have a stake in generating an increase in labour-power via the absorption of the labour reserve army into the workforce (Marx and Engels, 1965[1848]) [4], then people become productive in a socially desirable way which benefits the state and the free-market. The benefits system is made up of a multiplicity of contracts, such as the government and business, where businesses profit and in return, work to reduce the welfare bill. Further, there is the claimant's contract with the government, where benefit provision is reliant upon complying with the benefit-related practices and expectations which are set out.

Whilst there has been much rhetoric about benefit claimants being in work, there has been little about what 'good' employment should look like. Productive, rather than meaningful employment, is the focus of welfare reform. The risk of exploitation is so rarely discussed to the extent that a dogma of 'work is good for you' has been produced. This is discussed in more detail in Chapter Three.

The economic interests of capital mean that issues of social inequality are ignored by casting the public gaze onto conceived problems caused by the 'other'. Benefit claimants and migrants are then exploited wherever profit is generated. Rather than challenging the

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[4] Moving people who were once deemed unable to work back into work.

hegemony of capitalism, such groups are blamed for their exploitation as part of the neoliberal, capitalist order, which tends to thrive in conservative, nationalist conditions, but is rarely challenged there.

There has been much research concerning the social, financial and emotional impact of austerity measures. Those most heavily affected by austerity measures are socially deprived areas, thus welfare reform risks exacerbating pre-existing social inequalities (Beatty and Fothergill 2013; Whitehead 2014). Social inequalities, such as poverty, low income and debt have been linked to poor mental health (WHO and Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, 2014) as well as unemployment, underemployment and high levels of deprivation (Mattheys, 2015).

The period of austerity coincided with disinvestment across the NHS, which impeded the provision of services (Royal College of Psychiatrists, 2015), whilst demand continued to increase (O'Hara, 2013). The economic recession, financial hardship and unemployment have also been linked with social deprivation, social isolation, alcohol misuse, increased suicide rates and suicide ideation (Knapp, 2012). Around 21% of the United Kingdom's population live beneath the poverty line, the majority of whom are targeted by welfare reforms (Duffy, 2013). Morrow (2013) argues that this growing inability to cope with the effects of austerity, such as the reduced provision of mental health services, is reflective of dominant discourses around mental health, in which social and structural detriments are negated in favour of the individual.

Thus, neoliberalism suggests that it is not the implications of austerity that affect an individual so negatively, but the individual's own inability to cope. The notion of the individual is deeply embedded in neoliberal assumptions. In reinforcing individualisation, austerity acts as an important tool in producing, deploying and responding to neoliberal values.

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The individualisation of benefit entitlement fails to consider the socioeconomic inequalities that might cause poverty in the first place (Wiggan, 2012), producing feelings of alienation amongst the lower classes. Individualism, largely in the form of individual responsibility, is embedded deeply in Anglo-American culture and psychotherapy (Epstein, 2010; 2013); this has long been used by the powerful as a justification for disciplining the poor (Jones & Novak, 1991).

Such practices are representative of paternalism. Dworkin (1972) defined paternalism as an interference with a person's liberty and freedom, consisting of actions which limit a person's autonomy, of which the subject is not necessarily aware. Paternalism is not strictly coercive, given that there is no overt coercion that takes place; control happens on an unconscious level. However, paternalism can come in multiple forms, whether hard or soft, moral or political. Paternalism raises moral questions about free will, though is discussed here in the context of welfare provision, thus the moral questions that are asked largely concern ethics and the interests that paternalism serves.

Jones, Pykett and Whitehead (2011) argue that the Conservative-Liberal government was soft-paternalistic, suggesting that the government approach laid somewhere between soft-paternalism and neoliberalism. Soft-paternalism entails more liberal notions of self-governance, such as being encouraged towards appropriate behaviours which are conducive to the take-up of work, as opposed to more coercive interventions:

> *…soft paternalism is about the careful design of collective structures of choice, in a range of different policy areas, which facilitate more effective decision-making while enhancing personal freedom (Jones, Pykett and Whitehead, 2011:51).*

Whilst paternalistic approaches may have the best interests of the individual as their central focus, this can become conflicted with other interests, such as the financial and emotional

cost to society (Childress et al., 2002). Thus, austerity responds to concerns about the functioning of the market and can be deployed as a tool of neoliberalism.

A key example of this is benefit sanctions. Whilst claimants of benefits such as UC, ESA and JSA are not, in the traditional sense, coerced into complying with, participating in and attending required meetings, the prospect of destitution, homelessness and reliance on food banks acts as a coercive and strongly disciplinary practice, amidst the seemingly neoliberal, soft-paternalistic policies, which appear to encourage free-will.

The short-lived Work Programme represents an extraordinary example of paternalism in action. This was the UK government's welfare-to-work scheme, where the ill and unemployed were expected to work for their benefits. The DWP outsourced their search for a resolution to unemployment to charities and the private sector. Those in the programme worked up to 30 hours a week, though received no payment from the companies they worked for (Butler and Halliday, 2017). Given that the maximum rate of JSA is currently £73.10 weekly and the current minimum wage £8.21 hourly, the exploitation of job seekers within the scheme speaks volumes. The DWP later dissolved the scheme following their findings which detailed the Work Programme's ineffectiveness (Department for Work and Pensions, 2012). Work Programme Providers were sanctioning twice as many people as they were signposting into employment (Etherington and Daguerre, 2015).

Contemporary paternalism has been embedded in the notion of 'compassionate conservativism'. Compassionate conservatism was a particularly strong theme during the Cameron-Clegg government, underpinned by the 'compassionate' delivery of traditional conservative values and initiatives, such as the continuation of Thatcher's council housing policies. Compassionate conservatism reflected some of David Cameron's scepticism towards the role of the state, often expressing his preference for individual action and volunteerism over government intervention (Kerr, 2007). In its formulation, what

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compassionate conservatism does is encourage self-governance and self-reliance of people, to the wider benefit of the state. In theory, compassionate conservatism represented a shift away from the typical neoliberal approach to economic, social and political policies.

However, the modern, progressive approach of compassionate conservatism was effectively overwhelmed by the financial crisis. Conservatism was never truly able to separate itself from its neoliberal roots. Rather than mobilising community cohesion, initiatives such as the 'Big Society' left communities to plug the gaps left open by austerity measures. The promotion of community volunteerism was veiled in rhetoric espousing empowerment, though was marred by a prevailing set of welfare reforms.

The 'Big Society' was represented by the Cameron government as producing friendly communities, working together to govern themselves in a collegial way, without state intervention. However, the removal of the state reified neoliberal ideas of individualism and the reinforcement of self-governance, which acted as a subtle form of biopower. A separation of the state from communities was enacted, which absolved the government of the responsibility to fund important resources, such as libraries. By no means did volunteerism expedite a sense of anarchy within communities, but instead left them to manage pre-existing social and economic inequalities alone, of which were exacerbated by welfare reform.

There are notable similarities between the ideologies of 'The Big Society' and neoliberalism. The neoliberal agenda represented a mobilisation of the links between faith in the free-market and community efforts in upholding market rationality. Therefore, compassionate conservativism was soft-paternalistic and simultaneously neo-liberal in encouraging self-governance and empowerment, whilst emphasising the role of the free-market. Rather than reinforcing these values within the individual, as is typical of neoliberalism, they were produced through the imagining of 'The Big Society', by recasting neo-liberal values of
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individualism onto the community, turning free time into productivity and seizing

community as capital through volunteerism, all veiled in a discourse of liberation:

> *We will never crack crime unless parents bring up their children properly, unless businesses stop selling alcohol to underage people unless we all decide that these are our streets and our communities, and we have a role to help make sure they are safe…We need people to act more responsibly, because if you take any problem in our country and you just think: 'Well, what can the government do to sort it out?', that is only ever going to be half of the answer…(Cameron, 2011, para. 4).*

Neoliberalism has been criticised due to the suggestion that it is a form of class

subordination, described by Harvey (2007) as a form of class warfare, and as a form of

social control by Piven and Cloward (1971). A neoliberal approach to welfare reform

typically entails the encouragement of people to take up particular behaviours. Soss,

Fording and Schram (2011) suggest that neoliberal paternalism is a practice of governing

and regulating poverty.

However, in this expectation for self-governance, there are dilemmas. It has been reported

that ESA claims may reach beyond the remit of information provided by the claimant. A

report by the House of Commons Work and Pensions Committee (2018) found several

discrepancies in the assessment of benefits eligibility, which suggested a lack of expertise in

areas such as mental health and learning disabilities. One woman was judged fit for work

because she could walk her dog, despite not having a dog. Parents have been asked how

long their child has had Down's syndrome and when their child **caught** Down's syndrome.

After attending an assessment whilst actively suicidal, a claimant received a report which

stated that their mental health was not an issue because they had smiled during the

assessment. The report acknowledged evidence of discrepancies in reporting a person's

condition as well as a lack of expertise in some situations.

There has been further controversy around the suggestion of a '*canteen culture of contempt*' (Butler, 2019) in the DWP; this was evidenced in legal papers provided to a tribunal for a PIP appeal, where a DWP decision-maker stated:

> *[Sic] In this lying bitches case she is receiving the middle rate carers allowance component for providing day-time supervision to another disabled person (Butler, 2019, para. 4).*

Furthermore, in 2017 the Minister for Disabled People, Work and Health championed Sainsbury's as the largest retailer to become a Disability Confident Leader. In the same year it was revealed in a Freedom of Information (FOI) request (What Do They Know, 2018) that Sainsbury's is one of many organisations who share CCTV footage of claimants with the DWP when building a case against a claimant. Further information such as credit ratings, social media information and details of transactions may also be shared by Sainsbury's with the DWP, as per Sainsbury's privacy policy (Sainsbury's, n.d.). There have also been reports of police forces who have passed footage on to the DWP for the same purpose, detailing people with disabilities taking part in anti-fracking protests (Rahim, 2018).

On the surface, the welfare system maintains a soft-paternalistic approach which aims to give people the right tools to shape behaviours towards acceptable consumerism. However, given the value placed on individual responsibility and the overemphasis of fraudulent claims, more coercive practices of surveillance, or imagined surveillance, may be deployed as a warning to benefit claimants:

> *It is this fact of being constantly seen, of being able always to be seen that maintains the disciplined individual in his subjection (Foucault, 1977: 187).*

This notion of surveillance somewhat complicates any attempts to fully explain the philosophy that underpins the specific paternalistic approach of the government. In theory

and policy, current approaches are soft-paternalistic on the surface, characterised by encouragement and empowerment. For example, benefit sanctions aim to 'incentivise' claimants into compliance. However, when a person is sanctioned or negotiates an imagined risk of being sanctioned, the role of paternalism becomes coercive.

Thus, benefit-related practices are also underpinned by other less visible, wide-reaching practices. Whilst it is possible to describe the current system as soft-paternalistic, it is necessary to note that there are also veiled threats of hard-paternalism hidden within it. Such practices are not solely hard-paternalistic but are simultaneously soft-paternalistic, in eliciting an imagined sense of surveillance. Therefore, whilst surveillance can be used in real terms to make an allegation of fraud against a claimant, surveillance also acts as a soft-paternalistic deterrent of unacceptable behaviour that warns claimants of the need to police themselves.

Furthermore, Mead (1986) argues that the interplay between paternalistic and neoliberal philosophies links notions of productivity, consumerism and self-sufficiency together. In turn, such a philosophy has implications for the spaces which people with disabilities are expected to take up regarding employment. In Capital, Marx (1990[1867]) theorised that those who were unable to work due to illness or disability were of lesser status than the working classes, though still important to the functioning of the capitalist political economy.

2.2.3.1 The Neoliberal Management of Disability

Mitchell and Snyder (2015) introduce the concept of 'ablenationalism' to understand neoliberal-ableist assumptions of disability. It is argued that disability is perceived by neoliberal governments as a materially devalued existence. The 'able-disabled' are expected to pass as non-disabled, or at least able enough to leave the anti-normative performance of

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disability behind. Anderson (1999) suggests that the able-disabled may then achieve the appearance of ability and functionality which is synonymous with the privilege of citizenship.

The nationalism part of ablenationalism refers to the 'new acceptance' of people with disabilities and the dilemmas of assimilating the 'formerly stigmatised'. Examples may include a moral government commitment to the 'less fortunate' and its most non-productive members. Neoliberalism then '*produces disability as a malleable form of deviance tamed for the good of the nation*' (Mitchell and Snyder, 2015:27). An example of this is when welfare reform is introduced or amended, it is always spoken of in terms of ensuring the most vulnerable are protected from it, and how such reform will serve to empower and help people with disabilities to live better, more productive lives. Thus, people with disabilities, though in receipt of a more favourable outlook in terms of protection, are still positioned towards a discourse of deviance by not taking up work, because of how work is fetishised and represented as natural.

Despite the government's optimistic outlook, disability stigma in the workplace continues to prevail, along with the disability pay gap. In 2017, people with disabilities earned on average £1.50 an hour less than their non-disabled peers (TUC, 2018). There is always an element of perceived deviance, difference, and inequality, which are indicative of a continuation of this devalued status.

Gleeson (1999) suggests that the social evaluation of capitalist economies focuses upon the potential benefits to the economy, such as profit and productivity, thus devalorising the work potential of those who could not produce at socially-expected rates. Unproductive members of society consequently become 'disabled'.

In constructing disability as an individual problem, rather than the culmination of political, social and economic forces (Barnes, Mercer and Shakespeare, 1999; Oliver, 1990), the
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legitimisation of disability as a fixed, linear state of being fulfils essentialist and hegemonic assumptions of disability as an explanation for an individual's inability to participate fully in capitalist economies. The construction of disability as medically inferior (Hahn, 1986) has historically legitimised the exclusion of disabled people from the labour-market (Russel, 2001); for example, in the realm of US welfare provision, disability is constituted as a medical inability to engage in work (Berkowitz, 1987).

Mitchell and Snyder (2015) draw on the work of Foucault, arguing that the able-disabled and ablenationalism are neoliberal strategies which regulate the entry of disabled people into the neoliberal economy through biopolitics (Foucault, 1990[1976]). As discussed previously in reference to Marx's (1990[1867]) discussion of surplus labour-power and profit, these biopolitical practices govern the movement of the labour reserve army into the workforce by encouraging productive behaviours.

Rather than navigating the poor towards desired behaviours, neoliberal paternalism allows for a transformation to take place, wherein subjects are encouraged to 'freely' choose to conduct themselves in a more appropriate manner (Dean, 1999; Foucault, 1991). As suggested by Grimshaw and Rubery (2012), neoliberal paternalism emphasises a belief in work discipline and deregulated markets. This approach was characterised by intense pressure on lone parents and disability claimants to enter work, underpinned by the idea that 'any work was better than no work'.

Neoliberalism demands an adaptive worker, despite changes in the global economy, such as the retrenchment of welfare (Goodley, Lawthom and Runswick-Cole, 2014a). They argue that neoliberalism nourishes and entrenches ableism, which urges people with disabilities to empower themselves and overcome disabling conditions by embracing ableism.

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Similarities can be drawn between neoliberal-ableism, the subjectivities it creates, and the current ESA system, which focuses on unveiling ableist notions of ability and capability for work. The current benefits system is focused upon ability, rather than disability or diagnosis, and is thus largely focused on the ability to be equally as productive as non-disabled peers by overcoming disability.

Regarding the neoliberal management of disability, Mitchell and Snyder (2015) propose that neoliberalism introduces a paradox of support. Well publicised expansion of social support is introduced, then later destabilised or removed once again, though this time with far less fanfare:

> *Within such instances of promised supports offered then taken away, PWD's status within neoliberalism situates them as veritable canaries in the coal mine of arbitrary, restrictive, and narrowly defined government-funded policy initiatives (Mitchell and Snyder, 2015:38).*

This paradox is characteristic of ableliberalism. Support for people with disabilities may complement corporate interests, though not necessarily those of people with disabilities. An example of this is the outsourcing of contracts to businesses such as Maximus and ATOS, who undertake benefit assessments. Whilst these are likely multi-million-pound contracts, the UK government would not reveal the exact cost of such outsourcing in an FOI request (What Do They Know, 2015), due to the risk of revealing commercially sensitive information which may prejudice opportunities for Maximus by revealing sensitive financial information to their competitors. The commercial interests of such outsourcing were deemed not to be in the public interest. For Mitchell and Snyder (2015), this rhetoric of support is masked by the institutional interests it serves.

The broader implications that neoliberalism has for the governance of people with disabilities has been discussed in this section. The following section locates these practices

within mental health policy and culture to understand how people with mental health difficulties are implicated in neoliberalism. This is discussed with regard to how changes in funding have shaped the lives of people with mental health difficulties, how they are governed and the material effects that follow from this.

2.2.3.2 Mental Health Policy and Neoliberalism

Responses to welfare reform have become increasingly neoliberal in the context of unemployment. Where mental health is considered in the scope of welfare reform, there is a considerable focus on locating a lack of employment as evidence of psychological defects or faulty attitudes, located in the individual. What seems to set mental health apart from wider disability is how blame can be laid in the essentialist assumption of unproductive characters and traits, which are framed as a conscious choice.

The cost of mental ill-health to society is an area which is frequently explored by charitable organisations (King's Fund, 2008), the media (Elliot, 2014) and the research literature (Fineberg et al., 2013). Consequently, society often makes specific reference to the burden that mental health puts on society (Ferrari et al., 2016; Trautmann, Rehm and Wittchen, 2016), particularly in economic terms, such as absenteeism and loss of productivity. This suggests a standardised economic system which places value on productivity above all. However, it appears that mental distress is constructed as having a 'cost' to society far more than other health conditions because it is framed as a conscious choice to be burdensome.

Such responses have increasingly invited the Psy-complex and allied professions into the realm of unemployment. The Psy-complex can be broadly defined as the science of the individual, which emerged after the Second World War. The Psy-complex has been described as:

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> *a complex made up of discourses, prejudices, agents and techniques' used by psychologists, who could make judgements about conduct within the 'jurisdiction of the psychology of the individual' (Rose, 1985:9).*

Rose was particularly interested in the role of power in the Psy-complex and the use of psychology in maintaining the status quo. The Psy-complex has been introduced to the benefits system to ascertain and alleviate the presumed self-imposed barriers to the take-up of employment. For example, eligibility for benefits may require claimants to carry out a series of tasks including job searches, work preparation activities and psychometric tests. Positive psychology has been particularly valued in welfare policy, emphasising how certain values, attributes or dispositions may be used to explain employment outcomes:

> *A cheerful disposition, in combination with a thankful heart and highly developed 'executive control', is so widely celebrated in the policy literature that the politics of this reification are rarely questioned (Friedli and Stearn, 2015:42).*

Positive psychology purports to help the unemployed identify and regulate behaviours which are deemed to be markers of 'unemployability'. These practices involve the promotion of psychological interventions which aim to modify or change unwanted behaviours, cognitive functions or emotions (Friedli, 2014). Involvement in such interventions may be voluntary, though can also be a part of the claimant agreement, which means that people are obliged to comply, at risk of being sanctioned. The above obligations and discourse around unemployment have come to suggest that unemployment is evidence of character flaws or psychological deficits (Friedli and Stearn, 2015).

With growing welfare conditionality, public policy has drawn upon psychology as a means to correct or amend dependency and a lack of work ethic, responding to neoliberal concerns of the personal, psychological and the individual (Cole, 2008; Dean, 1995; Jones, Pykett and Whitehead, 2013; Walters, 2000; Wright, 2014). Society is absolved of any responsibility

because an individual's disability is represented as being created by the individuals themselves (Darke, 1997), rather than a product of society:

> *As a job seeker you are required to accept that what differentiates you, the failed and undeserving jobseeker, from other more deserving and successful jobseekers is a set of attitudes and emotional orientations (Friedli and Stearn, 2015: 40-41).*

As a consequence, the Psy-complex frames unemployment as a disease, something which is unseemly, socially undesirable, unproductive, yet curable. The role of psychology in the welfare system is referred to as '*Psycho-Compulsion*' by Friedli and Stearn (2015: 42), which rationalises and coproduces neoliberal discourse. This is done whilst simultaneously eroding alternative discourses of resistance, such as solidarity (Peacock, Bissell and Owen, 2014). This discourse constructs the 'right' or 'employable' subject, made up of 'attitudes' which indicate the ideal neoliberal citizen. Through this imagining of the ideal neoliberal subject, psychology offers atomised, overly simplistic, unsettling suggestions about how unemployed people can be 'activated'.

There has been little debate about the use of psychology to coerce people into compliance in welfare policy. Nor has there been much discussion around the implications this has for surveillance (Friedli and Stearn, 2015). Nonetheless, psychology plays an integral role in upholding the current benefits system; from the formulation of the model which underpins current welfare reform, to the development of psychometric measures of 'right' attitudes, to rationalising the implementation of sanctions. Ultimately, psychology has played an important role in upholding the current status quo.

A focus on mental hygiene prevails in the current benefits system, locating problems in the individual, focused on character flaws and an assumption of some 'lack' within the self. This shifts the burden of mental health care from the state onto people themselves, in the hope that they may better commit to a reality that is conducive to the functioning of capitalist

political economies. This incites a very material encouragement of the neoliberal self in trying to produce happy, productive workers, who are cleansed of any mental or emotional inconvenience to the workplace. In their paternalism, the 'expertise' of the state bestows people with the 'right' support and skillsets by drawing upon contemporary knowledges of psychology and mental health.

Approaches such as cognitive behavioural therapy, mindfulness, positive psychology and notions of resilience are not inherently problematic but become so when they are used as tools of the neoliberal state. In such a context, mainstream psychology assumes that people can self-actualise by exploring their consciousness, or can simply be 'more present', and that with just the right outlook or viewpoint, people can transform their lives into more productive ones. As Parker (2007b) notes, psychology is the study of the individual, which when guided by neoliberalism, maintains the status quo and the structure of the dominant economic system.

It is worrying then, that Maslow (1943), who coined 'self-actualisation' in his *Hierarchy of Needs*, would likely refute the pseudo-scientific assumptions and practices which are proliferating the welfare system. There is a wealth of evidence which suggests that welfare sanctions serve to disenfranchise claimants from gaining employment, rather than incentivise them (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2010a). Stewart (2016) argued that the welfare system is producing preventable harm through current policy. Examples include destitution, poverty and limited access to food.

Food deprivation may be catastrophic and in the worst cases has resulted in death (Ryan, 2014). Ultimately, normalising insecurity by depriving an individual of food or their means of survival serves no role in incentivising their participation as a consumer or encouraging an individual to become more productive:

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> *It is quite true that man lives by bread alone – when there is no bread (Maslow, 1943:375).*

When interventions do not prove helpful, the responsibility is laid solely on the claimant, who is consequently punished with preventable harm. Given such responses to neoliberalism maintain a focus on individual responsibility, the onus is on the claimant in their inability to benefit from psychological interventions, or to cope with inherently stressful situations. Failure becomes personal failure, given the dominance and faith placed in interventions in producing successful outcomes.

Another problem with the notion of a 'correct' state of mind is that such a thing is subjective and infinite, always changing as new approaches come and go and as the social obligations people take up change too. When life becomes more difficult and social inequality rises, rather than challenging structural inequality, neoliberalism uses psychology to tell us we must become more 'resilient' each time.

Such approaches have begun to reach beyond personal, private and voluntary efforts to manage aspects of the self within everyday life, becoming embedded in hospitals, workplaces and schools, at the expense of real and meaningful consideration of serious mental health difficulties. For example, having puppies at universities for undergraduates taking exams, or yoga activities for staff, not only undermines what may well be very real stress or anxiety but fails to account for inherent, systemic problems that may cause distress initially. It is hardly an adequate replacement for real social change or a challenge to the systems in place, ultimately rendering decision-makers devoid of any sense of accountability.

Such a culture around mental health cannot replace practical support for helping people into work, particularly given the stigma around mental health in the workplace. Rather than

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holding the state accountable in its oppression of others, psychology is instead used to embolden and legitimise it. As discussed above, often such approaches serve to simply maintain the status quo and in turn, the neoliberal order of things, destined to place the value of the free-market above that of the individual.

There is not strictly a problem with such approaches to psychology, or even the use of psychology in the benefits system, but how interventions are used. When psychological methods are used to regulate people towards a specific political ideal, such as the budget deficit, rather than help and empower people, it becomes deeply problematic. The use of psychology to respond to neoliberal concerns in liberating the free-market and maintaining the status quo is one of the very things that critical psychology warns us of, particularly if we are being oppressed by psychology in the process.

It is necessary to take a critical psychological approach to pose a challenge to the current status quo and to deconstruct rhetoric around welfare reform. There are a multiplicity of reasons that render critical psychology necessary, though, in the given context, this ultimately resembles a call to arms - a reclaiming of the psychological territory of sorts. Due concern needs to be taken with how psychology has been used and misused to potentially exploit, rather than emancipate others. Critical psychology then becomes a useful framework to read from as it allows for the consideration of the complex interplay between the political, social and economic drivers which shaped the welfare system, as discussed earlier in this chapter.

In laying down the contextually specific groundwork which shaped increasingly neoliberal, ableist, responses to benefit claiming, critical psychology, armed with the knowledge and critique of contemporary neoliberal practices, can begin to unpack and deconstruct assumptions of benefit claiming. Coupled with a discursive approach, critical psychology can consider the importance of language, not as a means of neutral communication, but as a

vehicle for practices which can be deconstructed. Thus, language represents a material, ideological way of making sense of complex social phenomena. A critically driven, discursive approach has the potential to problematise, dismantle, resist, destabilise and deconstruct the dominant neoliberal order of things.

The following chapter takes this approach to explore dominant rhetoric around benefit claiming and the role that the media plays in naturalising, constructing, producing, and reproducing rhetoric. This begins with a critical discussion of the key discourses around benefits in political rhetoric, situating the exploration of these discourses within their historical context.

3. Chapter Three: Background Context

3.1 Rhetoric on Welfare

Contemporary rhetoric around claiming benefits has been largely underpinned by neoliberal ideas of individual responsibility. Such notions of responsibility emphasise an inherent risk of fraud or criminal behaviour within the welfare system. This is despite relatively low levels of fraud.

The DWP estimated the overall level of benefit fraud for 2017/2018 at 1.2% (Department of Work and Pensions, 2018a). They further claim that this is the highest recorded level of benefit fraud to date. However, when the DWP measure fraud, their statistics include things like failure to comply with the claimant agreement and instances where benefits stop. It can be anticipated that the actual level of benefit fraud is even lower than 1.2%, given that the DWP's fraud statistics include what are likely to be sanctions and changes to entitlement. Benefits can be stopped for many reasons, including uptake of work and scoring less than the required points in a reassessment. This is particularly salient given that eligibility for benefits and sanctioning regimes have become increasingly restrictive.

Responsibility rhetoric also extends to the role of claimants in the free-market. It is thus the responsibility of people to actively be in work. People who are not, are positioned as doing so through choice, but are also simultaneously irrational, given the fetishism of hard labour in the UK (Fuchs, 2016). This labour fetishism means that society simply cannot comprehend why a person would not want to be in work.

Whitworth (2016) argues that there are two versions of the welfare claimant. The first is the hard-paternalistic account of 'shirkers and skivers' – the irrational unemployed, who

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are defined by naturalised ideas of incompetence or unwillingness and navigated towards compliance through coercion. Secondly, is the neoliberal account of the rational unemployed, where neoliberal paternalism allows for a transformation to take place, wherein subjects are positioned as having the ability to conduct themselves towards socially acceptable behaviours with the right support.

Work has been celebrated by the state as the best route out of poverty (Waddell and Burton, 2006). In turn, it has been suggested that the benefits system, in its generosity, acts as a disincentive to work, trapping people in poverty. In the '*Ready for Work'* green paper (Freud, 2007), work is not only argued to be the best route out of poverty but also good for people. A government-commissioned 'review of evidence' by Waddell and Burton (2006) emphasises this point further:

> *…Overall, the beneficial effects of work outweigh the risks of work, and are greater than the harmful effects of long-term unemployment or prolonged sickness absence. Work is generally good for health and well-being (Waddell and Burton, 2006:4).*

The work of Waddell and Burton (2006) was strongly criticised by Shakespeare, Watson and Abu-Alghaib (2016) due to the self-referential nature of the paper and its consequent inability to withstand academic scrutiny, given that the findings are not informed or underpinned by coherent theory, evidence or practice. Ideological rhetoric on welfare in the contemporary era has often been legitimised and upheld by politically motivated, agenda-driven, government-commissioned research:

> *…But whence this candour, this presumed authority to make such sweeping statements on such a significant and sensitive issue? One would assume that, at the very least, before presuming to make such categorical statements, the authors would be sure to have carefully sifted a wide range of evidence. But that would be to forget that this is twentieth-first century politics, a world where policy decisions need to be made yesterday and justified, if at all, tomorrow. A world where we can go to war against our 'enemies' on the basis of a selective interpretation of the selective evidence. (Jones, 2010:16).*

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The role of researchers within government-commissioned research is multifaceted in the context of the political backdrop of the work produced. The LSE GV314 Group (2014) argue that there are four broad relationships based on whether the government 'leans' and whether the researcher 'buckles'. When the government leans and the researcher buckles, a servant/master relationship is created (Manzi and Smith-Bowers, 2010:143), centred around concerns about the political implications of the findings. The researcher may also 'buckle' without prompts from the government, likely due to the disciplinary power (Foucault, 1995[1977]) of the wider culture around research funding, which may produce docile researchers, seeking to satisfy funders. When the government exerts pressure and attempts to lean, but the researcher does not buckle, The LSE GV314 Group (2014) refer to this as 'resistance'. The final relationship is one of 'truth-seeking' (Manzi and Smith-Bowers, 2010: 141) or collegiality, (The LSE GV314 Group, 2014) where the government does not attempt to lean, and the researcher does not buckle.

Ultimately, the offer of a government contract benefits both policymakers and business in the context of welfare reform, as ongoing rhetoric about the welfare system was being legitimised and rationalised by the work carried out by Waddell and Aylward (2005), where the WCA and its underpinning philosophies were already being used in practice.

For example, claiming benefits has long been associated with negative assumptions about dependency. Fraser and Gordon (1994) argue that dependency, in the context of welfare reform, carries ideological weight because of how it has been historically construed:

> [Dependency]…'carries the debris of several centuries of poor relief policies that relieved hunger while stigmatizing recipients, often actually impeding their escape from the dole into wage labour' (Fraser & Gordon, 1994:5).

When exploring such historically contingent rhetoric alongside the contemporary context, it is equally important to recognise the current systems and power relationships, along with historical ones. Contemporary examples include the relationship between the media and the government regarding the use of rhetoric. Together, they produce and reproduce discourses in society, particularly when this information is crafted for public consumption. The media plays an important role in the practice of communicating complex political phenomena to audiences.

3.1.1 The Role of the Media

The mass media plays an integral role in allowing audiences to make sense of social issues, in which the audience appraises the knowledge available to them and assesses what is important. The dynamic between the government and the media warrants exploration in order to appreciate the role that the media plays in contemporary society. An understanding of how the media transforms complex political phenomena into digestible information provides insight into how rhetoric shifts from political spheres into private life, as it enters the public interest. The role of the media is explored here in a theoretically grounded way to understand the relationship between the state, the subject and the media.

Increasing levels of consolidation in the mass media (Bagdikian, 2004; Curran and Seaton, 2003; Smith and Tambini, 2012) can have negative repercussions, including the maintenance of a vast amount of power held by the media, which may afford the media the ability to influence parliament, political careers and public opinion (Doyle, 2002). Furthermore, Curran and Seaton's (2003) systematic examination of British newspaper content suggested evidence of owner interference and manipulation of newspaper content.

It has been argued that modern governments are not concerned with controlling media activity because they need to retain the support of media establishments to maintain their power (Tunstall and Palmer, 1991). Thus, there is evidence to support the suggestion that media ownership and control is an ideological matter, as the media constitutes a substantial part of the democratic process. The mass media informs and influences political elections and proposals and in turn, is itself shaped by them.

Hall (1997) argued that the mass media exists in a larger cultural and political context when constructing ideology. Rather than simply reflecting prejudices in society, Hall argued that the media constructs ideologies which serve the ruling class, thus maintaining authority, cultural hegemony, and power relations in society. Thus, the media is part of wider power relations in society; it effects and is affected by these dynamics:

> *The media do not merely 'reflect' social reality; they increasingly help to make it (Curran and Seaton, 2003:344).*

Furthermore, the mass media opens up spaces for public opinion (Gamson and Modigliani, 1989) on things like government policy and political events, which are shaped by reporting. This grants the media the ability to constitute normality on a large, accessible scale. Exploring how and where truth is constituted not only helps to understand how the public consumes and negotiates truth but can highlight how the production of truth can impact stakeholders, such as politicians and healthcare providers, who also consume media representations (Seale, 2003).

3.1.2 The Struggle Over Truth

When addressing how truth is constructed and constituted in the media and the role this has in society, the relationship between the government and the media is explored through a Marxist lens, which foregrounds the economic side of this power relationship. This discussion will also draw upon a post-structuralist lens, which emphasises the scope of rhetoric offered by newspapers.

In the case of the media, post-structuralism suggests that historically contingent assumptions can shift over time. Theorists associated with the poststructuralist movement, such as Barthes (1977) and Foucault (2002a[1969]), argue that there is not one fixed 'truth' of something, but a multiplicity of truths. This may be noticeable when reading a left-leaning newspaper as opposed to a right-leaning newspaper, where based on the 'values' of the establishment, certain ideologies are reproduced, whereas others may be resisted, or are simply absent and less visible. Where each newspaper may espouse different truths, there is ultimately a struggle over which 'truth' is dominant in wider society. Hence, newspaper reports on a specific phenomenon can produce widely different 'truths' depending on the discourses drawn upon, and how the subjectivities which arise from it are constructed.

Marx does not appear to have specifically referenced the role of the media in his body of work. It can be anticipated that had Marx made such reference, it would be difficult to consider the function that the media had in the 19th century as being comparable to contemporary, media-saturated times. However, many of the principles of Marx's work are useful in understanding the media when used in an applied manner, and what's more, this is becoming increasingly necessary. The economic crisis, the results of which have meant increased class conflict, growing inequality and precarious work, as well as a

growing sense that neoliberalism may not quite be common sense, have unveiled the darker side of capitalism (Fuchs and Mosco, 2016).

One way that the media can be read is with regard to false consciousness. Marxist scholars perceive false consciousness in a variety of ways. For Althusser (2014[1970]), the media forms part of the ideological state apparatus in capitalism, which upholds ideologies that suit the interests of the ruling classes. This refers to institutions that exist outside of the state, though tend to serve it, producing knowledges of subordinance and maintaining the status quo. The focus of false consciousness, for Debord, is the 'spectacle' - *"a social relation, mediated by images" (1992:2)*, which distracts and pacifies the masses, concealing us from ourselves, but also one and another.

Ultimately, when the media produces 'false consciousness', it represents a belief in ideas and values as truths. These truths may serve certain interests, institutions and power relationships at the expense of others. Marxists such as Althusser (2014[1970]) proposed that media messages are constructed ideologies which support the power base. Thus, the media is itself a means of production, where truth and knowledge are commodities. If the media is the means of communication, then it is also the means of production, where knowledge and truth are produced through discourse.

3.1.3 Marx on News: Media, Discourse and Capitalism

For Marx and Engels (1965[1848]), the struggle over truth is finite – for the death of capitalism to happen, people must first realise they are engaged in a struggle and are being oppressed. This production of truth, which espouses the vested interests of the elite, is exploitation.

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However, there are instances where potentially oppressive news media reporting has been challenged, where alignment with specific 'truths' has not simply indoctrinated audiences or appeased the ruling classes but has produced resistance, issued apologies, the removal of articles, public outrage and social change. Infamous examples include the boycott of *The Sun* following its representation of football fans during the Hillsborough Disaster (Gibson, 2004) and a column in *The Sun* authored by Katie Hopkins, likening migrants fleeing North Africa to cockroaches (Jones, 2015).

To assume that each media institution shares a common vested interest would also be problematic. Newspapers, while held in the hands of a few powerful elites in terms of media ownership, do not necessarily serve a specific interest or agenda. Power is capillary. There is not just one purely good or bad power relationship at play, but several: the media and the government, the public and the media, the media and advertisers, and the public and the government.

Whilst newspapers do tend to position themselves towards partisan political positions, this has been known to change in response to social and political events, such as general elections. Media establishments are not merely comprised of a few 'press barons' but also of editors, CEO's, guest authors and journalists, thus there is always an element of subjectivity and journalistic flair in reporting. It is highly unlikely that Rupert Murdoch read *The Sun* each day, before it went out to print, to ensure that each article aligned with his values and political beliefs.

The struggle between the state and the media over press freedom heightened following the Leveson Inquiry and the closure of *The News of the World*. Thus, it would be problematic to suggest that contemporary newspaper establishments act as tools of the state, given the backlash in response to recent controversies, such as the phone-hacking

scandal. In response to the Leveson Inquiry, many media establishments emphasised a continued need to maintain freedom and autonomy of the press from state regulation.

As discussed in 3.1.2, the role of the media has transformed somewhat since the socio-historical context of Marx's work. With the evolution of social media, online access to newspapers, comment sections and decreased readerships of physical newspapers, the media has also become an entertainment medium, where establishments carefully craft newspapers to meet consumer needs. For example, *The Metro*, crafted to be read by commuters, is made up of shorter, digestible stories. Arguably, contemporary newspapers are less geared towards appeasing or serving the state, as would be implied by Marx, but are instead focused upon their readerships. This does not necessarily mean that the media are outside of the state's vested interest in capitalism, but that the media is just one part of an assemblage of institutions which form the capitalist political economy and are invested in their own survival within it.

In drawing upon post-structuralist theory, the practices that are deployed when the media constructs 'truth' are far more complex than subservience to the state. This means that power is not static, purely bad, coercive, or held in the hands of a few, but is everywhere. Although not a tool of the state, newspapers often report on government rhetoric, though this is likely due to a vested interest in amounting profit in a time of decreasing readerships. The media is not a mouthpiece for capitalism, though is prepared to capitalise upon political events, profiting from objects and subjects of perceived human interest, for example drawing on stereotypes and naturalised assumptions as a source of entertainment.

The media produces accounts which may come to be dominant or naturalised and thus constitute 'truth' (Curran and Seaton, 2003). Young (1971:33) argues that '*our knowledge of deviants not only is stereotypical because of the distortions of the mass*

media but is also one-dimensional', due to misconceptions which are purveyed by the mass media. Hall (1997:258) further highlights stereotyping as a representational and signifying practice which is '*part of the maintenance of social and symbolic order'*, it '*divides the normal and the acceptable from the abnormal and unacceptable*', occurring '*where there are gross inequalities of power*'. This establishes the relationship between discourse, 'otherness' and power.

Further to this, media professionals have cited impartial and emotionally neutral accounts as being one of their least pressing concerns (Salter and Byrne, 2000). Given the unapologetic position of media establishments in their representation of people, it is consequently the role of a critical psychological framework to challenge this. In exploring how the media may uphold the status quo in reifying dominant assumptions and focusing upon vested interests, such as neoliberalism and capitalism, they can be deconstructed and held to account.

Discourse represents a set of statements which are always in flux and subject to negotiation, as power exists everywhere (Foucault, 1990[1976]). Foucault invokes the notion of 'regimes of truth' (Foucault, 1980) to highlight how accepted knowledges become privileged. These regimes of truth reinforce certain discourses, like medicalised discourses in various institutions, such as schools and hospitals. When reinforced and naturalised, such discourses eventually come to function as true.

In recognising that discourse is constantly shifting, always subject to negotiation, and that power is not fully coercive or oppressive, room for a critical psychological approach is made, due to the spaces for resistance and social change which can be created. This means that if what we know about phenomena, such as navigating being a benefit claimant, changes, for example, vocabulary that is used to position people within wider discourses, then it can be challenged and resisted.

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Section 3.2 explores discourses on welfare, unemployment, disability and mental health to highlight how discourses shift and fluctuate over time. The rationale for the inclusion of this section is Foucault's suggestion that challenging power need not mean a practice of searching for truth, but one of detaching truth from hegemony, where power can be resisted through subversion (Gaventa, 2003).

3.2 Shifting Understandings of Welfare and Mental Health

When exploring rhetoric on people who claim benefits, it is necessary to consider the 'situatedness' of this talk in two ways. Firstly, the contemporary political, social and economic climate needs to be considered to generate a contextually situated snapshot of discourse at play. Much of this groundwork was explored within the introductory chapters, for example, responses to neoliberalism, austerity and mental health culture.

It must also be acknowledged that language is not static but constantly changing. Therefore, to understand how talk about certain phenomena has come to be, we must consider what has happened before. For example, discourse on poverty, mental health, and support for vulnerable members of society is certainly nothing new but has presented new and different subjectivities and dilemmas for centuries. Ultimately, what we know now about social phenomena are discourses which have developed and shifted throughout history. By exploring the historicity of discourse and taking what Foucault (1995[1977]) referred to as a 'genealogical approach', the way in which discourse is constantly in flux can be understood. This approach entails not only exploring how discourse has changed across time, but also liminality, considering how systems of thought have progressed throughout history. Rather than simply suggesting that ideology is static, before undergoing sudden change, there is room to instead explore the gaps in-between these liminal periods, lending from Marx (1990[1867]) to frame

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these as rites of passage, created through the evolution and eventual death of capitalism. Spaces for change, reflexivity and transformation can then be produced when considering how contemporary benefit practices may exploit people.

To appreciate how understandings of poverty have shifted throughout history, poverty will be explored with attention to the provision of assistance. The decision to approach poverty at this angle is done to ascertain the kind of support that was given to those deemed to be in poverty or in need of support. This draws upon contemporary rhetoric around current welfare provision, such as ideas of the 'deserving and undeserving poor'. This discussion will also consider how understandings of disability and mental health came to function as 'true', how discourse around this shifted, as well as the relationship such discourses had with work, societal attitudes and welfare reform.

3.2.1 The Middle-Ages: Vagabonds and Beggars

Governance during the Middle-Ages was markedly different from its contemporary conception. With little formal structure or order such as a police force, the state relied heavily upon the community. At a time of inflation, population growth and a widening gap between the rich and poor, stress was put upon the state, who in turn found new, often coercive ways to maintain order. It was felt that the unemployed and destitute were a threat to the public. During this time, people were obliged to comply with their allotted place within the societal structure. However, the poor who challenged this structure, feeling their place was not fixed, were perceived to be a threat to order. Weber and Bowling (2008) argued that the Middle-Ages represented a transitional period on the path to the collapse of Feudal society which was characterised by concerns about idleness, vagrancy, and begging.

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The Vagabonds and Beggars Act was legislated in 1494, punishing the poor for simply being poor in an attempt to keep them in their societal place. People who were so much as suspected to be idle would be put in the stocks, sent out of town, and then sent out to work (Blake, 2018). Those who were too infirm to work were given an informal concession where they were allowed to beg, though by no means did they receive any formal support.

The early concession of begging in the Middle-Ages suggests that whilst unsympathetic and subjective, a distinction between different poor subjectivities was apparent. Though, this was more of a distinction between being deserving of punishment or the 'infirm' who were exempt from it. There is little reference as to what 'infirm' meant in documents of the time, though as those who were punished were referred to as 'sturdy' beggars in later parliamentary acts, it is likely that 'incapacitated' referred to people who were either in old age, unable to work, or had physical disabilities.

During the Middle-Ages, mental ill-health was not necessarily associated with the above notions of vagrancy, sin, or wrongdoing, but things like overwork and grief (Kroll and Bachrach, 1984). Care for those with mental illnesses or learning difficulties – '*lunatics*' and '*congenital idiots'*, was likely undertaken by the family and community. When the family did not have the resources to support relatives, a public jury would take place in a communal process led by the Crown, along with the subject themselves and all interested parties, where decisions were made regarding care provision and diagnosis. This was always led by the best interests of the person (Roffe and Roffe, 1995).

3.2.2 18th Century: Continued Acceptance

At the turn of the 18th century, the notion of 'the deserving poor' was further elaborated upon and consequently used to determine eligibility for benefits (Lin, 2000). Benefits
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were provided to soldiers and sailors, who could then allot benefits to their families. This was done to boost morale and increase recruitment. Before this, parish poor-relief provision ensured that anyone in need could receive benefits, particularly women and children in need (Boyer, 1990; Cody, 1993; Marshall, 1968). Parish poor-relief consisted largely of a religious obligation to support the poor, rather than organised provision. The shift to structured provision removed agency from women, who were considered only to be deserving in the eyes of the state as dependents of working men.

The role of work shifted during the 18th century with the birth of the Industrial Revolution. In his landmark book, *The Protestant Work Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Weber (1958) argued that the alienation of the worker occurred during the shift from agriculture to industry. This left the worker distanced from his own labour given a lack of material sentiment and ownership over what was being produced. Driven by a focus on the positive, vocational, and educational benefits of labour, many children were put to work in factories during this period, representing a pronounced emphasis on the moral value of work during the 18th century.

Nonetheless, there were elements of resistance, most notably the Luddites – a secret group of protesters, social activists and craftsmen, who destroyed machinery in their violent opposition of the changing face of capitalism (Clancy, 2017). Having previously been able to determine the price and value of their craftsmanship, the Industrial Revolution dramatically changed the labour market. This meant that time worked on a product, cost of materials, and profit for the factory owner became important considerations. Workers were displaced by a larger capitalist power (Adger et al., 2001). Marx (1959[1952]) critiqued how breakthroughs, such as the Industrial Revolution, lowered the price of commodities as wage labourers sold their labour power to capitalists, leaving workers alienated.

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People with disabilities, though still seen to be vagrants at this time, were just as much a part of the labour force, often through 'unproductive labour'. They continued to largely be cared for in the community, rather than in institutions. People with disabilities survived and often thrived in all corners of society – from the slums to the highest royal circles. Many educational establishments taught blind children to play an instrument to prepare them for the job market or to assist their begging (Illingworth, 1910). Many deaf artists also enjoyed high-profile careers under the rule of George III, who himself famously experienced chronic, severe mental illness – now thought to have been frequent episodes of mania, associated with bipolar disorder (Peters and Beveridge, 2010).

This period was known as the Age of Enlightenment. People began to question what it meant to be human and whether this was instinctual or learnt. It may well have helped that during this time, Lord Nelson, with the sight of one eye and the use of one arm, led Britain to victory over Napoleon. Nonetheless, the 18th century also saw the medical regime of Bethlem hospital come to fruition, as religiosity slowly gave way to medical and moral understandings of mental illness. Life was about to drastically change for people with disabilities, people with mental illnesses and people in poverty.

3.2.3 19th century: Poverty as Sin

Though some formal welfare support was available during this period, support of the poor was largely achieved through philanthropic efforts. This was underpinned by Christian obligations of charity that had been centuries in the making. The wealthy felt that helping the needy would bring salvation or bring them closer to Christ.

However, formal and informal support soon began to overlap. As a result, welfare provision became increasingly bureaucratic and regimented (Morris, 1986). As the cost

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of caring for the poor grew, so did suspicion amongst the middle and upper classes, who felt they were paying for the poor and unemployed to be lazy and idle.

Understandings of mental illness shifted in the period of enlightenment, as psychiatrists learnt more about the brain. As a result, religious assumptions of mental illness began to be regarded as little more than superstition. Poverty, though seen as part of the natural order of society, was deemed to be due to vice, sin, and idleness.

The 1834 Poor Laws were introduced in response to growing suspicion about worklessness and as further means to reduce the cost of caring for the poor. This meant that most poor people would only receive support if they went to live in workhouses. The conditions in workhouses were deliberately poor, intended to function as a disincentive to seeking and receiving support unless people were desperate.

Those who went to live in workhouses were treated extremely poorly and often with contempt. Such an environment was particularly harsh for the poor, the unemployed, the disabled and the 'insane'. Nonetheless, many workhouses were made up entirely of such groups. The 1834 Poor Laws were also responsible for the increase in mental asylums. People with mental illnesses who were unable to fend for themselves were eventually moved into 'madhouses'.

The 'disposal of pauper lunatics' in the latter half of the 19th century signifies much of the discourse of danger and threat which concerned itself with the poor and people with mental illnesses. As criticisms of the treatment of the mentally ill in workhouses and asylums emerged, many people were kept out of such places and at home, at risk of attracting the gaze of the 'lunacy commissioners', who worked to unveil the poor conditions and treatment that occurred (Cox & Marland, 2015). The Poor Laws further

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called for 'harmless incurables' to be moved from workhouses to specialist facilities (Philo, 2004).

Much of what is known of Victorian attitudes towards the poor can be gleaned from the work of Charles Dickens, who became an outspoken critic of the poor working and living conditions that the poor and vulnerable were subject to. Dickens drew on his own experiences of life in the workhouse in a critique that directly challenged the social, economic, and moral abuses of Victorian society.

The work of Dickens contains a strong critique of the value of hard work. Such value laid on labour fetishism can be attributed to the thriving protestant work ethic discourse of the time and disdain towards the poor, which Dickens challenged the morality of. Protestant work ethic discourse (Weber, 1958) espouses that values such as a strong commitment to hard work, frugality, and self-discipline are indicative of success.

Dickens created the character of Scrooge with direct reference to a corrupt version of the Protestant work ethic. Before his revelation, Scrooge exemplifies many of the values that are to be admired within the Protestant work ethic; he is hard-working, frugal, disciplined, and carries himself with an air of self-restraint. Scrooge shows disdain for the poor, who do not maintain the same values that he has. Following his transformative revelation, Scrooge is no longer characterised as morally and socially bankrupt but begins to exhibit love, empathy, optimism, and selflessness.

Such representations of poverty served as more than just a literary device. In capturing the present and portraying it to the masses, Dickens helped to alter perceptions of reality. The public was unified, emotionally affected and outraged at the emotionally elevated conditions presented to them. The public was primed to deprivation and

hardship, becoming actively engaged in resisting and calling for a change to the cruel treatment of the poor (Gabriele, 2009).

3.2.4 20th century: The Birth of the Welfare State

With the hardship of war, there was a sense of equality – or at the very least, a shared feeling of threat under a common enemy. Rations were shared equally, regardless of social standing and many different classes mixed in air raid shelters and on the front-line. This encouraged a greater sense of sympathy for the plight of others. When children were evacuated from inner-city areas to middle-class suburbs, the poverty and hardship that existed there was illuminated.

Disability truly came to be termed as such in the 20th century, following the horrors witnessed after two World Wars and the large numbers of disabled servicemen who returned home. During this time, the public became aware of the mass sterilisation and isolation of disabled people in Nazi Germany, which helped to shift opinions away from eugenicist theories of disability. The mass killing of people with disabilities happened in secret in Nazi Germany, following public disapproval when originally enshrined in law.

Children were initially targetted in the 1933 'Law for the Prevention of Hereditarily Diseased Offspring', where a panel of medical experts would give their approval for the 'mercy killing' of a child. This often happened without the knowledge of the child's parents. Goodley, Runswick-Cole and Liddiard (2016) argue that ideas of 'monstrosity' formed much of the rationalization of the mass killing of disabled adults and children in Nazi Germany (Evans, 2004).

Euthanasia was soon expanded to include non-German adults who were deemed to be 'unworthy of life', including the mentally ill, criminals and the disabled, who were targeted by Hitler's euthanasia programme – the T4 programme. This was rationalised by a belief that such groups were burdensome and of no use to society when unproductive and unable to work, as they drained resources from the state (Figure 1).

Figure 1: A Nazi propaganda poster expressing the idea that people with both physical and mental disabilities are a burden to the German Nation

A compulsory programme of sterilisation was forced upon people with disabilities in the 1933 'Law for the Protection of Germany', intended to prevent people with disabilities from producing 'inferior' children. Monstrosity and disability are often bound up in discussions about what it means to be human and '*human, but not quite',* where being born human is not sufficient enough a circumstance to be a person (Taylor, 2013). It can

be gleaned from this suggestion that being 'human' is linked to the privilege of citizenship.

Nonetheless, eugenicist theories also prevailed in the UK. In 1932, Aldous Huxley wrote 'Brave New World' (Huxley, 1994[1932]) amidst the eugenics movement in Britain. In Brave New World, a utopian society values intelligence above all, which forms the social hierarchy in a heavily capitalist society. In such a society, psychological techniques are used to indoctrinate the public and maintain social order. Though 'Brave New World' is often thought of as being a satirical, dystopian novel - a moral warning associated with the likes of Orwell, Huxley held many popular beliefs of the time, namely meritocracy, eugenics, and citizenship as forms of urgent social reform (Woiak, 2007).

The post-war period also marked an important point in the history of welfare provision in the UK. A plethora of welfare reforms followed. Reforms such as the 1944 'Disability Employment Act' originally targeted ex-servicemen through the provision of employment quotas, mobility, and daily living skills. This soon spread to the wider disabled population as the National Health Service widened its inclusion criteria for support, by covering those affected by industrial accidents in the workplace. Free, equal access to the National Health Service at the point of delivery marked an important point in the development of the welfare state.

Participation in the workplace appears to have been perceived as a right, rather than an obligation. Although the rehabilitation of servicemen was largely aimed at their speedy recovery and re-uptake of work, it was strongly felt that rehabilitation from injury could not be effectively done without also dealing with the psychological effects of disability (Anderson, 2011).

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In the UK, many disability rights activists were inspired by the US Civil Rights movement. During the 1950s and 1960s, The American Coalition of Citizens with Disabilities became dissatisfied with lack of access and lack of action on behalf of the government in ending discrimination. Led by Judy Heumann and Kitty Cone, 150 disability activists staged a sit-in in federal building 50 in San Francisco, which lasted 26 days. Given the physical nature of the disabilities of many of the protestors, the protest was physically demanding for many involved. With the help of growing media attention, the activists used their platform to educate the public about disability discrimination. The community soon began to arrive with food and medical supplies. The protest was also supported by allies of the disability rights movement, something which had never been done in disability activism before. This included sign language interpreters, parents of children with disabilities, Gay and Queer men and women's movements, The Salvation Army, The Black Panthers, and Vietnam veterans. Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act was signed following intense pressure, dramatically shifting understandings of disability from those of pity to political activism and agency. The demand was that it is the societal obligation of the state to end disability discrimination by providing equal access to medical care and education facilities and to uphold the right of disabled people to pursue them (Cone, 1997).

In more recent history, for people experiencing mental distress, the medical model of disability proposed treating mental illness in the same way as physical injury[6]. Understandings of mental illness became deeply rooted in pathology, emphasising physical causes of mental distress. In response, the anti-psychiatry movement began questioning and resisting the use of diagnosis in mental illness during the 1960s. Of particular note is the Rosenhan (1973) study, which demonstrated the inherent,

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[6] Wider implications, controversies and critiques of models of disability in regard to mental health are discussed more thoroughly in 4.4.

contextual and situational difficulties in using diagnostic criteria to distinguish between the 'sane' and 'insane'.

Inspired by the civil rights movements in this period, people with disabilities in the UK also began to mobilise, dissatisfied with inequality and poor access. The social model of disability was born out of this dissatisfaction, developed by disabled people for disabled people as a means to rethink disability and its place in society.

As perspectives on disability began to shift beyond medicine and into the domains of sociology, psychiatry and psychology, Oliver (1990) offered that disability was not an essentialist state of being but a political matter. The aim of the social model of disability was to ultimately shift understandings and perceptions away from a myopic, medicalised conception of disability, which highlighted issues within people, rather than those in society. The view of the social model of disability emphasises that disability is not a product of tragedy, but instead a product of oppressive and unaccommodating societies.

As discussed in the beginning of the thesis, mental health activism, such as 'Mad Pride' and 'Recovery in the Bin', represent a distinct step away from the medical model, towards a social model of disability. For such groups, acknowledging barriers in society means not only recognising those which are architectural or physical, but also those that exist within institutions, systems and societal attitudes. This is achieved through challenging the pathologising tendencies of psychiatry, which risks construing certain behaviours as either normal or abnormal, natural or unusual and acceptable or unacceptable.

Such movements, alongside discourses of 'psychiatric survivorship' contend this, reclaiming 'madness' as a valid identity, whilst acknowledging the existence of systemic

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sources of discrimination, exclusion and oppression, for example within the mental health system or the benefits system.

One example of this is Recovery in the Bin (2017), who trouble the notion of recovery, arguing that only normative and successful recovery stories are generally emphasised. In particular, Recovery in the Bin engages with a critique of neoliberalism, arguing that the idea of recovery has been co-opted by neoliberal ideology. They consider how this neoliberal ideology produces impossible ideals of self-sufficiency, which in turn produce intense pressure, oppression and discrimination, whilst masking the systemic removal of services and practices, such as the benefits system and treatment outcomes which serve to humiliate those experiencing distress. Ultimately, Recovery in the Bin (2017) and associated movements call for the range of subjectivities available to survivors to be expanded, whilst keeping in mind their place in the wider socio-political context and relevant systems.

With regard to the culture of the mental health system, a fierce critique began to grow concerning the treatment of people in psychiatric hospitals. Of note is the David 'Rocky' Bennett inquiry. Following an altercation in response to racist abuse from another patient, David hit a nurse and was consequently restrained face-down on the floor for twenty-five minutes. David later died due to positional asphyxiation. In the period that followed, David's sister, Dr Joanna Bennett, led a public enquiry which challenged practices within mental health service provision, with due consideration for the importance of acknowledging cultural differences, institutional racism and restraint-related practice and deaths in NHS mental health services.

In response, many NHS trusts have become more integrated with local authorities, social care, and community mental health services, shifting mental health care towards the

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community (King's Fund, 2014). This resulted in a shift back to care in the community from psychiatric hospitals; people left hospitals and returned home.

Over the course of the 500 or so years discussed above, mental health and disability have always been discussed separately. Nonetheless, it does appear that mental illness has historically been constructed as disabling in terms of everyday life and participation in work– though it is never explicitly referenced as being a disability. This raises questions as to whether something that is disabling is a disability, or if they are mutually exclusive, and if so, what implications this has for subjectivity.

3.2.5 Poverty and Work Revisited

Gold and Shuman (2009) argue that there are commonly held beliefs about work. These assumptions stem from the moral and social values that are attached to work-related behaviours. For example, the potential for clinicians to interpret problems with employment as being due to the pathological or the psychological.

Gold and Shuman further argue that many mental health professionals have internalised this work ethic, although the DSM states that occupational problems are not solely derived from mental health disorders. Nonetheless, the evaluation between 'can't work' and 'won't work' remains very much subjective. This ethic fails to account for variances in how strongly individuals and groups adhere to or take up the Protestant work ethic, such as cultures which pride self-reliance and resilience (Gold and Shuman, 2009) or those who believe they are entitled to state and institutional support.

Assessments of the distinction between 'can't work' and 'won't work' are rooted in subtle moral intuitions about responsibility and choices (Gold and Shuman, 2009). When

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striving towards objectivity regarding ethical obligations, mental health professionals are expected to account for the potential for bias. Mental health professionals who perform disability-related assessments in the workplace often face the challenge of minimising the projection of their own moral and social values.

In recent years, two key United Nations investigations have taken place. The first considered the benefits system with specific regard for people experiencing mental health difficulties. This was originally leaked to the UK media in 2016 (Disabled People Against Cuts, 2016) and later published in 2017 by the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2017). The inquiry concluded that the UK government's implementation of a punitive welfare regime has been based almost entirely upon largely unevidenced political claims, naturalised assumptions and 'justification narratives', which has resulted in grave and systematic violations of human rights, to the detriment of over half-a-million disabled people.

The second investigation explored the material and human rights implications of the recent austerity regime in the UK. Professor Alston visited food banks, schools and disadvantaged rural areas as well as speaking to academics, homeless people, and MP's. Early media reporting in newspapers (Chakelian, 2018) suggested that Alston's response to the implementation of the wider benefits system was particularly scathing, branding Universal Credit 'ideological', describing the freezing of payments 'hypocritical' and terming benefit sanctions 'counter-productive'. Alston concluded that the wider austerity regime is a punitive, mean-spirited, and callous choice which has caused suffering and misery, to the extent that one in two children now live in poverty.

However, Alston did note the compassion of work coaches and of individuals who had changed the ethos in regional jobcentres – people who are often scorned for their lack of compassion in supporting claimants. Alston laid fault at the feet of the government,

claiming that the government can better support people at no cost but are in denial of the real human cost of current policy. In response, Amber Rudd, the Department of Work and Pensions secretary, condemned the 'political nature' of the language in the report, calling the study 'disappointing' (Walker, 2018).

4. Chapter Four: Representations of Mental Health and Disability

In the following chapter, the representation of mental health, as well as representations of claiming benefits and of disability, are considered separately. The rationale for structuring the chapter this way is due to the scarcity of literature which considered the three topics in unison. Existing literature on representations of benefit claiming, people with mental health difficulties, and disability are discussed separately, before drawing these ideas together in reference to mainstream models of disability.

It is necessary to discuss these dominant conceptualisations of disability[7] when exploring discourse on people with mental health difficulties who claim benefits. People with mental health difficulties are always constructed in relation to disability, regardless of whether they take up 'disabled' subjectivities. To capture how people with mental health difficulties are positioned within discourses on benefit claiming, it is necessary to bring together the existing literature.

4.1 Media Representations of Claiming Benefits

As the benefits system has become corroded under neoliberalism (Jensen, 2014), a representation of the welfare claimant has been created which elicits negative images of the 'scrounger' and the 'skiver', a contemporary folk devil (Cohen, 1972), which represents the epitome of moral decline and social disintegration (Jewkes, 2004). Despite a breadth of literature which highlights the harmful effects of austerity

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[7] The discussion of such models is qualitatively different to Chapter Two, as it specifically considers the place of mental health within these models, rather than the place of these models within welfare reform.

(discussed in Chapter Two), discourse on welfare remains somewhat unsympathetic towards those who face severe financial and social hardship. Jensen (2013) highlights the rise of a new archetype of media representation - 'Poverty Porn'.

According to Jensen (2014), 'Poverty Porn' is often featured in documentary reality television programmes in the British post-recession period, examples include '*On Benefits and Proud*' and '*We Pay Your Benefits*'. The genre is ideological in that it allows audiences to scrutinise the lives and financial habits of its subjects, individualising their experiences, making available discourses of theft, scepticism, greed, morality, and criminality (Jensen, 2014). The mass media has long responded to the discursive struggle over benefit fraud (Lundstrom, 2013), particularly the construction of the 'cheater' subject position in regard to the welfare state (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985). For people with disabilities or mental health difficulties, such discourses emerge when the legitimacy of one's health condition is brought into question.

Despite the voyeuristic and emotionally elevated experiences which function as 'entertainment' within 'Poverty Porn', the genre ultimately misrepresents and objectifies the poor, side-lining the social causes and consequences of poverty:

> *…both the articulation and erasure of dis/ability are used as a form of narrative prosthesis to support the overarching story line that people on benefits are unworthy 'scroungers' (Runswick-Cole and Goodley, 2015:1).*

Furthermore, Skeggs, Thumim, and Wood (2008) argue that newspaper headlines and reality television programmes invite audiences to share in this consensus of 'bad objects', whilst obscuring structural barriers to improving lives and reframing identities as morally inferior and deviant, echoing the notion of folk devils (Cohen, 1972). The resulting moral panic supersedes the potential for empathy by inciting a suggestion of

risk to social cohesion. This further exacerbates the existing stigma that is attached to mental health.

Research has also explored the legitimisation of austerity politics in reality television (Hill, 2015), proposing a marked change in the reporting of disability following a radical restructuring of the welfare state (Briant, Watson and Philo, 2013), and the counter-productive rhetoric of the government, public, and the media towards incapacity and sickness-related benefits (Garthwaite, 2011). Heeney (2015) argues that old debates about welfare support for the 'deserving' and 'undeserving' poor have been reopened.

4.1.1 The Dangerous Classes

The re-emergence of the 'undeserving' and 'deserving' poor, alongside the resulting cultural and symbolic images which have become naturalised in political discourse and the media, serves to 'other' people who claim benefits. This is rationalised through assumptions of moral inferiority, which in turn, justify their use as a scapegoat for contemporary problems in society (Gans, 1996).

This group is referred to by Gans (1996) as the underclass and as 'the dangerous class' by Marx and Engels (1965[1848]); a group which poses a threat to social order and stability (Morris, 1994). Discourses of the underclass and those of 'chav culture' are not unconnected (Hayward and Yar, 2006), featuring ideas about a group distinguished by 'cultural dispositions' which drive negative behaviour patterns such as chronic welfare dependence and antisocial conduct (Murray, 2001: 26). The resemblances between the contemporary 'dangerous classes' and the 'Beggars and Vagabonds' discussed in 3.2 are striking. The assumption that the poor and the unemployed are a threat to social and moral order has long withstood the test of time.

Research has further explored how neoliberal discourse has legitimised a form of governmentalism (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 2001). Governmentalism refers to Foucauldian ideas about how the state shapes behaviours and actions of populations. One such method might include biopower (Foucault, 1990[1976]; 2003[1975-1976]), wherein bodies are regulated through practices of governance. In a neoliberal context, Foucauldian ideas of governmentality refer to how the state outsources these practices to the individual's themselves, as part of soft-paternalistic practice. This is referred to by Foucault as 'Technologies of the Self' (Foucault, 1998) and entails regulation of one's own body to attain happiness.

4.2 Media Representations of Disability: Disability as the 'Other'

The majority of the UK population have little contact with disabled people (ComRes, 2010). In a 2018 survey by Scope (Scope, 2018), 22% of non-disabled respondents agreed that there is a lot of prejudice against people with disabilities. Furthermore, when asked to predict the percentage of the population who were disabled, the majority of survey respondents underestimated the prevalence of disability, reporting it to be lower than the actual figure of 22%[8] (Department for Work and Pensions, 2018b).

As a consequence, the media represents an important medium which facilitates non-disabled people's understanding of disability (Barnes, Mercer, and Shakespeare, 1999). It can legitimise narrow and contradictory dominant discourses of disability (Ross, 2003), which the public draw upon when understanding and reconstructing acceptable ways of being disabled (Gilman, 1982).

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[8] As of 2016/2017*

Disabled people are required to 'prove' their disability amidst a discourse of suspicion, by defining their disability in regard to *'culturally acceptable disability discourses'* (Goodley and Runswick-Cole, 2011: 609). Foucault (1980; 1995[1977]) argues that these dominant discourses represent the disciplinary structure of language. This disciplinary power produces docile subjects (Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1982). Through this process, power is rendered invisible (Giroux, 2009; Rouse, 2007). However, these valued knowledges can also be 'thwarted' (Foucault, 1990[1976]: 101) by those who insert their perspectives into what is read, consequently diminishing and resisting the dominion of valued knowledges.

Disability is generally constructed parallel to cultural norms of health, fitness, and autonomy (Imrie, 2000). Such notions have come to form the basis of perceived 'normality'. Naturalised disability is therefore always thought of as binary to something else, constructed in regard to difference and otherness. The perceived deviation of disabled people from culturally dominant ideas of completeness is always the focus of discourses of disability in society.

Grue (2011) argues that disability has often been an underexplored topic in discourse work, further claiming that such work has the potential to aid disability studies in furthering its goal of social change. The following section explores two examples of media and societal discourses around disability– that of the 'Paralympian Superhumans' and the 'Plucky Disabled', whilst making links back to the relevance of mental health.

4.2.1 The London Paralympics: The 'Superhumans'

The rollout of the 2012 Welfare Reform Act coincided with the London Summer Paralympics. Consequently, two widely different discourses of disability emerged. The first is that of the scroungers, the shirkers, and the skivers. However, amid the largest,

most accessible Paralympics ever, another discourse was offered; disabled athletes were presented to growing media and public interest as 'superhumans':

> *It is a stark contrast with the benefits reporting that is taking place alongside: light to the dark of benefits, confrontation transformed to celebration…a larger-than-life glossy photograph of athletes, sleek and streamlined: swimmer, cyclist, runner, wheelchair rugby player. Looking the viewer in the eye, they challenge them to dare to look back, dare to pity (Crow, 2014: 171).*

Those who 'overcame' disabilities were celebrated as heroes and superhumans, marking a noticeable return to the notion of the 'able-disabled' (Mitchell and Snyder, 2015). Those who perform ableism adequately are absorbed into society, whilst those who do not are admonished and left behind. It is notable that to enter the 'able-disabled', disabled people must achieve great feats. The superhuman discourse is unhelpful, setting a precedent for people with disabilities which ultimately emboldens neoliberal-ableism. The Channel 4 coverage of *Superhumans* was followed by a seemingly inspirational slogan – *'there's no such thing as can't'* (Catchpole, 2016).

The reality for people with disabilities is that the 'superhuman' invokes and normalises grand expectations of professional athleticism which are difficult to live up to. Regardless of their navigation towards culturally dominant ideas of disability, people with disabilities continue to be 'othered', because this subject position offers a chance of disability as valued (yet different). There is a sense of irony embedded within the superhuman discourse because, at the same time, many benefit claimants had benefits reduced or taken away as they were no longer deemed to be disabled, disabled enough, or failed to perform disability adequately, inviting discourses of fraud, scepticism, and criminality.

The disciplinary culture of the welfare gaze ensures that problematic, disabled bodies are carefully surveyed (Biggs and Powell, 2001; Shildrick, 1997). This gazing culture is not simply exerted by the government, but by all of us (Foucault, 1977). The mass media,

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who play a role in constructing contemporary assumptions of disability, are an important example of this. Shakespeare (1999) argues that representations of disability are largely lazy, crude, and one-dimensional, often using disability as a plot device or character trait, where a person is seen only through their impairments. In the rare instances where people with disabilities are the protagonists, they are generally positioned as a source of humour. This reinforces and produces myopic understandings of disability, readily available for the public to consume.

The 'Superhuman' represents the cultural fetishisation of disabled bodies (Goodley, 2010). This fetishisation of disabled people is pertinent to an understanding of the media, who construct stories based on a perceived demand from the audience, but also construct and deconstruct understandings of disability in public discourse. Though often contradictory, this may include traditional assumptions of vulnerability and dependency as well as the exotic and the different.

Language in the media has important implications for disability. Goodley (2010:97) considered the 'plucky-yet-mourning'[9] splitting paradox that is expected of people with disabilities, where a lack of depression is seen as denial, but 'fighting spirit' is maladjustment to impairment. Such references are frequent in the media. One example is a *Mail On Sunday* article (Taher, 2011) about a '*plucky*' policeman, '*confined to his wheelchair'* in his '*fight against crime'*, focusing upon the man's impairments whilst evoking disablist assumptions which predicate an expectation of mourning, suffering or depression when living with a disability – i.e. '*confined*'. In what appears to be a positive story, disability remains a devalued status, represented as something one is helplessly trapped within.

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[9] Out of curiosity, I did a search for stories of 'plucky' mental health service-users or survivors, which turned up little to nothing. This is reflective of a dearth of stories about recovery in mental health (Chen and Lawrie, 2017). Mental health has largely been distanced from discourses of disability in both the research literature and policy.

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Research to date has failed to explore the relationship between disability and mental health in the context of benefits. This is particularly important as people with mental health problems are much less likely to be in paid employment (Marwaha & Johnson, 2004; Rinaldi et al., 2011). Also, a third of new job seekers reported a deterioration in their mental health (McManus et al., 2012). Therefore, it is necessary to address the representation of people with mental health difficulties who claim benefits, given that discourse on benefits, discourse on disability and discourse on mental health are intertwined, rather than mutually exclusive.

4.3 Media Representations of People with Mental Health Difficulties

Whilst poor employment rates have largely been linked to barriers to employment such as discrimination (Biggs et al., 2010; Corker et al., 2013; Corrigan et al., 2003; Danson and Gilmore, 2009; Loughborough University/ Mental Health Foundation, 2009), it is of import to further explore these ideas in a way which addresses power systems and structures discursively. There is a further need to look beyond stigma by exploring the discursive strategies and power relationships which shape naturalised assumptions.

Whilst the media does represent people with mental health difficulties who claim benefits, a specific focus on this is absent in the literature. This may well be due to the points highlighted in 3.2, where disability and mental health have largely been regarded as mutually exclusive. Nonetheless, as assumptions of welfare provision and disability have shifted, assumptions of mental health and distress have shifted alongside these. Thus, there as a tenuous and implicit relationship between these broader discourses which warrants exploration.

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Given that the majority of people who claim out-of-work sickness benefits do so because of a mental health difficulty, it can be anticipated that such a group are implicated within naturalised assumptions of mental health, disability and benefit claiming. There is a need to consider how people with mental health difficulties are implicated in broader discourses around their position in society.

The media often produces sensationalized, distorted representations of mental health and illness, drawing upon discourses of criminality and danger (Stuart, 2006). The voice of people with mental illnesses is often absent (Bilic and Georgaca, 2007). Ohlsson (2018) further notes that mental illness is used in taken-for-granted ways in the media, who often express ambivalence towards expert knowledge on mental health.

Representations of mental illness have been explored across several mediums of representation, such as newspapers (Rose, 1998; Wahl, 1995) and film (Time to Change, 2009), which feature discourses of instability, psychosis, risk, danger (Rose, 1998), criminality (Olstead, 2002) and violence (Wahl & Roth, 1982; Wilson et al., 1999). However, Howlett (1998) argued that inaccurate depictions of people with mental illnesses as violent have generated public support and funding, improving care in community settings and facilitating a critique of the mental health system (Morrall, 2000). Thus, it is important to consider how negative discourse may be a useful tool for resisting naturalised assumptions.

There are many examples of the effective use of discourse analysis in mental health research, which demonstrate the utility of discourse analysis in deconstructing taken for granted assumptions (Georgaca, 2000), empowering professional practice (Kogan & Brown, 1998) and unveiling the subtle ways in which disenfranchised groups have been dominated by oppressive systems and practices (Willig, 1999). When challenging the

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dehumanising effects of oppressive and damaging practices, it is equally important to explore discourses of empowerment and resistance.

Recent Foucauldian discourse work in the field of mental health has explored service-user construction of diagnostic identities (Tucker, 2009), relationships in psychiatric inpatient services (Cheetham et al., 2017) and professionals' use of compulsory powers under the Mental Health Act (Buckland, 2016). Thus, it appears that much of the Foucauldian research conducted in the field of mental health has specifically focused upon clinical settings, as opposed to mental health in wider society.

Mental ill-health has gradually become the leading reason for claiming benefits worldwide (OECD, 2010). Restrictive benefit-related practices such as narrowed eligibility criteria have effected people with mental health difficulties more than members of any other disabled group (Shefer et al., 2016). SPERI (2014) suggest that negative attitudes towards welfare, such as ideas of deservedness, have been extended to the mentally ill. This has resulted in a decline in empathy toward socially disadvantaged and marginalised groups.

Previous research on benefit provision and disability has explored newspaper representations outside of UK disability discourse (Pinto, 2011) and periodic comparisons of newspaper reporting on disability (Briant, Watson and Philo, 2011). However, mental illness is often an after-thought, incorporated into the research as a 'disability' without consideration for the nuances of mental health discourse alongside disability discourse.

Increasingly stringent benefit-related practices and systems position people with mental health difficulties as increasingly vulnerable. Nonetheless, research has often broadly focused on the disproportionate effect welfare reform has had on people with disabilities (Morris, 2011) and how they position themselves in an era of neoliberal-ableism

(Goodley, 2014). However, research which focuses upon how the intangibility of mental health and distress has been implicated in the political and economic context has been largely absent. This is likely due to the contested construction of mental illness as a disability.

When separately considering media representations of benefit claimants with mental health difficulties as well as representations of disability, some commonalities are apparent. All groups are subject to a disciplinary gaze that is produced by the benefits system and reproduced in the media. This disciplinary gaze acts as a biopolitical practice that is ultimately focused upon the regulation of bodies to maintain social order. This maintenance of the social order appears to suggest that people should only claim what they are entitled to.

People with mental health difficulties who claim benefits fall within both the hard-paternalistic and neoliberal accounts described by Whitworth (2016). Though mental health culture is soft-paternalistic in the benefits system, focused upon gently pushing people towards 'activating' themselves, they are equally levelled with the hard-paternalistic threat of coercion – real, veiled and imagined - that constitute the claimant agreement.

Hard-paternalistic accounts of benefit claiming, which identify people as lacking agency, risk becoming conflated with naturalised assumptions of mental health, such as irrationality, unreason, and risk. This risks potentially exacerbating existing stigma around mental health and illness and has implications for the maintenance of agency and governance of populations.

I argue that in the context of benefits provision, defining oneself as disabled may well be a product of necessity, rather than choice. The disciplinary 'welfare gaze' is a practice by
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which the 'truly disabled' are separated from those who are not. Naturalised assumptions of disability appear to be important in facilitating assumptions of legitimacy – 'real' disability is assumed to be based on ideas of mobility and visibility.

The 'truly disabled' are rendered '*abnormal bodies*', a '*fiscal burden, but one who deserves the support and succour of the community*' (Hughes, 2001: 24). There is a strong suggestion that assumptions around entitlement to benefits are not only reliant upon the reification of the deserving/undeserving poor dichotomy, but that new dichotomies have been created which act to differentiate between the deserving and the undeserving, masquerading disabled. The gaze upon disabled bodies can take many forms; one example may include seemingly positive representations of the lives of people with disabilities, which are ultimately veiled within subtle practices of ableism.

4.4 Mental Health as a Disability

It is difficult to provide a definition which fully captures disability. WHO and World Bank (2011: 3) argue that definitions of disability are '*complex, dynamic, multidimensional and contested*'. The reasons for this are multifaceted. Some disabilities are visible – some are not. Disabilities can affect people in vastly different ways and occur at all stages of life. Some people may consider disability to be an identity which they navigate towards, others may not.

The Equality Act defines disability as a physical or mental impairment that has a long-term, adverse effect on daily living, lasting for at least twelve months. As the benefits system has responded to neoliberal concerns, increasingly stringent practices have been introduced, transforming the parameters of what constitutes disability. The main focus of the following sections is upon critically appraising these models. I further locate mental

health and distress within these models, considering how people with mental health difficulties may take up, resist, or negotiate models of disability, further considering the relevance of disabled subjectivities to mental illness.

4.4.1 Medical Model

The medical model proposes that disability is a problem located within an individual. The use of the medical model within psychiatry has had little clinical value (Faulkner, 2015). The suggestion that a value-added truth can be found within a person is not only reliant upon positivism but may also produce a '*monopoly of truth'* (McCann, 2016: 2), which risks reproducing systems of inequality (Foucault, 1975;1977).

This elicits some of the points previously discussed in Chapter Two with regard to responses to neoliberalism. The assumption that disability is inherently problematic and indicative of personal lack or failure, puts people at risk of exploitation. The idea that an individual can be activated or corrected is deeply problematic. The language that features in the model is largely negative, indicative of many naturalised assumptions of disability, such as pity, abnormality, and tragedy. There is little room for empowerment, if at all, in the medical model. Areheart (2008) argues that under the medical model, disabled people are either represented as child-like objects of pity, or 'supercrips', who overcome disability.

Furthermore, the medical model does not refer to the wider socio-political context of disability. This is necessary for the realm of mental illness, given that mental illness is contextually and historically bound, produced through discourse, like disability, though may be constructed in different ways both inside and outside of disability discourse.

4.4.2 Social Model

The social model of disability represents a shift away from locating problems within the individual by identifying the structural barriers in society which disable people. The social model establishes a distinction between 'disability' and 'impairment', facilitating a political agenda, geared towards social change. Nonetheless, there has been concern surrounding the notion of impairment and its definitional link with medicalised discourses (Goodley, 2001).

In a study by Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2010b) which explored the perspectives of mental health service-users, little consensus was offered on the usefulness of the social model of disability. Whilst participants acknowledged that the model does highlight experiences of exclusion and discrimination, other participants rejected the social model because of its association with the devalued status of disability and by extension, further stigma. The basis for this argument was that mental health and disability should be treated separately, largely because of dominant assumptions about the permanence of disability and medicalised conceptions of such:

> *While some people felt that the social model of disability could be helpful, there was also a strong sense that the medical model was so strongly ingrained in society that it would be difficult to change people's perceptions, both as members of the public and as service users who had come to internalise the medical model (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2010b: 20).*

Nonetheless, in the context of mental health and distress, the social model is ultimately a transformative model, given that it has played a significant role in creating conflict and tension around the role of the body and society, with regard to definitions of disability. It recognises that disability is not an inherent deficit in the self, but a social construct, produced through power systems and structures. This recognition has allowed the social model to open up a dialogue around the historical and societal oppression of people with

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disabilities, whilst encouraging society to recognise its role in oppression. It further opens up spaces for people with disabilities to challenge their oppression through political action.

As discussed in 3.2.4, for mental health service-user groups who engage with activism, such as Recovery in the Bin (2017), challenging oppression and transforming the experiences of people living with mental health difficulties means recognising the situated context of, and 'recovery' from, mental health difficulties. In particular, this entails illuminating how practices and narratives around such experiences are located within the wider context of neoliberal ideology, considering what this means for the way people with mental health difficulties are treated, both by society and within wider practices, institutions and systems, for example in medical practice.

Given the important ideological and material implications that neoliberalism has for the governance of people with mental health difficulties, constructions of disability and the provision of benefits, it was necessary to create a methodology that recognised the importance of this and addressed it sufficiently. Chapter Five explores the journey of creating a methodology which addresses these concerns fully.

5. Chapter Five: Theoretical Framework

This chapter sets the scene for the two empirical studies, overviewing the philosophical principles, reflexive considerations and theoretical frameworks which informed the empirical work undertaken in the thesis.

5.1 Positioning in Critical Work

When taking a critical psychological approach, positioning becomes an important consideration that should be reflected upon. In particular, concerns of partisan positioning must be acknowledged. In the thesis, an explicitly political approach has been taken because it concerns itself with what I consider to be power struggles that are inseparable from politics. This means that though at times unconscious, subjects find themselves engaged in what are also political struggles when navigating the benefits system. Whilst attempts are made not to align oneself too closely or explicitly with a specific political party, I note that the thesis is left-leaning and engages with political issues, rhetoric, concerns and struggles through a Marxist lens and in a critical way.

However, there has been a long-standing assertion that psychologists should aim to be apolitical, particularly in spaces where there has been a strong argument for psychology as a science. Koocher (2006: 5) argues that many use '*behavioral science as a rationale to promote or oppose political and social policy agendas*'. Hunt (1999) argues that political correctness may be a threat to psychology. Maracek, Fine and Kidder (1997) argue that psychologists who explore social issues often invest their values within this work and that the liberal zeitgeist of psychology shapes research.

Such politically informed personal investment in one's research can contribute to arguments in support of apolitical stances in research, which suggest that psychology should not engage with politics where an explicit stance can be inferred as political bias. However, this claim appears to have more gravity in the North American 'culture wars' (Hunter, 1991) which emphasise a divide between liberal/conservative views and a growing literature base which concerns itself with 'problems' of liberal bias, than that which is apparent in the UK context.

Nonetheless, critical psychology, on a political level, can offer a challenge where instances of exploitation may occur, for example on discourses of Thatcherism (Fairclough, 1989), racism (van Dijk, 1991), and the reporting of the nuclear arms race (Chilton, 1985). Given that such work explores events of a political nature, expecting researchers to conduct analyses of political phenomena that are divorced from the nuances of the situated political context, would be unhelpful, if even possible. Furthermore, the analysis of discourse, by character, is a deconstructive approach, particularly where the thesis is concerned. Doing discourse analysis means unpicking that which appears natural, or taken for granted, reframing phenomena in the light of an alternative lens. Part of this practice of deconstruction may well involve psychologists exploring how the personal becomes political as a means to explore taken-for-granted assumptions.

BPS president, Peter Kinderman (2017), authored a blog which advocated for the place of psychology in using its evidence base to shape political policy within the benefits system and mental health legislation. Kinderman goes on to argue that psychology has an important place in such debates and that any reform which intends to shape the lives of humans should be informed by an in-depth understanding of them:

…all the subject matter of politics is the subject matter of psychology (British Psychological Society, 2017, para. 5).

In the UK context, there appears to be strong support for psychologists engaging with politics, who are well represented in the work done by many BPS member networks such as the Social Psychology, Community Psychology, Psychology of Women and Equalities and Political Psychology Sections. Across these member networks, critical psychology represents a useful way through which to engage with politics.

'Critical' is a loaded term, though in the context of the thesis this entails taking a 'radical' approach in psychology, akin to the theoretical work of researchers such as Austin and Prilleltensky (2001) or Parker (2005; 2009), where there is a stronger tendency to draw upon Marxism and to critique the academy itself. Thus, doing critical psychology means critiquing and holding accountable mainstream psychology, its subservience to the status quo and its loyalty to dominant social interests (Burton, 2004).

I do not believe that it is useful or necessary to hide my political and personal position in the research, though do reflect upon this. I have long found myself situated in discourses of disability, which has meant that I have spent much of my life trying to resist some of the limitations put upon me, largely based on an assumption that I would not manage or succeed in education. The systems and professionals I navigate now seem to have taken an interest in my decision to do a PhD, though in hindsight I find it disappointing that until this point, nobody asked what I wanted to do with my future – there was a larger emphasis on what I couldn't do. None of the literature about children and adults living with Congenital Heart Disease is particularly positive, even problematising those who refuse to accept limitations, described as people who need to be repaired and managed (Green, 2004).

I have also felt the effects of not having a visible disability, particularly the scepticism that comes with this. I have received the highest award of DLA, which was removed in its entirety, much to the disbelief of the assessor. I have needed support but have not been 'disabled enough'. At times, my position is more empathetic and borne of experience than it is political, though inevitably this becomes political because the things I am dissatisfied or frustrated with are inherently political. It can be difficult to envision oneself outside of this, given the material effects of such discourse.

To assume that as the researcher, I could freely, impartially, and neutrally interpret a social context I am situated strongly within would be naïve, particularly given that my position has motivated this research. Nonetheless, I believe I am accountable in making this transparent, particularly as my ideas change over time (discussed in chapter ten).

5.2 A Hybrid Discourse Method

I originally set out with the intention of conducting a Foucauldian discourse analysis, which would broadly look at how people are represented with regard to power systems, relationships, and structures in society and how these shape accepted truths on benefit claiming. However, I began to make Marxist interpretations, which whilst useful, were not initially a part of my methodological framework. There was a sense that there was 'something else' at stake in discourse. I could not ignore how the benefits system works, such as the outsourcing of contracts to ATOS and Maximus, who delivered WCA's. It is not my intent in the thesis to attempt to be an economist, though the roots of current government policy are well worth considering, given the status of both Maximus and its predecessor ATOS as Trans-Atlantic, multi-billion-pound corporations.

Thus, the role of the free-market and its relationship with neoliberalism was not to be underestimated. Neoliberalism soon emerged as not only intrinsically tied to economic concerns but also concerns about managing social order and governing people, thus opening up possibilities to bring together the work of Foucault and Marx. In doing so, a theoretical framework was produced which looked at Foucauldian ideas about the role of power systems, relationships and institutions in this governance as well as the work of Marx, exploring how capitalism shapes practices of governance, for example how responses to economic concerns produced an increasingly stringent, individualised benefits system. Given that rhetoric on the benefits system and consequent changes to welfare reform were shaped by the contemporary economic context, such an approach was necessary to understand the production and function of discourse.

Therefore, an alternative methodology needed to be crafted which drew upon both Marxist and Foucauldian philosophy. This meant accounting for interpretations that I had been implicitly making, but not explicitly detailing.

Singh (2015) argues that when crafting your qualitative methodology to fit with the research questions presented, there are three main elements to be considered: philosophy, including the epistemological and ontological perspective, the broader methodology, where a rigorous argument about how knowledge will be created is offered, and the methods, where the processes of analysis and data collection are operationalised and explained, for example, analytical steps and the process of data collection.

Whilst there is a wealth of literature which encourages and advises ways through which to be more nuanced and creative in research, this is limited to data collection, rather than the analysis of data. There is little explicit guidance about the journey of crafting a method of analysis:

> *The real task while doing this is to select between alternatives, integrate the seemingly opposite poles and operationalize the implicit concepts (Singh, 2015:145).*

This does not necessarily mean that nuanced approaches to analysis do not exist. However, when undertaking relatively traditional methods such as focus groups and media analysis, there appears to be less said as to how an alternative analysis can be produced, at least on an explicit level. The concepts suggested by Singh (2015), philosophy, broad methodology, and methods, need to be considered separately as well as together in creating a watertight methodology.

However, Budds, Locke and Burr (2014) do offer a good example of an explicit rationale for bringing together multiple discursive frameworks, in their instance, that of FDA and discursive psychology. Budds, Locke and Burr argue that producing their blended method overcame some of the inherent difficulties presented in FDA, notably, a distinct underemphasis on the role of subjectivity. Blended methods have been further advocated for by Wetherell (1998), who argues for the effectiveness of an eclectic discursive framework, drawing together conversation and post-structuralist analyses, focusing not only on the 'why' of discourse but also on social interaction as it happens, for example, where subject positionings are being negotiated. A further example of a blended discursive methodology is Feminist Relational Discourse Analysis, which aims to produce politicised, feminist readings of power, considering the interplay between the personal and the political when exploring identity (Thompson, Rickett, and Day, 2018).

However, whilst discursive psychology and FDA tend to sit closely on the spectrum of discourse studies, Marx has less of an allegiance with the study of discourse and has an antagonistic relationship with psychology because it is part of the social relations of capitalism (Marx, 1990[1867]).

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In 'Foucault with Marx', I explore the rationale for bringing together Marxist and Foucauldian philosophy within a discursive framework to generate new knowledges of power that are contextually situated within neoliberal discourses. The nuances, controversies, and reflexive considerations of drawing these ideas together are considered with regard for the underpinning critical psychological framework in the thesis.

5.3 Foucault with Marx

My rationale for drawing together the work of Marx and Foucault is that questions of both 'how' and 'why' need to be asked to fully understand discourses on claiming benefits. This means asking not only how discourse functions, for example, how people are positioned in and governed by discourse, but also questions of why, exploring how discourses of benefit claiming have evolved throughout history, developing into what they are today, for example, how the economic recession transformed discourses about benefit claiming and the governance of subjects. An extended account of these discussions is available in **Appendix A**.

In the sections that follow, I explore concerns that are pertinent to the creation of a Marxist and Foucauldian discursive framework. In 5.3.1, I explore some of the perceived barriers to bringing together the work of Marx and Foucault, considering the transformations that need to take place to achieve such a framework. In 5.3.2, I discuss how Marx and Foucault can be drawn together to study power, with a focus on the power relationship between truth and economic forces, in particular, the struggle over truth that takes place. In 5.3.3, I consider the role of work, introducing Marx to the study of discourse, emphasising the deconstructive potential that Marx's work has in this context. In 5.3.4, I explore what Marx and Foucault can contribute collectively to a historically

informed account of disability, considering what this can offer to the study of people with mental health difficulties who claim benefits. In 5.3.5, I address tensions over psychology and how Foucault and Marx can be brought together within the realm of critical realism. I further explore the role of liminality, its application to Foucault and Marx and its potential for social change. In 5.3.6 I consider both the work of Marx and Foucault as accounts of history which take interest in issues of materialism and biopower, of which are useful to the study of subjects within capitalist political economies. To close, in 5.3.7 I account for wider ideas beyond the theoretical framework which were drawn upon to inform the analyses in the two empirical studies.

5.3.1 Reading Marx after Foucault

This section explores the perceived incompatibility between Foucault and Marx, offering a resolution for and critique of such claims. It considers that some of this incompatibility may well be short-sighted, rigidly and militantly stuck in the defence of one theoretical camp or another. I build an argument which considers that whilst Marx and Foucault did indeed understand history and power in ways which were often different, they shared a belief in the relevance and importance of power.

Marxist and Foucauldian theory has historically been represented as fundamentally incompatible (Callinicos, 1985). Marsden (2003) notes that whilst Foucault rarely critiqued Marx himself, his work often acted as an implicit critique of Marxism. Marsden further argues that Foucault believed Marx's understanding of power was economistic, focused on motives (the why) rather than the actual function of power (the how), which may go towards explaining why Marx's work has been read as overly deterministic. Marsden further states that Foucault took issue with how Marxism defines class at the expense of the struggles within it, along with a disagreement with how Marx and Engels (1965[1848]) invoke the state as part of an explicit political strategy. Marxist theorists

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countered Foucault's critique of Marxism by going on to excommunicate *The Order of Things (*Foucault, 2002b[1966]), construing the work as right-wing, and Foucault as an anti-Marxist (Eribon, 1991).

The qualitative differences between the work of 'Marxists' and 'Foucauldians' and that of Marx and Foucault are worth noting – Marxist and Foucauldian work is always an interpretation of the work of Marx or Foucault. Such terms are an umbrella of philosophies and thoughts ascribed to each author; they are constructs within broader discourses of society which flux over time - an account of each author's political experience and by extension, that of those who read from it. It is not Foucault or Marx who are fundamentally at odds, but 'Marxists' and 'Foucauldians' who facilitate such juxtaposed readings.

Nonetheless, it is necessary to take great care with the terminology used. Foucault's opposition of both Communism and Marxism need not mean incompatibility with the work of Marx. Whilst I acknowledge that mine is also an interpretation of their work; in the spirit of social constructionism, the work need not be bound by one sole interpretation of each philosophy; this would suggest there is one truth, which lends itself to positivism. What I do argue is that Marx would not call himself a Marxist and that Foucault may well have baulked at the thought of being Foucauldian. Their understandings in producing a critique of history are social constructs; products of their time, shaped by contemporary phenomena during their production and borne of a specific set of economic, political, and social contexts. It is important to also note that the readings of Marx and Foucault are academic readings in their application to the thesis, rather than readings from a partisan political position. This helps to shift away from more militant readings which have historically served to marginalise Marx and Foucault from one and another.

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It is my view that Marx and Foucault can be complementary, rather than contradictory of one and another if minor transformations take place. This does not mean changing the position of the source material but using the work of Foucault and Marx to extend the theoretical ideas of one and another.

To do this, I draw on the work of Balibar (2015), who denotes ways in which Marx and Foucault can be drawn together. The first is meta-theory (Balibar, 2015), which entails uniting Marx and Foucault under the same underlying theory, in this case, critical realism. Much rhetoric on welfare was situated around material changes due to the economic recession. Disregarding the importance of this could make it difficult to critique the material effects that welfare reform has. In bringing together Foucault and Marx, this is allayed by introducing a critical realist ontology with the view that whilst things are socially constructed, 'real', material things also exist, such as the economy. If there is nothing 'real' in the world outside of discourse, then an explicitly political agenda becomes difficult in the thesis, as the material effect of changes to benefit provision cannot be envisioned fully.

This is not to argue that Marx or Foucault are in themselves critical realists, but that introducing critical realism to their philosophies allows for a transformation to take place wherein Marx and Foucault can begin to compromise, particularly at points where there is a distinct parallel in terms of their chosen ontologies. Furthermore, this does not mean dramatically amending the source material of either theorist, but that both truths can exist simultaneously.

This is a viable approach given that the works of Foucault and Marx in themselves are not indistinct from critical realism, nor are they incompatible with such an approach. This is because both approaches already acknowledge both social constructionism and the role of realism; such as Marx, who recognises the importance of a critical account of

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history as well as a more determinist view on power, as well as Foucault's notion of 'discourse', which opens up room to consider that which is within language, but also that which is beyond it. Whilst both theorists attend to accounts of history and power in a critical sense, they also attend to the role of materialism and the structure of society. Whilst Foucault and Marx may attend to these issues in different ways, drawing upon different analytical concepts, for example when understanding power, it nonetheless remains that they address concerns of critical realism at their core.

Thus, introducing critical realism means that there is an acknowledgment that phenomena can be thought of as both social constructs and 'real' simultaneously. This might be, for example, recognising emotion as a biological response or change in response to some stimulus, but also that these biological changes may entail very different feelings or experiences in terms of wider social constructs. An example of this may mean recognising that emotions are not only biological changes, but also conceptualising emotions in terms of 'affect', meaning that emotions are not only biological, but also experiential and political and therefore productive in the context of discourse (i.e. Ahmed, 2004) where emotions 'do things' in their socio-political context.

As discussed further below, this critical realist approach not only entails compromise, but also a practice of borrowing. The thesis draws on Foucault's understanding of the subjectification of people and discursive power, using Marx's work as an extension to Foucault's work to understand how the economic shaped and produced material and extra-discursive effects. To do so, I drew upon Balibar's (2015) work regarding the notion of articulation. This meant that I borrowed from the work of Marx and Foucault in a way that informs and transforms the work of each, for example, using a discursive notion like subject positioning in a way that is informed by Marx's understanding of capitalist political economies, looking at how subjects are positioned and position themselves relative to capitalism.

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Concerning articulation, Foucault could explain the **'how'** of phenomena; gauging how certain discourses shape subjectivities and reproduce practice in regard to knowledge, for example how discursive power produces certain ideas which come to govern the lives of others. Marx then offered the necessary **'why'**, which meant exploring material and economic circumstances, such as the capitalist political economy and the dogma of productivity which shapes knowledge, where notions of neoliberalism can be drawn upon to understand how people are governed. This means considering the role that economic systems play in shaping discourse. For example, when considering the 'scrounger' discourse, one can explore not only the subjectivities it produces, such as idleness, but further comprehend why a lack of productivity or unemployment, along with the perceived success of the economy, are so important to society, given they are always at stake in such discourse.

Throughout the following sub-sections (5.3.2-5.3.6), I further build an argument as to why introducing critical realism need not mean dramatically amending the work of either Marx or Foucault. In these sub-sections, I consider and operationalise the practices of borrowing and compromise which informed the methodological and theoretical framework, with specific regard for the important theoretical ideas that shaped the methodology produced.

5.3.2 Producing Discourse: The Role of Power and Economy

Nonetheless, the differences in Foucault and Marx's conceptualisation of power should not be ignored. Marx understood power as being finite, only held in the hands of one group at a time (Marx, 1990[1867]). Power, for Marx, largely consists of ideas about class conflict, domination, and economic power – such as forces of production. Foucault, however, believed that power is limitless, existing everywhere, in many different forms, for example through dominance, biopower or self-governance. The crux of these

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arguments is that Foucault believed power needed to be transformed to effect change, whilst Marx argued it needed to be taken from the powerful (Marx and Engels, 1965[1848]).

Whilst Foucault did lend credence to Marx's (1990[1867]) suggestion that power is used to exploit populations, Foucault (1977) believed it to be far more complex than this; power is not simply held in the hands of one system or individual for Foucault, but is fluid, occurring everywhere. If Marx's suggestion is taken on face value, it is difficult to identify who exactly holds the power that is being used to exploit others and then in turn who this power should be taken from - Marx was arguably somewhat vague on this point.

Rather than simply concluding that Marx was wrong, Foucault can offer Marx something of a resolution, where Foucault's (1980) understanding of knowledge can be used to extend Marx's ideas. If knowledge is thought of as being the very property that the ruling classes have domain over, then how the ruling classes govern and disseminate knowledge, from which they benefit, can be considered. By extension, it can be understood how this may be used to exploit, oppress, and marginalise populations.

Knowledge is then a commodity, which is produced and reproduced through power relationships. Dominant discourses come to be hegemonic and naturalised when one truth prevails over others. This struggle over truth, rather than being held in the hands of the ruling classes alone, is instead struggled and competed over by everyone. If power is struggled over by everyone, then the act of taking power away is unnecessary – it simply needs to be transformed where certain knowledges become hegemonic. This means that power is not removed completely, but that it can be shifted in response to an imbalance of power through deconstruction and resistance.

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Though Foucault (1980) discussed the power/knowledge dichotomy extensively, allowing for an understanding of how contemporary power functions, he was relatively muted on its outward, explicitly political, material effects. By retaining some of Marx's economistic assumptions of power noted in *Capital* (1867/1990), knowledge can be viewed as a commodity which hegemonic systems of power may exploit, a materialist lens on power can be adopted and used to extend and transform Foucault's understanding of power.

Thus, knowledge, and therein truth, is a commodity to be monopolised. This still occurs within a capillary network, keeping in line with Foucauldian ideas, revealing a complex network of institutions who work together or against one another in a bid to disseminate dominant ideas and knowledges. Whilst Foucault (1980) allows for the acknowledgement of discursive power in this monopolisation of truth, his work cannot fully address why productivity is so important to contemporary discourses. Foucault is well equipped to explore how discourse becomes naturalised but is less concerned with the 'why' of discourse, instead, taking interest in how it functions. This is exemplified in *Society Must Be Defended* (Foucault, 2003[1975-1976]) where Foucault states that when looking at madness, he was not concerned with how people were excluded, but the techniques of their exclusion. Thus, at this point in his career trajectory, Foucault was not strictly concerned with systems outside of institutions, but how power operated solely within the specific institution.

Thus, it is necessary to draw on Marx alongside Foucault's (1977; 1980) understanding of the function of power to consider how certain subject positions are produced and reproduced in the contemporary era. This also shifts towards questioning why class is relevant to neoliberal and capitalist philosophies by focusing down on Marx's (1990[1867]) understanding of the place of labour in society. This theoretical synthesis further asks why such philosophies are so important to the economy, how they shape dominant discourse on the valued role of work in society, how they have become

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dominant and normalised, and the material effects they have. By emphasising neoliberalism and capitalism, Foucault's ideas are transformed in a way which allows for an investigation of the knowledges that are shaped by the economy, how power relationships work to produce and reproduce such systems, how people are positioned in regard to such economic philosophies and the discourses this produces.

In the context of the thesis, the focus is on specific forms of knowledge which act as vehicles for discourse. This includes knowledges of paternalism, productivity, employment, consumerism, disability, and late-stage capitalism. With this knowledge, comes power in governing the lives of subjects. Nonetheless, this system bears similarities to economic processes as truth shares links with capital:

> *To summarize all this, let's say that money is linked to power as simulacrum'*
> *(Foucault, 2013[1970-1971]: 141-42).*

Truth is produced through hegemonic systems that are capitalist by character, where knowledges are constantly competed over by the powerful. It can then be considered how the capitalist mode of production oppresses, exploits, and excludes people with disabilities whilst shaping knowledge around the positions they should take up within it, which are informed by economic concerns. This consequently shapes discourse as the social obligations to be productive or engage in labour shift and change.

Marx (1959[1932]) argues that the dramatic pace of capitalism meant that as property was bought up, a large mass of people was expected to take up waged labour. Those deemed unemployable, ill-equipped for labour or burdensome were cast asunder to pauperdom or institutionalised. Introducing this reading means not only casting a careful eye when exploring how work is constructed in the contemporary era, but also considering when, how, and why this knowledge changes, for example, the increased

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emphasis on work in political rhetoric around benefits following the economic crisis. This critical, deconstructive lens on work makes good use of the more determinist aspects of Marx's writings.

In contemporary rhetoric, there has been a noticeable reification of Marx's labour reserve army (1990[1867]), where there is a minimum expectation for many to take up waged labour and participate in the capitalist political economy. Due to the economic downturn, the labour reserve army was absorbed back into the workforce as obligations shifted. As discussed in Chapter Two, changes to welfare provision meant that many who were previously entitled to lifelong support were declared fit for work and expected to take up employment.

In the UK, this has occurred amidst discourse on the economic and political situation of the 'disabled', which in the contemporary era has come to focus upon the importance of responsibilities and obligations ahead of rights, diminishing what citizenship is available to people with disabilities (Dorn and Keirns, 2010). A discourse of work as social obligation makes available discourses that are situated within the capitalist political economy, uniting Marx and Foucault in a contemporary context, where capitalism is an economic system that serves to produce truths and therefore discourse.

What Foucault and Marx do agree on, is that this power is veiled and does not always occur on a conscious level. This means power needs to be shifted and transformed to bring about resistance:

> *…The Communists fight for the attainment of the immediate aims, for the enforcement of the momentary interests of the working class… the right to take up a critical position in regard to phases and illusions traditionally handed down from the great Revolution…Working Men of All Countries, Unite! (Marx and Engels, 1965[1848]).*

> *[Foucault]…It's not a matter of emancipating truth from every system of power (which would be a chimera, for truth is already power) but of detaching the power of truth from the forms of hegemony, social, economic and cultural, within which it operates at the present time (Chomsky and Foucault, 2006[1961]: 171).*

In drawing Foucault and Marx's ideas on power together, I relate power to notions which are of central importance to the thesis: knowledge and truth. This is because within every discourse, whether in political rhetoric, historical understandings, or media representations, there is always a 'truth' presented. These truths represent the production of valued knowledges.

I argue that uniting Foucault and Marx offers a resolution to accusations of Foucault's apolitical approach (Zamora and Behrent, 2016). Without this Marxist lens on power, the material effects of neoliberalism cannot be acknowledged. If Foucault alone were drawn upon to build a discursive method, there would be little room to consider the extra-discursive. This means a pluralistic method of analysis is necessary to consider these extra-discursive, material elements. It would be problematic to imagine that discourse which describes what is good for people in the context of the benefits system, such as sanctions, cannot be material. This is particularly relevant given that such discourse is shaped by late-stage capitalism, a key tenant of which is neoliberalism. There needs to be a way to address these philosophies with a stronger sense of materialism when understanding how the economy shaped discourses on benefit claiming:

> *The simple idea is that the policy process, far from being a rational weighing up of alternatives, is driven by powerful socio-economic forces that set the agenda, structure decision-makers choices, constrain implementation and ensure that the interests of the most powerful (or of the system as a whole) determines the outputs and the outcomes of the political system (John, 1992: 92).*

Nonetheless, Foucault favoured the importance of subjectivity over economic power, arguing that practices of governance produce social inequalities (Senellart, 2009). Marx (1990[1867]) however, considered the economy to be the sole practice which governs

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social order. This dilemma can be resolved. I offer that as Foucault considers in *The Will to Know* (Foucault, 2013[1970-1971]), the economy is an institution and money a symbol, so by extension, they are part of a power relationship, hinged upon dominant truths, marking a point of entry for a Marxist reading of discursive power.

What Foucault and Marx did share, is the grounding of knowledge as being historically and socially situated, asking how knowledge is mobilised. Whilst Marx can give light to how knowledge may be shaped by the economy, Foucault allows consideration for how this knowledge is taken up in discourse; how it comes to function as true, how it transforms discourse into practice and how it impacts those positioned in regard to it. Marx offers an understanding of how this knowledge has come about, allowing Foucault to consider its social function and its discursive power. Marx further allows insight into the growing trend of nationalist discourse around the welfare system (Fuchs, 2016), such as discourses which emphasise the economic interests of the nation, particularly when positioning people with disabilities regarding their productive value.

Marx and Foucault engaged with a historical critique of power, albeit in different ways. The role of power was nonetheless important for both Marx and Foucault. Importantly, neither Marx nor Foucault stipulated a prescriptive method of such a critique, allowing for a consideration of the productive relationship between economic forces, the material, and the discursive when deconstructing work as a power relationship which entails economic and social systems, positions, and obligations.

5.3.3 Discursively Studying Productivity

Angermuller (2018) argues that many Marxist theorists have restricted discussion of the modes of production, particularly capitalism, to the industrial sector. However, in contemporary rhetoric, discourse on work and what this means for people is still
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relevant, even when it is invoked outside the immediate workplace. Discourse on work has become an important cornerstone of contemporary rhetoric on benefits. For example, the current benefits system always positions people in regard to the workplace, with a view of positioning people ever closer to it. The practices associated with claiming benefits, for example, meetings with work coaches, encourage claimants to position themselves, even if imagined, in the workplace.

Thus, there is a strong rationale for the inclusion of Marxist notions of productivity and capitalism, given the relationship between oneself and one's work is always apparent, whether conscious or subconscious, if you want to work or not, whether you can find good work and if you can work. This is something that Marx may not have necessarily considered, given that it is concerned with the function of discourse, specifically subject positioning.

Together, Marx and Foucault offer the potential to deconstruct the very notion of work. Foucault can resist the naturalisation of work and labour, offering an understanding of how knowledge on work produces certain discourses. Nonetheless, Foucault cannot quite conceptualise why work has become so dogmatic and hegemonic in contemporary society, though this is something Marx can offer him. Foucault can consider the social role of work in how it positions people, but there needs to be a way to consider the economic role that labour fulfils in society and how people are implicated in these broader systems of power.

For Marx (1990[1867]), labour was not about personal salvation or an inherent part of human nature, but something people reluctantly engage with to meet basic needs like food and shelter. To give credence to a critical psychological framework, it was necessary to deconstruct the value placed on work within contemporary political rhetoric to understand how subjects become marginalised and alienated. Drawing on Marx helped
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to further extend and engage with such an agenda, exploring how subjects are governed to meet prevailing expectations of productivity.

In reading Foucault from Marx, work can be considered in regard to contemporary rhetoric; as a socially acceptable, moral necessity for resolving the national debt. Marx does not simply deconstruct work but enacts a complete upheaval of its place in society. In doing so, work is read as a set of ideas and knowledges – where the work of Foucault can be applied, not simply to deconstruct and challenge, but to rethink and rebuild the idea of work.

Angermuller (2018) further argues that whenever talk and text are mobilised, so is the social world, wherein through language, the value of ideas expressed are evaluated along with subject positions, identities, and roles. It is here that Foucault's focus on discourse becomes increasingly useful to Marx. Constructions of disability are hinged upon valued knowledges of work in the context of the benefits system, where the capitalist political economy plays an important role when reinforcing discourses of productivity and consumerism.

5.3.4 Critical Psychology & The Subject

Whilst Foucault and Marx may not have considered the roles of the economy and power in the same way, their emphasis on a struggle over truth reinvigorates the need to consider the relevance of subjectivity, the subject, and what this means for a critical psychological framework.

In approaching Marx and Foucault's conceptualisation of the subject, the contemporary political economy needs to be considered to understand what is meant where 'truth' is

discussed. In his critique of humanism in '*The Order of Things*', Foucault (2002b[1966]) proclaimed the death of man, espousing that the natural sciences meant man has become both the object and product of knowledge. Foucault's work unpacked how the subject becomes naturalised in discourse and the role that science plays within this, echoing concerns that Marx had about psychology. This element of truth is important because in theorising how a revolution might come about, Marx and Engels (1965[1848]) elicit a reach for an alternative truth, where workers need to become consciously aware of their oppression to resist it.

This means that truth must be destabilised from the hegemonic systems that produce it. This closely resembles some of the issue taken with mainstream psychology by critical psychologists such as Parker (1992), who find a lack of socio-political consideration to be problematic, at risk of it being used to exploit, oppress, and maintain the status quo. When the nuances of context are rendered invisible, and laws are provided by science for every scenario, where a truth can be provided for everything, then subjectivity and the subject become lost. However, it must be considered that when dominant truths are rendered visible and detached from hegemony, they can be conceived with regard to the relationship that positivism has with the interests of capitalist political economies. When positivist laws are used to describe the human condition, these may be transformed into a benchmark which lays out the terms of the social and economic obligations that are ascribed to people, presented as true and natural.

Foucault does not strictly acknowledge the allegiance between capitalism and science, something which Marx (1990[1867]) was all too wary of, particularly in his rejection of psychology. The focus of the thesis is upon people as products of knowledge, situated in a capitalist society. Care is therefore taken to explore the allegiances that mainstream psychology may have with capitalism in upholding the status quo, addressing the concerns that Marx had. This is done with an acute self-awareness of the situated

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context of the research. My view is that the discourses that position people are produced in response to capitalist society. By aligning firmly with a critical psychological approach, some of Marx's concerns about the role of psychology are alleviated.

Thus, in understanding the relationship between discourse and the capitalist political economy, Foucault and Marx can be united under the banner of critical psychology[10]. I acknowledge that the work of Foucault and Marx are already inherently critical, given that they challenge systems in society and provide a critique of history. A critical psychological approach has been emphasised in the thesis as the work of either theorist does not always fall neatly within psychology, and at times may be at odds with it.

Marx (1990[1867]) took issue with psychology's tendency to individualise and divorce people from important socio-historical contexts. However, critical psychology may be closer to aligning with Marxism than mainstream psychology has been. Critical psychology has the potential to engage with, highlight and critique the systems functioning outside of psychology, but also within it:

> *Critical psychology could itself become another commodity in the academic marketplace or it could make those conditions its own object of study so that it analyses them from a position that will also change them (Parker, 2009: 86).*

If a critical psychological framework is drawn upon to question the allegiance between the natural sciences, positivist assumptions and capitalism, then a return to the subject may be possible. This involves engaging with an alternative psychology, which rejects positivist definitions of man which decentre the subject.

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[10] Further to this, my view is that Marx may well still have been somewhat apprehensive about this idea, but that directly acknowledging the role of capitalism would alleviate some of the concerns about mainstream psychology.

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Foucault's (1988) 'technologies of the self' considers not only the characteristically coercive and direct sovereignty of power but also the subtle, non-coercive dominance that is produced through strategies of power, which are characteristic of neoliberalism. Halpern (1991) argues that Marx can offer Foucault:

> …A model for how theoretical discourse can absorb a genealogical narrative without simply fragmenting (Halpern, 1991: 13).

In terms of producing a consistent genealogical narrative that does not become fragmented, Marx can extend Foucault's ideas about the subject by locating it within a specific historical context. Furthermore, Marx can transform Foucault's method, theorising about the transitions between historical periods (Halpern, 1991). This Marxist narrative can explore how 'regimes of power come to replace each other' (Halpern, 1991: 12). This means exploring truth as something which is constantly in flux, rather than occurring naturally, seemingly out of nowhere. This could mean, for example, exploring late-stage capitalism and conceptualising neoliberalism not as something that occurs naturally alongside capitalist political economies, but neoliberalism as an assemblage of knowledges that have come to be with time. By understanding both how and where discourse happens and changes, an understanding of how and where to change discourse for the better at these liminal points is made possible.

This gives a Foucauldian method the capability, through Marx, to capture and theorise about when and how discourse changes or transforms, exploring liminal periods of change to understand what a focus on the potential for resistance can contribute to the study of discourse. By drawing on this idea to inform the methodology, the subject is transformed from a passive user of discourse to a consistently active participant within it, where liminal spaces can be thought of as spaces for potential resistance.

This is particularly apparent when considering that Foucault did not propose a prescriptive method, nor did Marx. Any suggestion of a Foucauldian and Marxist methodology is ultimately an imagination, an interpretation, a reading of what many of Foucault's abstract discussions and an application of Marx's notions of political economy may look like in practice. There is always considerable space for subjectivity, application, and interpretation.

5.3.5 Foucault, Marx, and Neoliberalism

Nonetheless, Foucault has been criticised as having produced apolitical analyses of power. For example, Zamora and Behrent (2016) argue that when Foucault explored neoliberalism, he was less concerned with critiquing it and more concerned with making it intelligible as a practice of governmentality. However, such critiques have been somewhat unfairly levelled at Foucault, who later shifted his emphasis towards the role of the subject and subjectivity, particularly in regard to '*technologies of the self*':

> *[P]erhaps I've insisted too much on the technology of domination and power. I am more and more interested in the interaction between oneself and others and in the technologies of individual domination, the history of how an individual acts upon himself [sic], in the technology of self (Foucault, 1988; 19).*

Foucault returned to the subject in *Technologies of the Self* (1988), where he envisioned how the subject positions themselves in regard to wider systems and institutions. Foucault began to suggest that people are not only governed or dominated, but also govern themselves. This marks the entry of neoliberal discourse and the material impact that the economy, in shaping discourse, may have on subjects. Therefore, with the addition of Marx, Foucault's work can be argued to be about the market construction of politics and in turn, how this functions to govern bodies. Though rendering neoliberalism intelligible may not traditionally be conceived as a political act, deconstructing and

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making visible its implications for people certainly is, as it challenges the hegemony of power as it is known. Furthermore, although Foucault does not explicitly align with the left in producing such arguments, it does not mean that they cannot be useful to the left.

5.3.6 Materialism & Biopower

In Capital, Marx (1990[1867]) argues that whilst he is concerned with the abstraction of the laws which govern capitalist political economies, he is more concerned with how they vary, arguing that every historical period has laws of its own. For example, each time Capital was published in a different place, Marx emphasised the importance of its situated context, for example, the context of the Industrial Revolution in the UK. Marx was well aware that capitalism exists in many different forms. Thus, Marx allows considerable room for the role of subjectivity, insofar that he specifically acknowledged this, despite often aligning himself with ideas from the natural sciences, such as universal laws and objective reality.

This acknowledgement of the role of subjectivity, as well as the changing ways in which people are governed, brings Marx's (1990[1867]) ideas about historical materialism surprisingly close to those of Foucault's (2002a[1969]), where there are laws, but these are historically dependent – the exploration of which is relevant to both Foucault and Marx in providing a critique of history. This critique of history can be used to inform analyses of biopower, understanding the material, ideological and physical governance of bodies, informed by contemporary knowledges, as well as ideological governance, informed by discourse.

Furthermore, 20th century Marxists began to reconceptualise Marx's early notions of the economic base, arguing that whilst yes, social, political, and legal systems (the superstructure) are conditioned and affected by the economy, they also began to argue
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that the superstructure conditions and effects the economy. Therefore, modern Marxism suggests a parallel with Foucault (1980), where power is thought of as functioning in a capillary way. Whilst Foucault famously remarked that "*Marxism exists in nineteenth century thought like a fish in water: that is, it is unable to breathe anywhere else"* (Foucault 2002b[1966]*: 285),* there certainly remains the capacity to consider how the work of Foucault and Marx can be brought together to transform one another, rather than slotting them together in an atomised way.

Biopower represents one of the most fruitful ways of bringing Foucault and Marx together in a politically informed way. Introducing the notion of biopower makes good use of Marx's determinism by locating the role of power within specific systems which have defined laws and are 'real' or 'material'– such as in the economy. The economy can be considered in terms of biopower because capitalist political economies deploy practices like neoliberalism to govern bodies, in the hope of making them more productive. Foucault's understanding of biopower drew extensively on the work of Marx, given how Foucault reflected upon a compliant and productive labour force whose behaviours are governed carefully through biopower (Miller, 2010).

In the contemporary context, practices of entry and exclusion to the labour force represent an example of biopower, where the modern welfare system judges whether a person has the physical or mental ability and therefore a societal obligation to take up work. In describing the governance of workers in terms of biopower, there are implicit suggestions of the role that neoliberal discourse plays, focused on the success of the free-market and the responsibility of workers to allow themselves to be governed towards efficiency.

As Miller notes, when Foucault spoke of power, he not only considered that the economy plays a role in subject positioning and discourse but specifically acknowledged the

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relevance of capitalist systems. However, the references made to such theoretical ideas by Foucault are only available in his posthumously published and later works (i.e. Foucault (2003[1975-1976]), which as a consequence are speculative and fragmented. Foucault's more political works may then often be disregarded and overlooked in scholarship because they are incomplete.

Scholars such as Williams (1980) began to argue that there has been a shift, where people started to look at these power relationships as being more complex than previously thought in earlier Marxist readings. This represents a re-evaluation of the deterministic aspects of Marx's work, which Foucault took issue with, presenting a relationship between the base (economy) and the superstructure (social, political, and legal systems), which is far more dynamic and capillary than previously conceived. Subject positions are then not only produced by discursive power but also produced by economic relations in society which shape discourse.

Thus, the economic shapes discourse, but it also produces it, for example, when the governance of people is underpinned by the value placed on the free-market, discursive and non-discursive effects are produced.

5.3.7 Application of Wider Theoretical Resources

Given that the Foucauldian and Marxist discursive method discussed throughout this chapter is hinged upon a practice of borrowing and extension, there was room in the thesis to make further use of this practice in order to extend the points made in the analyses. Therefore, because this practice of borrowing means extending the work of Foucault and Marx in regard to one and another, there was room to do this when

introducing wider theoretical ideas. In chapter seven, the analysis also draws on the notion of affect when applying the Foucauldian and Marxist discursive method, considering the work of theorists such as Ahmed (2004). In chapter nine, the analysis extends the discursive approach discussed throughout this chapter by drawing on posthuman ideas (i.e. Braidotti, 2013; Kurzweil, 2005) and wider theory around consumerism, for example in regard to affect (Fromm, 2002[1955]) and ideas about subjugated knowledges in popular culture (i.e. Halberstam, 2011).

5.4 Summary

In this chapter, I outlined the main theoretical tenants of producing a discursive method that is informed by critical psychology and the work of Foucault and Marx. The key message of the chapter is that Foucault and Marx do have the potential to be brought together because they share concerns about power, neoliberalism, and materialism. To study each of these, a transformation needs to take place. In some cases, this means a compromise must be made, for example where Marx and Foucault view power differently, though can agree that power is an issue of truth, and therefore knowledge. In other cases, Marx and Foucault are used to extend, or borrow from each other, for example, where Marx transforms Foucault's theories on governmentality by framing it within biopower; specifically, biopower in terms of the governance of people within discourses of market rationality.

In Chapter Six, I overview the methodology for the first empirical study. I also discuss how the methodology was informed by the theoretical concerns discussed above.

6. Chapter Six: First Empirical Study

6.1 Overview

The first empirical study involved a discursive analysis of a corpus of newspaper articles. This discursive analysis drew upon principles of the work of Marx and Foucault.

The research aims were:

To discursively explore how newspapers represent mental health and distress in regard to claiming benefits.

To explore how newspapers position subjects in regard to neoliberal practices and the capitalist political economy.

6.2 Newspaper Representations

The 2008 economic recession threatened the financial stability of newspaper establishments, prompting debates about the future of traditional print media. Nonetheless, newspapers have adapted well to the changing face of the cybersphere amidst threats to press freedom due to the Leveson Inquiry, which saw *The News of the World* close. Regardless, multi-million-pound investments and acquisitions of newspaper institutions continue to thrive, speaking volumes to a continued faith in the future of newspapers.

Newspapers continue to represent a unique medium through which information is constructed and reconstructed so that the public can participate in the consumption of

politics, whilst also promising to inform, entertain, challenge, and hold the powerful to account. Rather than being silenced, the growing trend of social media use meant that newspapers have found new ways to sustain themselves, driving millions of social media interactions daily, for example, comment sections on articles and the ability to share and discuss articles across social media platforms.

Despite threats to press freedom, newspapers continue to serve a unique function in holding the powerful to account, demonstrating a continued need for investigative journalism. In 2011, *The Times* (2011) revealed the Rotherham child sex exploitation scandal, exposing a culture of bullying, sexism, the silencing of whistle-blowers, and systemic failures within South Yorkshire Police. In sum, the media plays an important role in society because it has the potential to report on previously accepted truths.

Nonetheless, given its reach and influence, the media also has the potential to construct and 'naturalise' truth (Curran and Seaton, 2003). I argue that press freedom has an important function in society and censorship is not the answer, however with this freedom, must also be accountability, particularly given that as discussed in 4.3, the media has often served to naturalise misguided and misconceived assumptions of mental distress and disability. These normative, taken-for-granted assumptions can be deconstructed by analysing print media in its social context (Altheide and Schneider, 2013). I therefore chose to examine newspaper articles to explore how the media represents people with mental health difficulties who claim benefits and how subjects are positioned in regard to neoliberal practices and the capitalist political economy.

6.3 Data Collection & Sampling

6.3.1 Initial Scoping of Relevant News Media

I initially used Google Trends to explore if and when there had been a marked change in rhetoric. The search terms were 'Work Capability Assessment', Mental Health Suicide', 'Scrounger' and 'Benefits Cheat'. These search terms were based on rhetoric in newspaper reporting around benefit claiming in regard to people with mental health difficulties. I began the research journey under the impression that discourse on welfare began to shift shortly after the economic recession, however, this was not the case.
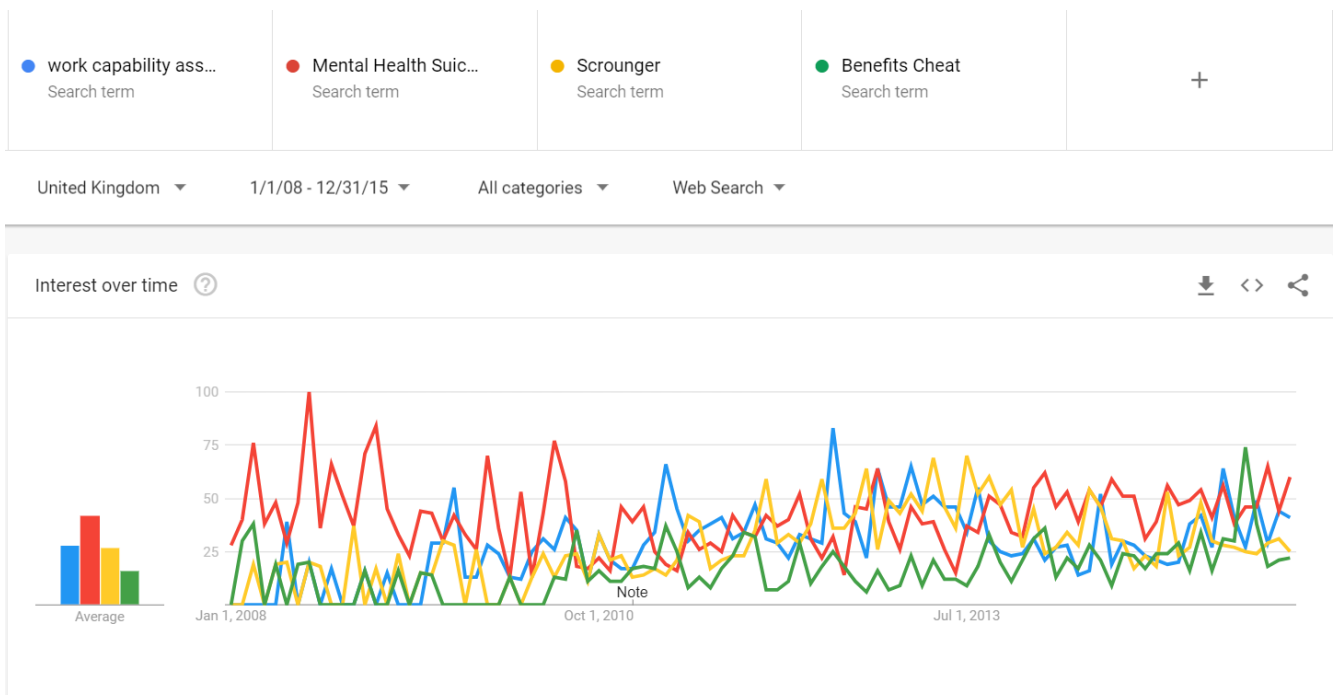
Figure 2*: **Google Trends Search***

Whilst mental health suicide[12] permeated public discourse in 2008, discussion of the benefits system in regard to mental health occurred far more strongly in late 2010. Notably, as the reporting on the reinvigorated Work Capability Assessment rose, so did searches for the term 'scrounger'. This informed my rationale for focusing on media coverage in the period 2010-2015.

This period was particularly controversial, given that it featured the 2012 Olympics and Paralympics, which were sponsored by ATOS, as well as the 2012 Welfare Reform Act. This period was one of a marked change in political rhetoric around disability and claiming benefits (Briant, Watson and Philo, 2011).

6.3.2 Sampling of Articles for Analysis

To allow scope for a wide range of subject positions, partisan positions, and acknowledgement of the implications these may have for subjectivity, I chose to analyse four newspapers which have the highest readerships in the UK and varying political positions. These were *The Daily Mail, The Sun, The Daily Mirror,* and *The Guardian*[13].

6.3.2.1 Inclusion Criteria

To ensure that my search did not reflect expectations of how I might anticipate the data to look, great care was taken in formulating the search terms I used to procure articles from ProQuest. A Boolean search[14] was formulated. This featured neutral terminologies,

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[12] There is a notable peak for this search term in the figure above – my suspicion is that in part this relates to reporting about Heath Ledger's death throughout 2008, rather than being about the benefits system.

[13] Daily Mail (Middle Market/Right Leaning, The Sun (Tabloid, Right-Leaning), The Daily Mirror (Tabloid, Left/Centre-Left), The Guardian (Broadsheet, Centre-Left).

[14] The Boolean search on ProQuest was: *(Mental Distress OR Mental Illness OR mental Health OR Mentally Ill OR Suicide OR Mental Health Problem OR Mental Health Issue OR Psychiatric) AND*

such as 'mental health', negative terminology, such as 'scrounger', colloquialisms, such as 'dole' and medicalised terminology, such as 'psychiatric'. The rationale for a range of search terms was to reflect the wide range of terminology and subject positions drawn on by each newspaper, avoiding the omission of important variations and distinctions, such as terms like 'handout' and 'benefits'. The time frame for articles collected was January 2010 to December 2015.

6.3.2.2 Exclusion Criteria

Before the first read-through of the articles, those that were irrelevant and unrelated to the topic were removed based upon the headline of the newspaper, for example in instances where terms such as 'benefits' and 'provision' represented something different to the topic at hand[15]. I made this process more efficient by downloading a spreadsheet which listed all article headlines. I could then remove irrelevant articles from both my spreadsheet and the search results in ProQuest. I could then download full-text copies of all relevant articles from my search.

The remaining bulk of the corpus was submitted to an initial read-through, allowing for the further removal of articles which were not relevant to the topic at hand, for example, articles often referred to mental health, but not benefit provision.

Around 70 articles remained after this process, leaving a corpus which would be unmanageable and inappropriate for a qualitative project, given the media analysis constituted one of two empirical studies. Nonetheless, it was important to ensure that

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(Unemployment OR Benefits OR Claimant OR Work Capability Assessment OR Benefit Fraud OR Scrounger OR Handout OR Taxpayer OR Welfare OR Dole)

[15] For example, one omitted article referred to the 'mental health benefits' of the changing position of Saturn.

the sampling process did not become unnecessarily restrictive. Therefore, to address the issue as to how to sample further, I returned to the research questions and aims.

As the work is focused upon representation, articles which did not strictly meet this description could also be omitted. This included removing many of the lengthy Sunday interviews and commentaries, leaving a remaining corpus of 43 articles which were broadly defined as constituting news by each newspaper. This also meant that many of the lengthy articles, such as those in *The Guardian,* were omitted.

During this process, the contested nature of what constitutes 'news' became both important and intriguing; articles which were categorised as being 'news' remained in the corpus. For example, many articles in the corpus positioned subjects around a discourse of truth-telling, as sensational, and of public interest. The categorisation of these articles as 'news' provided an excellent opportunity to explore regimes of truth.

The term 'news' is derived from the plural of 'new', implying the provision of noteworthy, factual information of public interest. Some articles in the corpus relayed individualised cases of fraud, offered an emotively worded 'verdict' on a recent suicide, or were strongly worded opinion pieces on the benefits system. I found it odd that such pieces were nonetheless termed as news, though I was mindful that categorising them as such was purposefully done in the belief that they were in the public interest. Similarly, in some instances, stories about claiming benefits were broadly discussed in regard to discourses of mental health or entailed discussions of distress, but a diagnosis was either refuted, avoided or made less visible. I decided to include these articles, where relevant, in the final corpus, as I felt they may have important implications for subjectivity.

6.4 Analytical Approach

6.4.1 Developing a Discursive Framework

My methodological framework draws upon the analytical steps and theoretical insights offered by Parker (1992) and is inspired broadly by the structure of Willig's (2008) method. Whilst I acknowledge that Willig does draw upon Parker's method of FDA, I synthesise the benefits of both methods, whilst bearing the nuances of the research questions in mind.

Whilst Parker (1992) offers a useful base for a discourse method informed by Marxist principles, Willig offers an accessible template which maintains a focus on the important discursive functions of texts, ensuring the voice of the subject was not lost. The template is accessible because it focuses on the key, necessary features which constitute a Foucauldian discursive analysis, i.e. subjectivity, discourses and discursive constructions. Because Willig (2008) has designed the method in such a manner, it opens up the possibility of making theoretical additions to the method, without neglecting the important nuances that constitute a discursive analysis.

I wanted here to not only draw upon Parker and Willig's accounts of a Foucauldian method but also utilise a Marxist lens to emphasise the material. This followed the structure of Willig's (2008) work, with the addition of interpretations from Parker's (1992) method, as this allowed a useful base from which to begin looking from a Marxist perspective.

This meant drawing on the work of Parker beyond the method detailed in *Discourse Dynamics* (1992), considering how some of Parker's Marxist work could then be drawn

upon in developing a wider discursive framework that explored Marxist and materialist elements that were necessary to answer the research questions, but not available in Willig's method alone. I found Parker's *Critical Psychology in Revolutionary Marxism* (2015) particularly useful in shifting the analysis towards a specific critique of capitalist society and by extension, the systems, institutions and structures that thrive within it.

I also drew upon Parker's (1992; 2015) work to adapt Willig's (2008) template to create a decidedly more 'power heavy' method that considered power to be multifaceted; it is disciplinary, capillary and one of governance and dominance, but it is also economic. I argue that it is more 'power heavy' because Willig's original method opens up opportunities to focus on discourse and what talk does but does not place particular emphasis on drawing out Foucauldian concepts like biopower and dispositif. In creating a method that refocuses the emphasis on such concepts, I wanted to design a method that considered power in a decidedly more political manner than what Willig's (2008) method was able to facilitate.

6.4.2 Introducing Materialism

In the context of the thesis, the study of materialism should be taken to mean an exploration of the material circumstances and physical relationships that constitute the governance of human life and society. I take the position that material circumstance, such as the economy, disability, work, and poverty, play a significant role in human social development and should be considered in analyses of power because they are in themselves issues of power. I further take a critical realist stance, arguing that there are 'objective' or 'real' elements of human life which play a role in social development and change, but they are simultaneously discursive. For example, poverty may be a physical state of existence or work may be something one takes up, but they are also social

constructs which produce discourses, such as 'scrounger' and the 'can't work, won't work' dichotomy.

Therefore, when I speak of power, I speak of it not only in terms of governance and discourse but also of economic power. My rationale for this stance is how economic concerns were privileged in rhetoric on the benefits system. These economic concerns not only shaped the benefits system into what it is today but also produced subjectivities which benefit claimants were expected to take up, for example, an emphasis on productive potential.

Thus, emphasising the role of power allowed a way through which to explore and disentangle the systems, practices and structures which are pertinent to a contextually sensitive study of discourse that is mindful of economic systems. When defining discourse, Henriques et al (1984) draw on the work of Foucault to argue that discourse is:

> …inscribed in relation to other practices of production of discourse,' and thus each discourse is entwined…'an intricate web' of discursive and material practices (Henriques et al., 1984: 106).

Given that the thesis is contextualised by contemporary rhetoric on claiming benefits, I created a method which could allow for a focus on the economic, given that rhetoric about being productive, claiming benefits, and taking up work was contextualised by the economic crisis and used to rationalise how people who claim benefits are governed.

This further created space to look at the ideological and the material within capitalist societies, with particular regard to neoliberalism and consumerism, given that they are intrinsically economic. Though these may typically be conceived to be non-discursive, neoliberalism and consumerism were nonetheless framed in the methodological framework as having implications for discourse and by extension how people are

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positioned, for example in regard to specific institutions, systems, and practices. This is because neoliberalism can be argued to be extra-discursive. After all, it is a material phenomenon which produces discursive struggles. One example could include the relationship between medicalised discourse and how benefit-related practices govern people in response to neoliberalism, drawing upon ableist discourses on the physical subjectification and governance of bodies when considering an individual's capability for work.

Thus, my focus on Parker's (1992) work meant looking at not only power but productive power, which is simultaneously material, ideological and discursive. This meant looking at discourses which were dominant and prevailing as well as those which were not visible, such as resistance, as much of the research is tasked with the upheaval of naturalised assumptions in moving towards resistance, encouraging the production of alternative knowledges and subjectivities. Further to this, I wanted to consider how the economy may shape discourse and how discourse might have material effects, as this would open up spaces to explore how people have been positioned. This is important for a critically driven study of discourse. Neoliberalism and paternalism are not simply value-free practices of power; they are inextricably economic.

6.5 Methodological Framework

The following principles outlined in the methodological framework are not prescriptive or intended to be done in chronological order, but instead reflect a framework consisting of various important theoretical ideas which informed the analyses in this study and the second study outlined in chapter eight. Rather than being prescriptive, the analytical points outlined below should be used to give the analysis direction and nuance, enabling the analyst to read from both a Marxist and Foucauldian framework simultaneously.

It is worth noting that along with not being prescriptive, the methodological principles below need not be done in a specified order. In designing the analytical method, whilst I did emphasise discourses, discursive constructions and positionings first and foremost, subsequent methodological points were designed with the intention of being thought provoking, of introducing new insights, and of creating new knowledge. This meant, therefore, that some sense of going back and forth is possible and is certainly encouraged. For example, looking at one methodological principle, such as ideas about the situated context of capitalism, might introduce new insights about the subject positions being made available in the text, because the data is being looked at through different lenses. The table below provides a brief overview of the methodological principles I discuss in this section.

Methodological principle	Methodological sub-principle	Key Theoretical Concerns
Discourses	None	Truths
Discursive Constructions	None	Biopower, Self-governance, Disability, Productivity
Action Orientation	None	Macro and Micro level analyses
Positioning (Subject Positions)	Alienation	Exploitation, Productivity, Individualism
	The Labour Theory of Value	The power relationship between the worker and capitalism
	Relations of Production	The power relationship between the subject and relevant institutions
	Forces of Production	Relationship between subjects and social obligations like productivity
Capitalist Political Economy and Consumerism	None	Consumerism, Biopower Productivity and Knowledges of normative participation
Practice	None	Institutions, Governmentality, Disciplinary Power and Power Systems
Materialism/Historical Materialism	None	Extra-discursive, Non-Discursive, Dispositif, Materialism, Genealogy
Subjectivity	None	Negotiation, Resistance, Deconstruction

Figure 3: Table of Methodological Principles

The above steps explore the key concerns for a Foucauldian and Marxist analysis of discourse. In the first instance, the key tenants of conducting an analysis are explored in terms of discourses, discursive constructions, action orientation, positioning, practice and subjectivity as offered by Willig (2008). Interwoven within a focus on these key discursive ideas is a focus on systems, practices and institutions, something which is emphasised in the work of Parker (1992). The idea for these introductions to the

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analytical framework is to emphasise the role of power, particularly with regard to systems and institutions and the power they deploy – something that is certainly of relevance to the study of the benefits system and related institutions that people within it may be governed by.

The notion of 'materialism/historical materialism' has been added in order to add nuance to the study of discourse, exploring issues of representation, history, and that which is within and beyond discourse. Finally, there are further additions to these two theoretical perspectives on doing Foucauldian discourse analysis; 'capitalist political economy' was introduced to this method in order to explore the role of economy and discourses constructed in regard to economic ideas.

Within each of the ideas that are considered in the theoretical framework offered, there are further intricacies at play, as noted in the 'methodological sub-principles' column in figure 3 above. The reason for this is to act as a guide to the analyst, to offer which lens should be taken when exploring discourses, as well as theoretical ideas and principles which can be employed to guide this.

In the following sections (6.5.1-6.5.8), each of the methodological phases is introduced in terms of how they were put into practice and operationalised in the context of the analytical work done in the thesis.

6.5.1 Discourses

Exploring discourses meant focusing upon establishing the main 'truths' that were present in texts. I was simultaneously mindful of those which were less visible, for example, noting where a truth was available in one article but absent in similar articles

where I might have expected it. In the first instance, I read through the dataset and coded each article fully, coding where a truth was being presented in the text, noting this as a discourse. I then read through the dataset several more times, noting where a discourse that had been established reoccurred. This way, I became very familiar with the dataset. I noted my thoughts by writing comments on a Word document that contained all of the newspaper articles. This meant that I could quickly search for a discourse in the document.

The process of deciding on which discourses to write up was based upon which elements of the analysis were pertinent to and would most fully answer the research questions and produce new knowledge in the field.

6.5.2 Discursive Constructions

Each time I noted a discourse, I wrote preliminary notes about how the discourse was being constructed. I coded each discourse on a Word document using comments, and within the same comment, noted how it was being constructed. This provided a simple way of overviewing the different ways a discourse was being constructed because I could use the search function for each discourse within a Word document. I followed a similar process for all subsequent steps, noting each time which discourse the code referred to, adding more extensive notes and reflective thoughts to another document which I could refer back to.

When exploring the discourses identified, discursive constructions introduced theoretical insights from both a Foucauldian and a Marxist lens. The Foucauldian element considered how discourses were constructed in regard to power, in particular, how economic power and biopower were used to construct discourses.

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The Marxist lens considered discourses of disability and productivity and how they are constructed in regard to work. This meant that when looking at how discourses were constructed, I particularly emphasised the roles that the capitalist political economy and consumerism were playing.

In this step, there were four lenses in action: a Foucauldian lens, a Marxist lens, a Foucauldian lens on Marxist interpretation and a Marxist lens on Foucauldian interpretation. I had originally conducted a Foucauldian discourse analysis before introducing Marxism to the work, therefore I read from this original Foucauldian analysis through the Marxist lens discussed above, before repeating this process once more, applying each lens individually and then in unison in a systematic way. This was done in the articles in all instances where I had noted a discourse. The subsequent steps in this subsection were explored in a systemic way, where I looked at each for a discourse at a time, rather than, for example, across the whole dataset.

6.5.3 Action Orientation

Action orientation explored how discursive 'truths' were achieved in texts. Texts were discursively examined on two levels. Firstly, this included a macro approach to the analysis of discourse, informed by the Foucauldian principles of the theoretical framework. This meant asking questions about how discourses related to wider power relationships, institutions, practices, and structures.

I further incorporated a Loughborough-style analysis (i.e. Edwards and Potter, 1992) to engage with the finer detail of texts. In the media analysis, this included asking questions about what was achieved in terms of discourses when journalistic decisions

were made, for example using the phrase 'scrounger' instead of 'benefit claimant'. I made these insights at points of interest, for example, where issues of representation were at stake. This allowed insight into the production of different representations of benefit claiming and by extension, how different subject positions were evoked. In the focus groups, this approach focused on how participants made use of certain vocabularies to position others and further to this, negotiate and resist subject positions themselves.

6.5.4 Positioning

In the context of the thesis, subject positioning was viewed as having a different function in each empirical phase of the work. This is because, in the context of the thesis, subject positionings are viewed as the vehicles for discourse – they are what makes discourse happen in the sense that they 'do' something. Therefore, subject positions are productive, because they achieve things in discourse, and by extension are inseparable from power. Viewing positioning through a Foucauldian lens on power also means adopting the idea that subject positionings are multifaceted and capillary, but most importantly, that they are productive. I therefore took this view when exploring subject positionings, applying this idea in different ways in the two empirical phases of the thesis; subject positions are viewed as something that can be passively given and taken up in a relatively static way, but also something that can be refused, resisted and redeployed. This is explained in more depth below.

In the media analysis, the focus on positioning related to more traditional conceptions, looking at how the person was being represented relative to the text, or discourse at hand. This view on positioning largely focused upon its passive usage, given that subjects were typically not active users, but had positions given or ascribed to them.

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However, at points, the analysis does explore instances where subjects noted common benefit-related subject positions or discourses on mental health and negotiated them.

On the other hand, in the second empirical study, subject positioning was viewed to be a more fluid and dynamic process that involved active participation. It was therefore approached with the view that participants, like the subjects in the media analysis, may well take-up subject positionings, but may also negotiate these, actively resist them, view their own positioning from the view of another party, as well as making use of subject positionings themselves, in the role of focus group participant.

In 'positioning', I considered how subjects were positioned in regard to discourses, power relationships, structures, and systems. In the context of the thesis, subject positioning refers to how subjects are described, attributed to, and represented relative to discourses, institutions and power relationships.

Positioning was informed by the discursive constructions that had already been noted. Therefore, when coding, I indicated examples of positioning where I had noted the discourses and constructions as a means to streamline the coding process. This made it easier to return to the analysis later as it was coded as a coherent narrative. If the codes for these were lengthy narratives, I would write these notes on a separate document, indicating exactly where in the complete dataset I could reference my discussions to.

Positioning drew upon Marxist and Foucauldian theories. To address both Foucault and Marx's ideas fully and demonstrate what Marx can contribute to the study of discourse, I developed four lenses when exploring subject positioning. These lenses were explored in the corpus where relevant; in following the set of methodological principles, the following methodological ideas were held in mind throughout the process of analysis and applied

where they related to relevant discourses and positionings, for example those which pertained to ideas of productivity and work. These lenses are detailed below.

6.5.4.1 Alienation

Alienation explored how subjects were positioned in regard to perceived feelings of powerlessness and distance that are produced through valued knowledges, drawing on the work of Marx (1959[1932]). To explore alienation, I looked in particular at discourses and constructions that evoked ideas about inequality, feelings of loss, distance, and exploitation. Therefore, alienation was operationalised in terms of ideas which represent the phenomena. This is because alienation, in the Marxist sense, was unlikely to have been expressed in such terms in the newspaper articles or focus groups.

I therefore explored positions that were akin to alienation, in particular, how work and society were constructed by participants in the focus groups and how they positioned themselves relative to discourses that were representative of alienation. These ideas were located in regard to wider systems and relationships that a subject is engaged in, for example if there were tensions around certain discourses, I would look at the relationships wrapped up in this discourse, or the systems that played a role within them, thinking about the subject as a position relative to these.

The following analytical ideas (6.5.4.2-6.5.4.4) introduce Marxist ideas to positioning, in particular, considering valued knowledges and the representation of how subjects negotiate or are positioned relative to the wider constellation of systems, structures and relationships that are introduced, where these ideas are made available and reinforced. In summary, the focus here is upon the construction, negotiation and take-up of ideas relative to the political economy, that are constructed as natural and dominant.

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6.5.4.2 The Labour Theory of Value

This step was informed by Marx's (1990[1867]) *Labour Theory of Value.* This lens was used to explore how subjects were positioned in regard to work and consumerism. For example, I focused on the social expectations and knowledges that were used to construct value, how subjects are positioned within such knowledges, and how these are reinforced.

This meant specifically looking at how normalcy was being constructed on a large scale, thinking about how subjects were represented when taking up, or failing to take-up naturalised and normalised positions. These ideas largely related to participating in capitalism and the positioning of subjects relative to discourse on the economy.

6.5.4.3 Relations of Production

The relationship of capitalism to the worker was important here, consisting of positions which refer to the specific power relationships between subject, employment, and the benefits system. Subject positionings related to relations of production were operationalised by exploring the subject relative to the systems they were being positioned towards, positions they negotiate, or position themselves in regard to in the wider context of neoliberalism, for example, ideas about productivity and employment with specific regard for power relationships and institutions.

6.5.4.4 Forces of production

How people position themselves in regard to notions of productivity was considered here, such as the expectation to be in work. This entailed looking at relevant discourses of productivity, for example, considering where subjects were located in discourses about

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being valuable or productive, and therefore the subject positions this makes available. This theoretical phase was operationalised by looking in particular at the power relationships which subjects were positioned within and their relationship with wider systems, for example where discourses of productivity and related subject positions were being reinforced by systems and related practices.

6.5.5 Capitalist Political Economy and Consumerism

I also considered notions of productivity in reference to neoliberalism, for example how certain discourses are privileged and respond to neoliberal concerns by drawing on the Marxist theories discussed above. There is a further focus on the construction of the roles which subjects are expected to take-up within the contemporary political context, which I scaffolded upon the previous step (positioning) and used to inform analyses of discursive practices which govern the take-up of such roles in the capitalist political economy.

The point of this empirical insight was to look at the subject positions that were being produced relative to late-stage capitalism, for example, taking subject positions around claiming benefits and looking at how these were represented relative to late-stage capitalism. This step therefore served a second function; not only did it link insights to the situated context, but was also a practice of deconstruction, encouraging me to look at subject positions and discourses that may well be naturalised, but may also play a role within the wider political economy. This is why this methodological principle is a stand-alone phase, separate from the above steps concerns with the wider implications of capitalism.

The role of consumerism, productivity and normative participation were considered when deconstructing discourses and subject positions. There is a further genealogical element
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here, focused upon the emphasis on the value of work throughout the course of history, such as Protestant Work Ethic Discourse as a power relationship and economic philosophy, considering how the two become intertwined.

6.5.6 Practice

In 'practice' I focused on the role of institutions and how certain truths may be subverted or reinforced by and within institutions, such as power relationships. The notion of governmentality was considered here to draw out the practices which guide normative behaviour, asking questions about the construction of what good productivity looks like and how certain practices are implicated within it.

Here, I referred back to 'Capitalist Political Economy and Consumerism' to explore disciplinary power and the systems and institutions which reinforce or reconfigure it. This meant asking questions about how ideas of good productivity were being reproduced in wider power systems, for example, how institutions responded to neoliberal concerns, such as how bodies were being regulated.

I further drew upon biopower to ground these practices firmly within the neoliberal order by considering the construction of how economic interests were being served when people are governed towards what are constructed as ideal behaviours. This meant looking in particular at how certain practices respond to economic interests, for example those of neoliberalism, i.e. the individual and the personal in the realm of market rationality.

6.5.7 Materialism/Historical Materialism

The aim of 'Materialism/ Historical Materialism' was to consider the extra and non-discursive, such as the practices and positionings which have a material impact on subjects. This step meant that I intentionally went beyond the data where relevant, for example using photographs and captions from articles to illustrate the discourses made available beyond the text in the article itself. This was because the discourses produced beyond the text offered insight into further naturalised truths in articles, for example, looking at poverty as material as well as ideological and discursive.

This step recognises the importance of the role of discourse in constructing 'truth' and the positions that subjects are in turn expected to take-up. It considers material effects in terms of biopower, looking at how power governs bodies and dispositif, looking at the devices that make this appear true, or natural[16] with regard to Foucauldian philosophy, whilst also allowing for a Marxist consideration of economic forces which galvanise such discourses. The intent of this was to focus upon material consequences, such as the alienating effect on subjects, or attending to emotion and affect in talk and text.

6.5.8 Subjectivity

This step brings together previous steps to deconstruct naturalised assumptions and dominant discourses. In the media analysis, the moral, social, and economic value placed within dominant discourses is deconstructed, exploring alternative and subjugated discourses to address the matter of subjectivity. Opportunities to explore

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[16] Dispositif refers what is known about a phenomenon and the network of power systems, relationships, structures, practices and institutions (the discursive) and knowledges (the non-discursive), which make what is known, normalised and naturalised available. In part, the full extent of the definition is lost in English translations of Foucault's work and is better captured in the original French explanation.

contradictions and opportunities for resistance within a critical psychological framework were emphasised here. I also focused upon the negotiation of subject positions to an extent, by drawing upon how the newspaper articles made use of and represented quotes from claimants. In the focus groups, subjectivity was addressed by considering the take-up, negotiation, use of and resistance of subject positions.

6.6 Application of the Methodological Framework: First Empirical Study

By working through the methodological framework and principles discussed throughout this chapter, the importance of shame in newspaper representations of mental illness in relation to claiming benefits became apparent. Therefore, a decision was taken to centre the analysis around shame in particular. For example, by focusing on the role of positioning, I explored the varied function of shame, such as something that one can position themselves as (i.e. ashamed), but also something that someone can be positioned as by others (i.e. shameful), particularly if shame is something that the subject does not take up willingly (i.e. unashamed).

Therefore, in applying the methodological framework, my focus was upon the many varied ways that this shame was being constructed in newspapers and the subjectivities that are made available. In order to further draw these ideas out, there is an emphasis on action orientation in this chapter. This focus entailed exploring the different subjectivities that were made available in terms of language, for example the decision to use a more pejorative term over a medicalised or formal term. The reasoning for this is that unlike, for example, conversational talk, the language used in newspapers is pre-emptive and carefully crafted, shaped by journalistic flair and careful considerations over wording.

In order to create chapter seven, I drew upon the methodological framework to attend to the role of shame in newspaper representations on people with mental health difficulties in claim benefits. In doing so, I attend to the role of shame by further drawing upon the work of theorists such as Ahmed (2004) and Gilbert (1997;2003) to understand the place of shame in contemporary capitalist society. This is done as an extension to the methodological approach outlined in this chapter.

In terms of systems and institutions, I consider how shame was deployed and practiced by systems and institutions and in turn, how this responds to neoliberal ideas. In terms of positioning, the focus in this empirical chapter is largely upon subject positions as passive, where they are ascribed to subjects or made available. The focus is passive here because in the majority of newspaper articles subjects did not have the opportunity to negotiate or resist subject positions, given that they are largely being spoken about, rather than spoken to. Thus, the Marxist interpretations I offer with regard to positioning explores the subject relative to the text and the wider systems, institutions and ideologies that are evoked by the author of the text, such as normative ideas about the subject's role in society and the obligations they are expected to take up.

Finally, I consider the role of subjectivity in two distinct ways; firstly, I offer a critical account of the discourses and positions offered throughout, recognising the implications that the 'natural' presentation of such ideas may have for subjectivity. Secondly, where a subject is active to an extent, for example, where they are quoted in an article, I consider their account where possible in terms of negotiation, though only so far as the discourses evoked in the newspaper article, for example, a subject actively negotiating the 'scrounger' position.

7. Chapter Seven: First Empirical Study: Analysis

The following chapter takes the methodological principles discussed above and applies them to the analysis of newspaper articles, exploring how newspapers represent and position people with mental health difficulties who claim benefits and in turn, how these discourses relate to the capitalist political economy and respond to neoliberal concerns. In this chapter, I explore the representation of shame and shamed positions and how these are deployed by the media in reference to class.

7.1 Shame, Tragedy and the Neoliberal Ideal

7.1.1 Introduction: The Political Function of Shame

In the media analysis, people were positioned as feeling shame but also as shamed, shameful, unashamed, and shameless. Shame is not only felt in material, embodied terms as a self-conscious emotion, but is done to people. Shame was understood to be both a noun and a verb; people felt shame but were also criticised for a perceived lack of shame and consequently repositioned back towards it. In its verb form, this represents a practice of shaming. Shame is located within a power relationship; it is everywhere and done by everyone.

The exploration of shame allows insight into how the stigma around claiming benefits is constructed and how shaming practices relate to neoliberal concerns, of which people with mental health difficulties find themselves positioned within.

Shame is affective and embodied, but also has a political, discursive function. Consequently, shame has a stake in power relationships given how it makes available

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normative, dominant, and accepted subjectivities. Shame is a disciplinary practice which

dictates the consequences of falling outside of these norms. Shame is drawn upon here

to demonstrate how attending to the affective, the material and the extra-discursive can

enrich the study of discourse by considering these elements as representational

practices, situated within the wider political economy, whilst giving attention to what

power can do (Blackman and Venn, 2010).

In *Affective Economies*, Ahmed argues that emotions are not solely experienced but are

productive within capitalist political economies:

> *…emotions play a crucial role in the "surfacing" of individual and collective bodies through the way in which emotions circulate between bodies and signs. Such an argument clearly challenges any assumption that emotions are a private matter, that they simply belong to individuals, or even that they come from within and then move outward toward others….emotions are not simply "within" or "without" but…create the very effect of the surfaces or boundaries of bodies and worlds...In such affective economies, emotions do things, and they align individuals with communities—or bodily space with social space—through the very intensity of their attachments (2004: 118-120).*

For example, shame may serve to marginalise, exclude, or defragment the self (Gilbert,

2003). Further drawing upon evolutionary psychology, Gilbert (1997) argues that

humans have an innate desire to be seen as socially attractive by others. Although

evolutionary psychology tends to lean towards what may be conceived as essentialist

assumptions, Gilbert (1997) offers shame as a ubiquitous, universal phenomenon, a

concern that humans have historically tried to defend the self from within social

interactions. Gilbert (1997) further offers a snapshot of the complex interdiscursivity of

shame, which includes affective experiences of feeling:

> *Disgraced, devalued, demoted, dishonoured, degraded, discredited, humiliated, ridiculed, shunned, ostracized and scorned (113).*

Furthermore, Nathanson (1987) notes that shame has many faces. Shame is multifaceted, never acting alone, but brings with it a complex repertoire of affective subject positions. Shame was considered by Cooley (1922) to be one of the most important emotions in terms of social control and conformity to social norms; in a Foucauldian sense, it is at the heart of discipline (Scheff, 1988). The discursive construction of shame is considered in this part of the analysis to consider the role of such 'affect'. This is done with regard for the discursive power of shame with reference to the wider political economy. Shame is drawn upon to highlight where the material and the discursive become intertwined with power and the subjectivities and practices this makes available.

7.1.2 Fear of Inferiority

When invoking shame, many articles drew upon colloquial, informal language. A range of terminology was drawn on to consider how language orients towards the production of shamed subjectivities.

To demonstrate this, I offer 'dole' as an example of how language is used to orient towards shamed positions and the practice of shaming. 'Dole' serves as slang, given that it is used, or perceived to be used, by specific social groups, yet is knowledge shared by most speakers of the English language. Such slang was largely drawn upon in regard to discourses of scepticism, where a diagnosis of a mental health difficulty was concerned.

The term 'dole' has many uses; the first of which is its contemporary meaning as a noun, referring to benefits for the unemployed. The second, more archaic meaning is 'dole' as a verb, in the sense of sharing out or receiving a charitable gift in meagre supply. Another variation of this is the active verb of 'on the dole', which refers to receiving benefits but also carries with it socially undesirable connotations of dependency.

In one article, the headline reads *'Dole Led to Suicide'*. Though only 63 words long, the article discusses '*a proud builder'* who took his own life because he was '*mortified*' at the prospect of claiming benefits. The article not only implies an inability to cope, rather than subjects located in distressing systems, but spends much time discussing the method of suicide in detail. Many articles which discussed suicide often signposted support for people experiencing distress. However, where shameful positionings in the benefits system were constructed, for example around language such as dole, no support was signposted, suggesting subtle positionings of inferiority, where certain discussions of suicide have more gravitas than others. In such cases, articles ended altogether differently, offering phrases such as:

> *Verdict: Suicide (Anonymous, 2010, para.1).*

In the articles, terminology such as 'handouts' was also drawn upon to shame subjects and construct them as morally inferior:

> *They weren't kidding. Since then, he has pocketed Pounds 31,500 in state handouts. Oh, and every three years they get a free car courtesy of the Motability racket (Littlejohn, 2012, para.5)*

> *Sources said around 260,000 on ESA -- about half -- who are meant to be preparing for work have mental health problems…They get handouts worth around Pounds 1.3billion a year (Woodhouse, 2014, para. 4-5).*

> *MORE than Pounds 435million of "mobility" benefits for the disabled are going to junkies, alcoholics, asthmatics and people with bad backs…the handouts of up to Pounds 49.85 a week are meant for people with "severe" walking difficulties (Wilson, 2011, para. 1-2).*

Handouts were referred to as being 'pocketed', explicitly drawing on a discourse of deservedness whilst locating subjects within a discourse of fraud. Handouts were constructed as undeserved or even stolen; such language orients readers towards benefits as being charity that is taken advantage of, rather than part of the welfare

state. Handouts were constructed as a practice of generosity borne of a farcical, broken benefits system, at the expense of begrudging taxpayers who are systemically taken advantage of by people who should be in work.

Eble (1996) argues that slang serves the discursive function of establishing the social identity of the speaker and the people they interact with. In the examples discussed above, slang served to construct subjects who claim benefits as being everything from overly dependent, to having criminal aspirations.

In the articles, slang is ascribed to an otherwise passive subject who has no opportunity for resistance and is not permitted to negotiate or participate in the construction of their identity. Given that such examples of slang are not used by the media to suggest familiarity with those they refer to or stake their claim to an in-group, there may well be a sense of irony or subtle humour at play. The use of slang establishes a higher status than that of the subject by producing positions of shame and inferiority. Thus, deviation from standard language is used to denote difference.

Furthermore, such terminology was used to construct benefit claiming as a practice undertaken by certain types of people. The quote below is taken from an article about Stephanie Bottrill, who took her own life, leaving behind a note which blamed the government for her death. The article is a defence of the welfare system under the Conservative Party, particularly of Iain Duncan Smith, and a sceptical attack on the Labour Party's outcry about Stephanie's death:

> *A constituency dependent on generous welfare **handouts** is likely to vote only in one direction (Glover, 2014, para. 23).*

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A distinct power relationship is set up where the status of the author is elevated above the subject. This use of slang produces an 'us and them' dichotomy which serves to position labour constituencies, which are largely working-class areas, as being particularly disposed to claiming benefits and well versed in being dependent upon them. Here, journalists observe a social and economic divide in society, where through othering subjects, social inequality is never challenged but is instead justified, legitimised, and naturalised. When observed without critique, inequality is constructed as normative, reframed as problems of deviance and inferiority that are largely class-based. In the corpus, informal language was used with a sense of both purposefulness and irony, creating a caricature of benefit claimants. This irony, typical of contemporary societies, has been described as irony without critique (Bewes 1997; Jameson 1998).

This sense of irony was most palpable in one article from *The Sun*, which reports a recent suicide attempt by Michael Carroll, who had previously won the lottery, spent his winnings and is now claiming benefits. Michael is positioned in a multiplicity of ways in the article:

> *…Convicted* **yob**
> *…alcoholic*
> *…weighing 20st*
> *…Former binman*
> *…The self-styled* **'King of Chavs'** *(Parker, 2011, para. 2-21).*

The article is oriented towards a character attack, drawing upon discourses of individual responsibility, morality, and criminality to remove any possibility of a sympathetic tone. These discourses are constructed in regard to classist undertones. This is a report on a man's attempt to take his own life, yet this matrix of discourses works subtly to construct Michael as inferior and amoral. The language used to describe Michael is loaded with derision, constructing the attempt on his life as laughable. A discourse of

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distress is not made available, despite the vivid images of distress and suicidality that are offered.

This irony without critique locates social inequality as an everyday problem that is personal rather than political, mocking and deriving humour from any works to resist real engagement with the otherwise serious effects of such discourse. The article is not a tale of sympathy about someone who attempted to take his own life after struggling with the pressure of his lottery win. Michael is someone to be humoured because he is constructed as amoral. Consequently, his life is devalued. Specific examples of Michael's indiscretions are emphasised; there is a selective choice to include those which can be construed as humorous and irrational:

> *He was also given an Asbo in 2005 for firing ballbearings at cars and windows from a catapult as he sat in his Mercedes…Carroll vowed to turn over a new leaf -- but in February 2006 he was jailed for nine months for running amok with a baseball bat at a Christian rock concert (Parker, 2011, para. 24-25).*

Where subjects are so negatively constructed, humour can even be derived from suicide, because it is constructed as deserved. This idea of deserved suicide is not explicitly apparent, but the humour derived from Michael, along with how he was positioned, makes this discourse of deservedness far more viable. Such use of irony holds discursive power. However, rather than being completely oppressive, such instances of disregard and disdain may work as a defence in the wider atmosphere of capitalism, where language indicative of class resentment may not be borne of a sense of superiority but a fear **of not being superior** (Nayak, 2006; Sennett and Cobb, 1972) in the competitive spaces that are opened up by capitalism.

This construction of inferiority is evidenced in the description of Michael's suicide attempt:

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> *Carroll was found hanging at his home…before he slashed his own throat four times in a separate suicide bid (Parker, 2011, para. 14).*

The language used is vivid, yet devoid of emotion or regard for Michael; he is constructed as inferior and undeserving of such sentiment. Michael is positioned as 'less than'. Constructions of inferiority and 'less than' are well-rehearsed in the literature, particularly in regard to disability and discourses of dependency (Bryan, 2004). As highlighted by Gergen (2007), this discourse of inferiority has historically played a role in assumptions about 'the defective self' (150):

> *The tendency to attribute undesirable behavior to undesirable states of the mind has a long history in Western culture - from spirit possession, to impure thoughts, to failings in moral character (Gergen, 2007: 157)*

Earlier in this section, I briefly considered the signposting of support in stories about suicide with regard to discourses of inferiority and shame. The article about Michael was no exception to this; it ends by describing the report as an 'exclusive'. Given the exposé style of the article, the author's responsibility to its audience is rendered unnecessary because the legitimacy of Michael's distress is removed. There is a sense that Michael has had a great fall and that failure is deserved because of the choices he made, making available a discourse of individual responsibility.

It is this discourse that gives insight into how the media responds to neoliberal concerns about the individual and the role this plays in late-stage capitalism. There is an emphasis on the productive value of people whilst implicitly locating dependency as problematic. One article discussed the story of a young man who took his own life after struggling to find work:

> *He isn't like some people his age, happy on the dole watching Jeremy Kyle day after day, he would have taken anything that was offered and would have been great at it (Byrne, 2014, para. 27).*

Here, 'dole' is used to invoke ideas about dependency and benefits as a lifestyle choice. This is further offered where 'Jeremy Kyle' is invoked, something which is discussed in further depth in 7.2. 'Dole' is constructed as being indicative of being workshy, idle, or lazy, an idea certainly upheld by the symbolic representation 'Jeremy Kyle' offers. Whilst 'the dole' is constructed as inherently bad, it is suggested that young people specifically are happy to be dependent, suggesting lax morality and an unwillingness to take up work, rather than inability.

One article discusses changes to the benefits system at the time when DLA was abolished and replaced with ESA. The article ends by noting that a ground-breaking new test has been developed which can identify 'genuine' back pain:

> *A CHEMICAL test to separate workers with genuine back complaints from benefits cheats will be launched next week…it should prove invaluable for employees on long-term sick leave who come under pressure to prove they are not malingering… (Walker, 2011, para. 17-18).*

The productive value of people is emphasised; it is suggested that only two subject positions are available: people with 'genuine' health conditions or benefit cheats; benefit cheat is synonymous with 'worker', suggesting that unless someone is 'genuinely' ill, they should be a 'worker', indicating a practice of shaming and a tone of scepticism.

7.1.3 The Shamed, The Unashamed and The Shameless

The benefits system was constructed as an inherently shameful system to access:

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> *Colin Mitchell, 54, was mortified at having to sign on at a JobCentre (Anonymous, 2010, para.1).*

When people were positioned towards shame, this was done with regard to their productive potential in two ways. Firstly, people are positioned in regard to shame which they take up in the form of emotional responses, where a range of terminology is drawn upon to indicate feelings of shame, such as being 'mortified' and 'humiliated'. This type of shame is constructed as being located in the individual, largely borne of dependency; it is affective and embodied.

Secondly, people were positioned as inadequately representing their shame outwardly. Here, a shamed position is transformed into positions of 'shamelessness' and being 'unashamed'. Being 'shameless' or 'unashamed', though positions located in the individual, represent a lack of shame. Shame was constructed as natural; it is a position that a person is obliged to take up when claiming benefits; it is a power relationship between the shamed and the shamer:

> *Back in 2005, Mr O'Shea and his wife Jean scooped the top prize in the EuroMillions Lottery. At the time, they promised: 'We'll never be any different, no matter how much money we have.'…Mr O'Shea, a 73-year-old retired builder, **isn't in the least bit ashamed**. 'I worked for 40 years and I'm entitled to it. I've got osteoarthritis in my legs and rheumatoid arthritis in my hands. We really only use the car to go to the shops.'…Mr O'Shea claims the maximum disability living allowance, which is meant for people who have severe difficulty moving. But that doesn't seem to have stopped him getting out and about (Littlejohn, 2012, para. 4-15).*

In the above article, the subject is described as having rejected a position of shame because of a perceived entitlement to support. This is refuted by the article's author, implying a need for the subject to feel the shame they rejected. This subject position is not solely a position of shame, but of naturalised shame, where a perceived lack of such is a moral indiscretion. It suggests that if one fails to embody and outwardly represent

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the affective experience of shame, they risk being positioned as shameless and unashamed.

This form of shame draws upon discourses of surveillance in the context of the benefits system, where subjects are further shamed for falling outside of expectations of productivity or are positioned as overly dependent. Shame is constructed as inherently bad, but something that subjects must fully take up; it is demanded that they must feel the consequences of relative powerlessness. However, being unashamed or shameless is much worse; it represents the consequences of refusing to feel shame about meeting expectations of productivity. In turn, being repositioned as unashamed or shameless represents the consequences of contravening the status quo. Positions of shamelessness and unashamed therefore function as practices of disciplinary power when subjects are repositioned in regard to them.

Furthermore, scepticism was drawn upon to position people in regard to shame, due to a lack of perceived feelings of shame which they are obligated to make visible. This reinforces and legitimises the notion that claiming benefits should be shameful. Shame is a social obligation to society for those who are constructed as 'inferior' or 'less than'. Shame and the conceptualisation of 'less than' is not only rooted in productivity but media representations of mental illness more generally:

> *The mentally ill on television are disenfranchised, not a part of the usual fabric of home and work. Such portrayals can only add to the public's tendency to view the mentally ill as a special, distinct and probably inferior, class of people. (Wahl and Roth, 1982:605).*

There is a further expectation that people with mental health difficulties should position themselves as feeling adequately ashamed because they claim benefits, this is evident

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where people are deemed to have contravened a dominant assumption of claiming benefits as being shameful, particularly when a diagnosis is drawn into question.

> *…Too "depressed" to work, living it up in Magaluf (Parker, 2014, para. 5).*

> *People who depend on DLA are already stigmatised by this Government and parts of the media and are worried sick that their benefits will be cut, so this woman's outrageous behaviour will only make the situation worse…I also think that someone suffering from severe depression would not be able to go on holiday, I know I certainly couldn't (Parker, 2014, para. 3).*

Therefore, when subjects are positioned in regard to shame, this is underpinned by a discourse of productivity, given that dependency is constructed as a source of shame, yet to be positioned more favourably in regard to dependency, it must be performed adequately and visibly. This is wrapped up in naturalised assumptions of what mental illness looks like, how it should be performed, and the ability for mental illness to be gazed upon:

> *White Dee is making a mockery of her depressive illness while enjoying the life of Riley and swilling down champagne in Magaluf (Parker, 2014, para. 4).*

Whilst the quotes from the following article were reader's comments, the article in question was categorised as news. A decision was taken to include the article in the corpus because it was classified as news and retained elements of journalistic flair. Although this reader's comments article was an exception to the rest of the corpus, much of the corpus did feature similar articles which functioned to shame a specific individual. This demonstrates the importance of this obligation to feel shame. A perceived inability or unwillingness to do so renders the private lives of the unashamed newsworthy.

This second example of shame is further constructed in regard to the performance of mental distress, where people are positioned as performing mental illness in a non-normative manner. This shaming serves to other benefit claimants who are deemed not to be performing mental illness as is societally expected – in this instance, going on holiday. In the article, people who identify themselves as having a mental illness and claiming benefits are aware of culturally available stereotypes, assumptions, and misconceptions about benefit claimants, such as high levels of fraud in the benefits system. They recognise that such stereotypes leave people who claim benefits and people with mental illnesses at risk of exploitation by the media and the state, yet these stereotypes and assumptions are so dominant and hegemonic, they continue to be drawn upon to position subjects:

> *Most of us are working our fingers to the bone just to make ends meet and we still can't even afford a holiday in the UK…Dee gives all people on benefits a bad name because the public naturally resents seeing her living the high life while she is supposed to be too depressed to work (Parker, 2014, para.1).*

Within the above quote, it is implied that people with depression should behave a certain way. When subjects attempt to resist being positioned in regard to dependency and the resulting shame that is present in public discourse, they are immediately repositioned back, through local power relations. Thus, whilst knowledges of shame are partly produced by the capitalist economy in regard to assumptions of dependency as problematic, they are also produced in regard to naturalised assumptions of mental illness, which suggest that mental illness should, in both social and economic terms, prevent a person from living a fulfilling life.

7. 1.3.1 Individualisation and Shame

7. 1.3.2 The Tragic Hero

The notion of mental illness as a barrier to living a fulfilling life is further underpinned by discourses around disability, where media portrayals represent people with disabilities as:

> *…pathetic victims of some appalling tragedy or as superheroes struggling to overcome a tremendous burden (Oliver, 1996:61).*

When subjects were positioned in regard to shame in the articles, they were also often positioned in regard to tragedy. Tragedy and dramatic irony were so emphasised that the representation of subjects echoed Shakespearean tragic heroes.

In his tragedies, Shakespeare drew upon the work of Aristotle to create his tragic heroes. Tragic heroes are generally good people who possess certain traits that eventually bring about their downfall. For Romeo, it is his impulsivity, for Hamlet, his indecisiveness and procrastination, whilst Macbeth eventually succumbs to ambition. These traits are usually obvious to the audience, whilst the character himself is blind to it, at least until the penultimate moments in his story before the impending tragedy. Such protagonists serve multiple purposes as the story plays out; their blindness to reality and destiny invokes fear and anxiety in the audience, then the protagonists' eventual realisation has a cathartic effect – it purges the audience of the heightened emotions they have experienced. For Shakespeare, whilst tragic heroes often served as moral tales through example, he always offered them a chance at redemption and consequently, the audience's sympathies.

Like Shakespearian tragic heroes, the protagonists in the 'tragedies' reported in the media were predominantly male. In the following two sub-sections, the focus will be

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upon two articles in the corpus which explored the suicides of two young men named Martin and Colin, who struggled to find work. Although there were further examples of individualisation, shame, blame and responsibility in articles which took this tragic tone, the majority of these were often constructed as short, objective news reports which offered a verdict that focused upon older men in regard to gender roles. Though these were interesting, the stories of Martin and Colin were far richer and extensive, given that the regimes of truth and discourses that were drawn upon were expanded upon much further.

In the corpus, young men were positioned in regard to this notion of tragic heroes. One such example is Martin, who took his own life whilst struggling to find work:

> *Young men in particular tend to act or react impulsively to life's events. The way of trying to come to terms with life's events is talking it through - even if you do not realise it at the time (Byrne, 2014, para. 34).*

Whilst Martin was positioned in regard to a discourse of sympathy concerning his plight, it is suggested that it is not difficulties accessing work, exclusion from the labour force, nor the wider political economy that caused Martin significant distress, but his inability to cope with 'life's events'. This inability to cope is construed as being a product of being both young and male. Like Shakespearean tragic heroes, there is a resolution to a problem that is rendered vividly obvious to the audience that young men like Martin are represented as being blind to and blinkered from.

The wider context of unemployment and its material effects are negated in favour of locating problems within Martin. Consequently, by referring to unemployment as *'life's events'*, they are normalised; construed as inevitable consequences of the current system. Nobody is made accountable and nothing is challenged, other than Martin. Yet

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Martin is also simultaneously positioned as tragic and lacking self-reliance for failing to ask for help.

7.1.3.3 Asking for Too Much

A lack in the self is identified as being a fatal flaw, however, excess was also constructed as a flaw that brings about tragedy:

> *Martin was the kind of guy who was industrious but too proud to tell us if anything was wrong. "On the day he died his mum gave him money for the bus home and instead he walked the five miles home and saved it for something important. That was the kind of boy he was - hardworking and with so much potential." Mr O'Gorman said that despite being unable to find work, Martin never claimed a penny in benefits (Byrne, 2014, para. 11-13).*

The excess offered above is that of being 'too proud' to discuss distress. Not claiming benefits is celebrated as the rejection of a shameful position but also a source of pride. Furthermore, Martin is constructed in regard to the neoliberal ideal, positioned as being readily available to be productive, collegial and of good heart. References to frugality echo the Protestant Work Ethic Discourse (Weber, 1958) and suggest that the reinforcement of shame is wrapped up in ideas about productivity, given that Martin avoids this shame because he is constructed as having productive traits. These 'traits' are used in the article as evidence that Martin did not have a mental illness. Language of distress is avoided, instead, Martin is positioned as:

> *…Demoralised*
> *…Frustrated*
> *…Fed Up (Byrne, 2014, para. 3-29).*

Whilst it would be problematic to suggest Martin was experiencing mental illness, given that it was not mentioned, the point of interest here is that Martin's desire to find work

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and to be generally productive is constructed as evidence that he did not have a mental illness. The language used does not evoke notions of distress, but offers the representation of self-conscious emotion, locating a perceived inability to cope in the individual, who allows themselves to feel such a way, lacking self-governance. Colin was constructed similarly:

> *An apprentice plasterer by profession…found himself struggling to get steady employment…He kept busy in between the times when work did come up…From a very early age it was easy to establish that he had a big heart. We moved here when he was a toddler and got involved with our neighbours, who were very elderly. He couldn't do enough for them, always making sure that their needs were taken care of. He was brilliant at organising stuff - organising a party or sorting out a way home for himself and his friends. He was very much involved in the community…be it a homecoming for a team, dancers, footballers, you name it, he did it. He excelled. That was the kind of lad he was…That's one thing we are sure of, he wasn't depressed. When he wasn't working he was helping out here. He would do the dinner and tidy up or put out the washing (Fegan, 2011, para. 18-20).*

Good work for Colin meant steady, permanent labour. Consequently, Colin is constructed as asking for too much. Whilst neoliberalism tasks itself with the stability of the economic market, it takes little concern with the emotional, psychological, and financial stability of subjects. Colin is not constructed as struggling because of an inaccessible job market he is alienated from, but as having 'found himself struggling'. The onus of responsibility is laid upon Colin, rather than systemic problems or issues around temporary or unstable work.

Late-capitalism makes available normative subjectivities which are largely achieved by identifying deviance from them, as opposed to explicitly defining what 'normative' is. This denotes the practices which work to exclude people from the labour force, where anyone who cannot access this is construed as somehow deviant. For Colin and Martin, their deviance is constructed around allowing oneself to become distressed; failure is

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located in their inability to find fulfilment in the insecure work that has become normalised in late-stage capitalism.

Neoliberal-ableism can be drawn upon here to understand the role of 'body management' in discourse underpinned by the ableist rationalities of neoliberalism and how exclusion from these dominant ideologies produces shamed subjects. Here, shame is intertwined with failure, but also failure to accept exploitation and failure because one feels the psychological implications of the alienation this produces.

The positioning of subjects in regard to fatal flaws and self-governance is further extended from the individual to young people as a whole, as noted in the article about Colin:

> *Young people demand too much from life…They think life should be offering them more in every respect, whether it be socially or culturally. They expect more than what they are getting. There is an overdependence on Facebook, on mobile phones, on alcohol. All the kids we hear about who take their own lives are wonderful, quality youngsters who shouldn't be in a graveyard today. I suspect this is a social problem (Fegan, 2011, para. 42-43).*

Young people are positioned as feeling increasingly alienated, which is argued to be due to 'social' problems where young people are positioned as over-ambitious, unwilling to accept what they are given and as expecting more from life. Rather than challenging the distressing consequences of unemployment and alienation, the article suggests that systems in society are well equipped to help young people, yet they fail to access such help, instead, positioning themselves in regard to systems and practices that are not conducive to productivity or good mental hygiene. This is where shame responds to neoliberalism because there is a suggestion that young people, like Colin, should be grateful for the insecure and unfulfilling employment that late-stage capitalism offers them.

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Individualised discourses are produced, though are ascribed to young people as a whole, producing stereotypes which echo contemporary discourses of the 'millennial'. Young workers risk being represented as overly emotional, a burden to capitalism, and as a group who need to be carefully managed. Whilst human emotions are drawn upon, they are constructed as irrational, used to attribute a reason or explanation for a person's failure and tragic downfall.

To overcome the economic downturn and the effects of austerity, people are expected to '*make do and mend'* (Tosh, 2013: 46). The two articles discussed position Martin and Colin as unwilling to accept the status quo in demanding more, subverting the above expectation. Though this is constructed as problematic and is located in terms of tragedy, fatal flaws, blame and individual responsibility, it does offer a point of resistance. The stories discussed serendipitously represent the rejection of capitalism and a growing postmodern worldview, produced in regard to how young people construct identity in late-stage capitalism, which is gaining the attention of media establishments. Individualised discourses of responsibility and blame were further available in the corpus with regard to ideas around legitimacy and visibility. These are discussed in the following section.

7.1.4 Blame and Responsibility

7.1.4.1 'Real' Distress: Legitimacy and Visibility

Articles in the corpus drew upon discourses of dependency, mobility and criminality when constructing legitimacy, offering a regime of truth with regard to what constitutes 'real' and 'legitimate' disability:

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> *MORE than Pounds 435million of "mobility" benefits for the disabled are going to junkies, alcoholics, asthmatics and people with bad backs…To qualify for the mobility element, claimants should be "unable or virtually unable" to walk, or have no feet or legs…It can also be claimed by blind, deaf and mentally ill people who need help to walk…The cash is part of the Disability Living Allowance designed to help those with a serious disability (Wilson, 2011, para.1-9).*

A regime of truth with regard to disability is offered, where mental distress can only be qualified by a physical, visible health condition and is neither a reason for claiming benefits nor a disability when considered alone. Here, disability is simply constructed as an inability to walk. A question is offered, but left unanswered, though it's answer is implied; if a disability is not 'serious', then what is it?

The article further implies that anything contrary to 'serious disability' is wrongly awarded and consequently fraudulent, shameful, and undeserved, yet occurring on epidemic levels which should be of concern to the reader. This incites a sense of moral panic which people with mental health difficulties who claim benefits are firmly located within. The material plays a strong role in the favourable construction of subjects. A dominant model of disability is implicated, producing a medicalised regime of truth about the legitimacy of mental illness and its position relative to visible disability.

Consequently, audiences are invited to view subjects in terms of their perceived value within the social and economic relations of capitalism, but never beyond it. Unless something can be observed, such as distress, it is rendered irrelevant. Where subjects are made accountable for potentially shameful practices, a valid reason to be out of work is demanded, yet only those which fit well within dominant assumptions and regimes of truth around disability are construed as valid.

The media acted as a large-scale practice of surveillance but also functioned to encourage the wider population to take up similar practices of surveillance in regard to

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benefit claimants by reinforcing the need to be sceptical. This scepticism was not only reinforced around claiming benefits but also cast aspersions upon the material and emotional effects of having a disability in a disabling society. Again, alternative discourses were subjugated:

> …Now it is claimed -- in The Guardian, naturally -- that 'two-thirds' of disabled people have been subjected to abuse and threats of violence because of the Government's plans. Do you believe that? No, me neither (Littlejohn, 2012, para.26-27).

Martin and Colin, who were referred to in the previous section, represented a useful example of the subjugation of alternative discourses. In the case of both men, discussion of mental health is completely avoided. This could be expected, given that poor mental health may not always play a role in cases of suicide, however, mental health is only ever fully evoked in the articles when done in regard to a willingness to be productive, which is constituted as being indicative of good character and an absence of distress. As Harvey (2000) observes, capitalism defines sickness as the inability to work. However, in the articles, Colin is not positioned in regard to illness, instead, he is specifically distanced from it:

> If Colin was depressed or on medication, you might be angry and say the system failed him. But there wasn't a bother on Colin, he was a happy-go-lucky 23-year-old (Fegan, 2011, para.1).

This transforms how Colin is positioned into something all the more individual, divorced from wider systems. The systems spoke of in the article are positioned as being a benevolent force, which whilst tasked with the responsibility of the institutions within them, only become responsible for individuals when ill mental health is legitimised through diagnosis.

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The above quote implicitly suggests that to be considered legitimate, distress can only be drawn on in regard to medicalised discourses, such as diagnosis, otherwise it is construed as an individual problem or fault. This is indicative of neoliberal ideology, which involves:

> *…populist notions of individual life planning, the personalization of welfare, and a growing tendency to psychologize human problems or see them in psychological terms and negate their societal basis' (Gray et al., 2015: 370).*

Distress as a result of navigating these neoliberal systems and the resulting alienation are veiled, masked by the dogma of medicalised discourse, which reigns dominant. There is a sense that if mental illness and any consequent distress are not being treated or diagnosed, then it does not exist. Whilst neoliberalism demands an adaptive worker, it also holds workers responsible for their health. Mitchell (2014) states that:

> *…those who don't adequately maintain their bodies are held personally responsible for their descent into the chaos of ill health and non-well-being profiting from the misfortunes of another; a parasitism of privilege allowed only to those who embody the normative capacities of neoliberal identities (Mitchell 2014: 3).*

Thus, neoliberalism locates a perceived inability to govern one's health within the individual, constructing it as personal failure. Foucault took interest in the power relations which embolden this demand for self-governance. Foucault (2003[1975-1976]) suggests that governmentality constructs political knowledge which in turn entails the kind of political rationality that is drawn on. Seeking out this rationality helps to identify what practices are being made available, particularly in regard to how practices of shame are produced through discourses of productivity. In the example discussed, this rationality is important as it gives light to how discourse functions within the economic, material, and political rationalities of the free-market and the practices of individualisation and productivity which neoliberalism emboldens.

7.1.4.2 Emotional Responses to Unemployment

In many of the articles, the material, emotional, economic, and psychological effects of being unemployed were reduced to a sense of irrationality. Knowledges which suggest an inability to adapt to situations where people should otherwise be fully in control of themselves are made available. Returning to the article about Colin, the suggestion that Colin may have had depression is once again refuted. Mental illness is constructed as being visible, unlike suicidality:

> *'In many cases parents will never be able to tell if their child is suicidal,' Peter says. YOU will with depression because it shows itself in more ways than one. But …for those who are highflying, and maybe just out of a job and feeling the pressures of life, a snap decision is the only option and that can't be seen (Fegan, 2011, para. 58-59).*

Despite a vast body of literature which demonstrates the emotional impact of unemployment, as discussed in Chapter Two, depression and unemployment are represented in the articles as being mutually exclusive. Unemployment is considered in terms of being '*maybe just out of a job'*, suggesting normative assumptions where unemployment is something one should be able to adapt to, where any emotional detriment or feelings of alienation are problems of the self. Further to this, being unemployed is underemphasised, rather than represented as being problematic, it is construed as trivial, natural, and passing. This strongly conflicts with discourses of productivity where a lack of productivity produces disciplinary practices of shaming, intended to produce some emotional detriment for the shamed when failing to take up a productive role.

Rather than being an economic, emotional, or psychological problem which may be exacerbated by the dominant focus on productivity, in neoliberal philosophy, suicide is represented as something that manifests in the self, particularly a deficient self which

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cannot adapt to a changing world. As a result, the state and wider economic systems in society are not held accountable for the effects of knowledges they produce but are divorced from the phenomena of suicide in its entirety.

Though such articles are seemingly sympathetic, at least in terms of the deaths of Martin and Colin, such sentiment was detached from anything outside of how subjects negotiated entry to the labour force. It is sympathy with their deaths that is taken, rather than with their distress or the wider socio-economic context of their struggles. It is difficult to conceive that the articles discussed are constructing any real sympathy. The wider practices and context of the struggles the two young men faced are never challenged. The suggestion that their will to productivity, which when met with inaccessible systems, can have psychological and emotional effects, is an idea that is refuted and separated from the discussion of suicide. Martin and Colin then, are not necessarily positioned in regard to sympathy, and certainly not empathy, but are instead positioned in regard to a discourse of pity.

7.1.4.3 Pity and Shame

As with tragic heroes, the behaviours that ultimately bring about a protagonist's demise would be otherwise unproblematic or even a virtue in any other given context. However, for young people, in a climate of neoliberalism, otherwise positive behaviours such as ambition, frugality and willingness to work are ultimately each protagonist's downfall. There is a strong sense of contradiction within this, given that these are the very values that neoliberalism espouses, yet young men like Martin and Colin are positioned as simply asking for too much of it – this is their fatal flaw.

Whilst there is a wealth of literature on the discursive function of shame (Chase and Walker, 2012; Gilbert, 2003; Nathanson, 1987; Scheff, 1988; Walker, 2014) and pity

(Chouliaraki, 2004; Hayes and Black, 2003), there has been little consideration for the relationship between the two. In the articles, shame transforms into pity given that, as discussed previously, claiming benefits is constructed as an inherently shameful practice. However, given that when this discourse of productivity is evoked, the root causes of having to claim benefits are disregarded. Shame transforms into pity, given that there is an underpinning discourse of tragedy; its consequences in worst-case scenarios, are located in the self and construed as fatal flaws. Subjects are positioned as being victims of their actions, rather than victims of wider injustices. This is not shaming in the sense of being shameful or unashamed, but the sense of an imagined onlooker, who detachedly remarks 'that's a shame'.

To consider the relationship between shame and pity, it is necessary to draw upon discourse around disability as well as engaging with a shift towards materialism. This is important when considering the political function of pity and shame when drawn upon in discourse on people with mental health difficulties who claim benefits. In arguing this claim, I offer that shame is a multifaceted matrix of self-conscious emotions that draws upon but is not limited to, other self-conscious emotions such as guilt, pity, contempt, and disgust. Pity is focused on here because of its role in disability discourse. As Cameron (2007) argues, disabled people are often positioned as freaks or objects of pity or wonder.

Despite the avoidance of diagnosis in regard to Martin and Colin, a disability framework can be drawn upon with regard to Marx's (1990[1867]) suggestion that disability is a metaphor for the effects of capitalism – where through a lack of participation in labour, the effects of capitalism render people 'disabled'. Pity is particularly relevant to disability given that it further reinforces notions of tragedy. Marks (1999: 21) further argues that these feelings of ambivalence often sit '...*shamefully with one's position in a disabling world*'.

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Chouliaraki (2004: 190) further identifies the political function of pity:

> *Pity…is not the natural sentiment of human empathy but, rather, an historically specific and politically constituted principle for relating spectator and sufferer, with the former safely removed from the unfortunate condition of the latter.*

One example of this is the positioning of the 'troubled' subject, someone who is beset with difficulties. The use of 'troubled' acts as a euphemism for mental illness, though is also detached and distanced from it:

> *Stephanie Bottrill, 52, walked into the path of a lorry on the M6 in May last year. In a note to her son, she said: 'The only people to blame are the Government… But outside court yesterday, Miss Bottrill's brother Kevin Owens said he supports the welfare reforms. He said the incident may have been the 'catalyst' to her suicide, but that his sister had been troubled (Dolan, 2014, para.2-4).*

> *Angela's obsessive compulsive disorder meant she wrote down on paper everything that happened to her…So far, almost two industrial skips have been filled with her notes…Caption: TROUBLED Angela, who took her own life in September… (Wynne-Jones, 2015, para. 20-36)*

> *How the Left cynically exploited a troubled woman's suicide to score points on welfare (Glover, 2014, para. 1).*

Within this 'troubled' narrative, pity is veiled because subjects are infantilised and deprived of agency. Further to this, 'troubled' evokes a sense of self-governance, focusing on a person's inability to cope and failure to meet normative assumptions, whilst negating the existence of mental health difficulties. Value is constructed around the subject's 'grieveability'. This is a subtle act of shaming because within it lies an assumption about a subject's worth and value to society.

Thus, shame is drawn upon in neoliberal society to produce feelings about oneself in relation to wider society. In turn, this produces other emotional responses such as pity and guilt, which themselves have a political function within the wider remit of shame.

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These are underpinned by reinforced expectations of self-comparison that are produced in the competitive spaces opened up by capitalism, demonstrated by the journalistic tone of detached spectatorship.

Pity functions as a disciplinary practice, it produces an asymmetrical power relationship, which when articulated, identifies and positions people in regard to difference. The powerful view the relative powerless with an air of indifference. Pity produces a spectacle which gazes over human suffering that is veiled by paternalism and thus by extension, expresses contempt. People positioned in regard to pity are spectator sport, where a detached, stoic account of neoliberalism is provided at its most contradictory and most damaging, materially and emotionally. Pity is a shaming practice given that it has a stake in social attractiveness as well as the self; like shame, pity is something that is done by people when they are pitied, but also something felt relative to others, such as feeling pitied. Gilbert (2003) argues that shaming practices, such as pity, produce feelings of powerlessness and inferiority in the self, based on how the subject perceives themselves to be seen in the eyes of a perceived spectator.

7.2 Class Struggle and Classlessness

The powerlessness and inferiority produced through shame was not a value-free practice that simply contained ideas about dependency and productivity but further intersected with class. This turn towards class gives insight into how shame is deployed. The practices which are deployed when shaming is drawn upon in regard to representations of class, responses to neoliberalism and the erasure of poverty are explored in this section.

7.2.1 'Othering' the 'Other'

Poverty acts as a moral warning to the bourgeoisie about the consequences of a perceived lack of productivity when subjects are cast into wider social relations. This is insofar that such stories have been commodified by the media. Poverty is made a spectacle of for entertainment, where humour is derived through derision and cynicism. The subjects of these stories also construct their own identities as benefit claimants whilst simultaneously having their identities constructed by the media.

In the following article, Maggie and her husband share a one-bedroom flat with their six children. The article poses a question to the audience, which is indirectly addressed by Maggie; **would you give this benefits family of eight a bigger home?**

> *When you're ill and you can't work then it's not your fault. I don't think there's anything wrong with asking for a bigger house from the council in my situation (Wilson, 2013, para. 25).*

The way that discourses of deservedness and worthiness are drawn upon to construct one's own identity has considerable implications for subjectivity. For Maggie, her claiming identity is constructed parallel to the claiming identity of an 'other', drawing upon a 'deservedness' dispositif:

> *Yes, I am on benefits but I shouldn't have to be in this situation when there's people who come over to this country and they get given a house for no reason at all. I have six kids and they shouldn't have to live in a one-bedroom flat (Wilson, 2013, para. 34).*

In the above quote, Maggie positions herself as deserving of benefits. In doing so, Maggie resists assumptions of deservedness and reiterates her entitlement by emphasising the non-deservedness of an 'other' for the same welfare support. This is a

practice which those in poverty have increasingly engaged with (Chase and Walker, 2013; Garthwaite, 2014; Walker, 2014) amidst hostile media and political rhetoric (Lister, 2004).

This construction of identity functions as a form of defensive othering; a strategy used by benefit claimants to manage stigma. Such stigma is produced through a 'scrounger' discourse which is constructed in regard to ideas around productivity and the notion of the 'undeserving poor', who are seemingly unable to provide an adequate excuse for not contributing to the economy. This stigma is deflected from the othered benefit claimant and projected onto another 'other'. As such, this discourse is constantly recirculated through this defensive practice of othering, representing an everyday way through which negative discourses of benefit claiming can be resisted. In this instance, nationalist, populist discourse is drawn upon to deflect from one contemporary 'problem group' to another – in this case immigrants. Patrick (2016) notes that this practice is a form of defensive engagement with citizenship which seeks to other the less deserving.

When the otherwise 'othered' 'others', this further represents a return to individual responsibility through deflection. Maggie asserts that claiming benefits is out of her control, but is a choice made by immigrants. Again, whilst this does not indicate class in the traditional sense, it is indicative of a hierarchy in society based around the 'deservedness' of certain groups, where people in the lowest social strata are pitted against and compete with one and another for the agency and fulfilment that comes from citizenship. Dominant assumptions of citizenship are underpinned by a belief that one should be in work. For those not in work, they must compete against one and another for citizenship and protection from stigma.

One article from *The Daily Mirror* opens up such debates around a scrounger discourse, inviting its audiences to gaze upon the behaviour of White Dee, who is probably more

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infamously known as the face of the Channel Four documentary *Benefits Street* (Smith and Hull, 2014). What makes this article interesting is that *The Daily Mirror* was generally sympathetic towards benefit claimants throughout the corpus, however, this article was an exception, largely because it was the only *Daily Mirror* article where social class was made visible, drawing on signs, signifiers, representations and stereotypes around class and benefit claiming that had been made readily available by the legacy of Benefits Street. The necessity to explicitly mention class was rendered unnecessary as a shared knowledge had already been made available by the programme. The article is styled as a 'reader's comments' article, though was included in the corpus because it was categorised as 'news', where the narrative produced is shaped by journalistic flair. The article summarises the general feeling of contributions as follows:

> *White Dee from C4's Benefits Street has sparked a storm after being snapped downing champagne during a bar crawl on a free trip to Majorca party resort Magaluf. Dee, 42, gets Pounds 214 a week in benefits as she is too depressed to work. You are disgusted...(Parker, 2014, para. 10).*

The reader's comments in this article are mostly submitted by people who are also in receipt of benefits or unemployed, who expressed the non-deservedness of an 'other' in constructing their own identities as entitled and legitimate claimants. This offers that there are two parallel benefit claiming subjectivities that are available in society – the legitimately ill and rightfully deserving, and the undeserving who simply masquerade as mentally ill for monetary gain. The contributors to this article undertake a practice that is very similar to that of Maggie; they reaffirm their own claiming identity as well as the legitimacy of their diagnosis whilst dismantling, resisting, and refuting that of an undeserving other:

> *I am sure people who are genuinely sick and who have to rely on Disability Living Allowance are just as horrified and are worried about being tarred with the same brush (Parker, 2014, para. 1).*

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> *I'm unemployed and can't afford a holiday to Margate, never mind Magaluf. I hope the DWP is looking into this (Parker, 2014, para 7.).*

> *If I was so seriously depressed that I had to receive benefits, I doubt I would be able to go out my front door (Parker, 2014, para. 6).*

In positioning oneself in regard to the 'undeservedness' of an 'other', this other is positioned as 'milking the system', 'masquerading as mentally ill' or both. This othering has become a necessary local practice of biopower for benefit claimants who attempt to reclaim their citizenship in a 'hostile environment', reclaiming power by drawing on the very same rhetoric of hostility. This hostile rhetoric is underpinned by a practice of naturalised surveillance that is justified where a moral transgression is suspected.

Amidst the threat of being gazed upon in terms of their moral deviance, resistance can only be brought about by shifting stigma onto a class of people deemed to be equally, if not more undeserving, such as immigrants and people deemed to not be 'genuinely' disabled. These were strong themes in contemporary political rhetoric where large changes to the benefits system were introduced. This is not necessarily a positive act, given that it acts to the detriment of other social groups, it is a practice of everyday resistance nonetheless (Patrick, 2016). This practice also functions as a reclaiming of citizenship which fulfils the self and legitimises one's place in society in terms of dominant discourses around productivity. This reclaiming of citizenship has important implications for subjectivity as it represents a reclaiming of agency:

> *…Citizenship as participation can be seen as representing an expression of human agency in the political arena, broadly defined; citizenship as rights enables people to act as agents (Lister, 1998: 228).*

This search for citizenship may be a means to avoid alienation, given that the underpinning narrative of productivity as necessary for citizenship brings the fetishisation of work back into the fore. Thus, whilst 'othering the other' may be

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undertaken as a defence against naturalised assumptions and stigma around benefit claiming, it further functions as a disclaimer for the subject in receipt of benefits. Thus, subjects use the practice of othering to avoid alienation by explaining that claiming benefits is something which is out of their control; subjects ask the gaze to be shifted away from them, by offering society another 'other' to scrutinise instead. This other is represented as choosing to be dependent, unlike the subject. Walker (2014) further argues that an 'us and them' dichotomy operates as a practice which determines the subject's social status within the power relationship it produces.

This othering is not only defensive but is productive; it grants benefit claimants agency and citizenship where they invoke their own power relations, even when this means competing with another similarly stigmatised group or sacrificing such a group to the gaze. Chase and Walker (2013) argue that when this scrounger narrative is extended it reduces the scope for alternative narratives or a challenge to the status quo. When the othered 'others', it may grant benefits to the self, though does not offer a way through which to work towards better social cohesion. This individualism suggests that the ethos of neoliberalism underpins such a practice; competition between similarly stigmatised groups evokes the competitiveness on which capitalist society hangs its banner.

For subjects, this may well mean practising citizenship as a way to be positioned more closely to the productivity that is valued in capitalist society, given that much of the stigma around 'deservedness' tends to be constructed in regard to the individual's economic value and material contribution to society. This means drawing upon the philosophies of the dominant economic order as a defence from stigma. Yet as a consequence, this serves to reinforce its hegemony.

Psychologists Against Austerity (2015) list feelings of humiliation, shame, fear, distrust and powerlessness as 'austerity ailments', which they argue are just some of the

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damaging psychological costs of austerity. It is necessary to note that for Psychologists Against Austerity, these ailments are not borne of individuals, but of a problematic society that is marked by 'poisonous public policy', weak social cohesion and inequalities in wealth and power. Therefore, the practices of 'othering' discussed in this chapter, whilst seemingly hostile, represent a subtle attack on the pre-existing power inequalities in society because it reifies them. Those who would otherwise be 'othered' attempt to reclaim agency and security from becoming the victims of this hostility by subverting powerlessness.

This othering, whilst a defence of the self, is produced amidst the context of the capitalist political economy and austerity, where a sense of citizenship has long been constructed in regard to people successfully being productive consumers. To begin to consider how the status quo can be challenged, it is necessary to consider how the class system has transformed in the contemporary period. This allows an understanding of not only how othering practices are underpinned by economic systems and productivity, but how this defensive othering is a dominant practice that has worked so well for the bourgeoisie and has come to be taken up by those lower in the social hierarchy.

7.2.2 Compliancy and Classlessness

Cautionary tales of falling outside of the relations of production appeared frequently in the corpus. In such articles, subjects are criticised for not taking up appropriate positions in regard to production. This is a presumed failure which unemployment and accessing the welfare system have come to represent. A discourse of compliance is made available.

Overt representations of class were relatively muted, replaced by an overarching theme of compliancy to productivity and the status quo. This is most notable in the case of Stephanie Bottrill, who took her own life after struggling with the Bedroom Tax.

Stephanie left a note claiming that the government was to blame for her suicide. One

article asserted that Stephanie '*had been troubled*' whilst defending the benefits system,

ultimately silencing Stephanie's voice by claiming her case had been '*cynically exploited*'

by the left. This represents a further return to biopolitical practice where Stephanie's

body and account are managed posthumously. Stephanie is constructed as having

already been '*unstable*' to an extent, proposing that Stephanie's suicide was not a result

of her experience in the benefits system, despite her having specifically stated as much:

> *Stephanie Bottrill, 52, walked into the path of a lorry on the M6 in May last year. In a note to her son, she said: 'The only people to blame are the Government.' Understandably in the circumstances, Steven declared that the Work and Pensions Secretary, Iain Duncan Smith, had 'blood on his hands'…But did it? In the view of her brother, Kevin Owens, the prospect that the 'bedroom tax' would require her to move from her three-bedroom terrace house to a smaller bungalow -- or lose [pounds] 80 a month in housing benefit -- may have been the 'catalyst' to her suicide, but his sister had been troubled… (Dolan, 2014, para. 2-4).*

The article soon shifts away from and decentres Stephanie, moving on to discuss how

well changes to the benefits system have worked, celebrating the '*great work*' done by

Iain Duncan Smith to lure the '*indigenous long-term unemployed*' and '*habitual*

claimants' into work and off of benefits. Goodley, Lawthom and Runswick-Cole (2014a)

consider how neoliberalism enables ableism to flourish, detailing the expectation that

people should overcome the insecurities presented to them by adhering to

neoliberalism's ableist tendencies. They further draw on the work of Mitchell (2014), who

states:

> *…those who don't adequately maintain their bodies are held personally responsible for their descent into the chaos of ill health and non-well-being profiting from the misfortunes of another; a parasitism of privilege allowed only to those who embody the normative capacities of neoliberal identities. (Mitchell, 2014: 3 in Goodley, Lawthom and Runswick-Cole, 2014a).*

Thus, wrapped up within neoliberal-ableism is a suggestion that despite significant

distress, to the extent of having taken one's own life, a person is accountable for

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allowing themselves to experience mental ill-health. This is represented as something which Stephanie could have avoided, had she made the required concessions. This echoes discourses of 'resilience' that are often presented in positive psychology. In Stephanie's case, a simple resolution is offered in the article – that she should have done what is expected of her and been grateful for what she was given.

Despite shifting the responsibility for her death onto the government in her own words, this is shifted back on to Stephanie. Within this is an element of deservedness concerning her suicide; a sense that she should have done what was expected of her. Her death is constructed as a sad, yet inevitable consequence of not maintaining and working within the status quo. This presumed disregard for the status quo, was in further articles, specifically located within class assumptions because the working-classes were never constructed beyond their place within the relations of production. However, Stephanie was described in the article as a '*grandmother*', which produced a construction of classlessness. Such a positioning did not offer a good fit with contemporary, culturally accessible signifiers that the media often relies on when representing and constructing class or the benefits system, relying instead upon discourses of irrationality associated with mental health, which became intertwined with discourses of deservedness.

7.2.2.1 'Aspiration Nation'

Jones (2011) notes a right-wing argument which suggests that what might have once been considered the respectable working-classes has slowly died out, giving way to a feral underclass. This argument suggests that the feral underclass no longer exhibit the aspirational values that once characterised the working-classes, who are now instead largely unemployed and reliant upon social welfare. The underclass is constructed as being feral because they are outside of the class system. This discourse of aspiration was directly opposed in one article from the corpus:

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> *APPARENTLY we live in an "aspiration nation". A nation, according to the Chancellor, solely for those who want to "work hard and get on"…Oh really? Does the Chancellor know how hard it is to aspire when you're part of a "hard-working family" with both partners on the minimum wage? Does he get that it's hard to aspire when you do want to "work and get on", but no one gives you a break?...Does he realise it's hard to aspire when you're disabled, have a bum of a life already and then are tossed on to the unemployment heap…It's hard to aspire when a nice walk involves going via a foodbank. It's hard to aspire when you're a public sector worker, despised by this Government, and with wage rises frozen at 1% until 2016...It's hard to aspire when you're one of the 2.53 million unemployed…The Chancellor simply does not get that society isn't solely made up of people who can. Some people just can't, through no fault of their own (Phillips, 2013, para. 1-6).*

The article proposes that it is not the working classes who have changed, but that society, particularly the functioning of its economic systems and relations, have themselves become feral, hampering any chance at real aspiration. Despite the rejection of individualism in the article, aspiration is never discussed in terms of one's wishes, achievements or hopes. Aspirations were largely constructed as being those of the capitalist political economy, rather than the individual. This is reflective of the bulk of the corpus of articles. Even where this is implicitly done, aspiration is always located firmly within one's productive value to society. Contribution is only ever spoken of relative to the economy and it is strongly implied that there is nothing outside of this. Subjects are never described beyond their responsibility to participate and are only ever positioned as failing or succeeding to play a suitable role within economic relations in society. With regard to claiming benefits and contextually-situated assumptions about dependency, this argument suggests that it is not the working-classes who are being exploited, but much the opposite – that they are exploiting the dominant economic system.

The notion of hard work was strongly fetishised in the articles. People who claim benefits because of a mental health difficulty were collectively constructed as people who should be in work but make an active choice not to be, strongly distancing mental health and distress from the legitimacy of disability:

> *Sources said around 260,000 on ESA -- about half -- who are meant to be preparing for work have mental health problems…A huge number declare themselves unfit for work through depression and anxiety…These are treatable conditions (Woodhouse, 2014, para. 4-6).*

The experience of having a mental health difficulty is implicitly trivialised, whilst on the other hand, serious mental health difficulties are absent from the above article's narrative completely. It is then claimed that mental health difficulties are treatable, which negates the experience, nuances and difficulties which may come with distress, ultimately suggesting that if a mental health difficulty is treatable, the onus is on the individual to be successfully 'treated' and therefore be in work. Such arguments serve to position people with mental health difficulties in regard to a discourse of individual responsibility. This raises questions about the faith that is placed in such 'cures'. A critical stance must be taken to trouble this, asking: if a person cannot be 'cured', will society cite this as lack of ambition too?

The article offers common-sense assumptions which strongly imply that disability is underpinned by a sense of permeance that is life-limiting, which mental health difficulties fall outside of. It elicits an idea that one would hope had long been forgotten – that distress is 'all in the head'. Ultimately, being outside of disability sets up a 'can't work' and 'won't work' dichotomy, with mental health difficulties positioned in regard to the latter. As the parameters of disability change, so does the responsibility and expectation for people with mental health difficulties to be productive.

Many of the articles suggested that the working-classes lack ambition. In the article below, it is offered that mental ill-health with regard to benefit claiming produces a cyclic system that people become trapped in, but do not enable themselves to escape from, whilst others purposely stay in the system for the gains that come from experiencing distress:

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More than a third of residents don't hold even a single GCSE. Life expectancy is among the lowest in Britain…It works like this: being put on drugs such as Prozac or Doxepin is evidence of mental ill-health. Mental ill-health can qualify you for disability benefit, as of this month the Personal Independence Payment (formerly Disability Living Allowance, or DLA)…Weeks go by and then they go back to their GP, who just ups the dosage. If that doesn't work, they go back and the GP tries a different anti- depressant…In this way, six weeks becomes six months and then six years but they never get better.' And some, it seems, may never have been ill in the first place (Bracchi, North and Stewart, 2013, para.10-47).

There is an implicit suggestion within this; that the working-classes have lost sight of what capitalist society expects of them. Furthermore, the article's narrative suggests a causal effect, where mental ill health produces social inequalities. Although the economic productivity of individuals is emphasised, where they do not meet this, there is a positioning made available beyond the scrounger discourse; one of 'unknowing'. One example may include how subjects are constructed as being blinded by commodities which distract them from their responsibility to participate fully in the capitalist political economy. Medication is offered as one example of this. Here, subjects are not strictly positioned as amoral but are positioned as navigating institutions and taking up certain practices because they simply do not know any better. The way that subjects are constructed in regard to consumerism is of interest, particularly in regard to representations of class.

7.2.2.2 'Chavs': Individual Responsibility and Consumerism

The lower classes were represented in the articles as having poor levels of personal responsibility. It was further suggested that those further up in the hierarchy have an awareness of society that the lower classes do not have. One article from the corpus (Wilson, 2013) offered particularly loaded imagery, offering a distinct representation of class. It shows a cluttered house, specifically highlighting a 'large' television. This is highlighted not only as a large television but one playing '*The Jeremy Kyle Show*', as referenced in the article.

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Figure 4: Photo from The Sun (Wilson, 2013) article, captioned 'Would you give this benefits family of eight a bigger home?'

Within the focus on a large television, as discussed above, there is a further symbolic representation beyond undeserved, unknowing, and unearned consumerism – that of class, particularly concerning the representation of 'Chavs'. Shown on the television is a still of *The Jeremy Kyle Show*, described by District Judge Alan Berg as a '*human form of bear-baiting'* (Dowell, 2007) due to the deprecating way that people's private lives and problems are handled and represented. *The Jeremy Kyle Show* has come to be synonymous with 'Chavs'.

The rationale for focusing on the 'chav' is the strong cultural images it evokes, which serve an important discursive function. Chav is a slang term which gained its more pejorative usage in the early 2000s and brings together material knowledges of a visible underclass. The chav is often constructed in a decidedly material way, such as through certain clothing and behaviours. Such stereotypes and signifiers are well-known and readily accessible knowledges of what constitutes the construction of chavs in public discourse. Tyler (2008) suggests that chav is just one of the terms which emerged out of

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evolving contemporary vocabulary on class, specifically where abuse of the white poor is concerned. Tyler further argues that in contemporary British media, chavs are circulated as comic, grotesque figures that are met with disgust. Haywood and Yar (2006) describe the chav as being aligned with:

> *Stereotypical notions of lower-class…a term of intense class-based abhorrence (16).*

Bennett (2013) argues that a central element of chav discourse is an assumption of pathological predisposition produced through class:

> *The representation of "everyday" British public experience as a practice of chav-spotting, of reading materials as signs of the private characteristics of those with which they are associated. This means reading class as a privately motivated phenomenon, as the product of the "choice incompetence" of chavs (146).*

Whilst the term 'chav' was only referred to once in the corpus, representations and assumptions of chav discourse occurred far more frequently. Although a chav discourse was not necessarily evoked in textual terms, it was made available within the materiality of representations which were shaped by stereotypical assumptions of the lower classes. The term 'chav' never needs to be explicitly mentioned in such articles, instead, a trail of material signifiers is laid out, leading the audience to such a discourse. This was often produced where class was represented as a pathological disposition towards making poor choices, something which was also a concern for discourse on shame, suggesting chav is a shamed position.

The most striking example of 'chav' discourse was Maggie, who was the focus of an article from *The Daily Mirror*, discussed throughout this chapter. Maggie is positioned as the quintessential 'chav mum'. The focus is upon Maggie's inability, or even

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unwillingness to control her excessively sexual body. Tyler (2008) considers this

positioning further, describing the representation of 'chav mums':

> *There is a repeated emphasis within news media and internet forums on the sluttish behaviour and multiple pregnancies of the female chav...an immoral, filthy, ignorant, vulgar, tasteless, working-class whore (Tyler, 2008: 26).*

The article orients towards language which evokes intense anxiety around female

sexuality, reproduction, and fertility, given an implicit assumption that Maggie has too

many children and lacks personal responsibility:

> *Maggie blames repeated failures with the Pill, condoms, arm implants and a contraceptive injection for four out of her five pregnancies (Wilson, 2013, para. 31).*

In the article, it is unclear what the interviewer asked to elicit the following responses as

the questions are not made available. Nonetheless, Maggie seems to address concerns

about her reproduction:

> *I asked to be sterilised but the doctors wouldn't let me and Gavin refuses to have a vasectomy (Wilson, 2013, para.13).*

> *He said he came into the world with them and he's going out with them fully intact. I said I'd get a brick and do it myself if it stops me getting pregnant (Wilson, 2013, para. 13).*

> *We don't even have sex that much. He's lucky if he gets it once every three months. I'd rather clean than have sex (Wilson, 2013, para. 15).*

Classist assumptions are drawn upon which position the lower-classes as brash, loud,

and uncouth in their willingness to talk openly about that which should otherwise be

taboo or private. Maggie is positioned as classless; this is not classlessness in the sense

of socioeconomic hierarchy, but lack of shame and decorum. Such undertones may not
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initially appear to direct the reader towards signifiers of class as socio-hierarchy; however, such representations have long been used as accessible tropes which make the working-classes easily recognisable.

Maggie is made accountable for a perceived lack of responsibility for her reproduction. As a result, her body is transformed from a biological site to a political one in the context of claiming benefits. There is a strong element of biopower here; Maggie's body is a site that needs to be controlled and subjugated, particularly as it is constructed as a body that is a burden on society due to a lack of individual responsibility.

Despite what appears to be a defence from Maggie, this is presented as further evidence of her tastelessness, which is used to evoke disgust and derision. Maggie is constructed as a perfect fit for the 'chav mum' positioning. Well-reasoned attempts to account for her reproduction are drawn upon to mock not only her perceived excessiveness but her tastelessness in speaking candidly. Despite a demand for accountability and a willingness to do so, Maggie is rendered an object that evokes disgust. Her attempts to resist hegemony by explaining why she claims benefits and has six children are instead used to further reinforce inequalities of power by rendering her yet further powerless through shame. The sceptical undertones of the article position Maggie as open to judgement, cynicism and even humour. Within this class-based abhorrence and disgust, is also misogynistic disgust.

Caricatures, such as the chav, have implications for the knowledges that are produced. For Habermas (1984; 1989), the media is a bourgeoisie public sphere of passive spectatorship, rather than one of genuine political debate, which distracts the laity from forming a rational, critical opinion. Whilst according to Habermas, the media fails to engage with political debate, it does produce ideological representations of political events and phenomena:

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> [t]he 'definitions of reality', favourable to the dominant class fractions, and institutionalised in the spheres of civil life and the state, come to constitute the primary 'lived reality'…for the subordinate classes. In this way ideology provides the 'cement' in a social formation (Hall, 1977: 333).

The media shapes knowledge on political events and thus, albeit indirectly, does play a role in political debate and by extension how people are positioned within wider socio-political relations. Hall refers to the media's role as:

> …the machinery of representation (Hall, 1986: 9).

Discursive signifiers which produce representations of claiming benefits are drawn upon and reinforced by the media, which serves to generate knowledge on claiming benefits. Jones (2011) argues that the middle-classes take up the majority of spaces in journalism, affording the bourgeoisie a monopoly on power and representation. Jones (2011) further argues that even when there are genuine attempts to give the working-classes voice, the profession is so detached from the material, lived-experience of working-class life, that even genuine attempts at fair representation tend to produce unfair, unrealistic stereotypes.

The notion of the underclass has a strong historical legacy, often constructed in regard to loutish behaviour, worklessness and dependency, as discussed in Chapter Three. However, what separates the contemporary chav from the traditional underclass, is how the 'chav' has become synonymous with commodity fetishism, irresponsibility, and excess. This is exemplified by the focus on ownership of consumer items in the article, particularly the aforementioned 'flat-screen television' showing a still of *The Jeremy Kyle Show*. Chavs have come to be identified by their poor, tasteless and irresponsible choices in regard to commodities (Tyler, 2008).

By highlighting the television, the article implies a tone of scepticism, where benefits should only be used to pay for certain things and people should be watched carefully in regard to this. Though there is sparse research on the topic; this construction of consumerism is commonly made available, though is subtle in its conception. In the wider media, lingering shots of people in poverty or on benefits with their consumer items are a common trope in poverty porn. In the programme *Benefits Street* (Smith and Hull, 2014), the audience is regularly offered a camera shot on a cigarette packet, a smartphone, or a large television. Judgements are never explicitly made, though they are invited by the materiality of such imagery. The shots are purposeful, exaggerated, and loaded with meaning, specifically emphasising consumer goods or luxury items, seemingly in passing, inviting the audience to ask if a person on benefits is deserving of such commodities, or whether they are simply unable to manage their money. An example of this was available in the corpus:

> *…Jeremy Kyle was in full flow on a **giant flatscreen telly** above a **satellite box** (Wilson, 2013, para.5).*

> *…Elektra chose a Lilo &Stitch DVD from a **vast collection** and slipped it into a **Playstation 3 console** (Wilson, 2013, para. 17).*

Although many articles from the corpus discussed situations which appear to be poverty, there was often a search to 'unveil' a truth located in their narratives. This is left open to interpretation by the author; audiences, however, are strongly led towards a preferred, hegemonic reading because of a focus on these items. They are led down the garden path, so to speak. This reading serves to reinvigorate a practice of self-comparison; it asks: is this what poverty *really* looks like, is this what you want *your taxpayer money* to be spent on and do *you* have these items in your own home? The construction of unnecessary or even undeserved consumer items suggests either surplus benefits, being

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financially better off claiming benefits than being in work, or an inability to manage finances appropriately.

Any context or alternative discourses in such circumstances are rarely offered, for example, whether such items were gifts or whether sacrifices were made. The lack of alternative discourses has implications for subjectivity given that the ownership of consumer items, such as access to the internet and owning a phone, are fundamental to finding work, applying for jobs, or contacting the benefits system. For example, UC applications can only be accessed and managed online. Many queries can only be resolved by contacting the Jobcentre via phone, rather than attending in person.

Although a focus on 'non-deserved' items invokes and invites a sense of moral outrage for audiences, nothing illegal is taking place given that the provision of benefits is capped, yet such consumerism is nonetheless framed in fraudulent terms. This is underpinned by the assumption that the provision of benefits is 'taxpayers' money', thus not only did it never fully belong to people who claim benefits but can also be taken away, placing the claimant in a position of relative powerlessness.

Such reporting further fails to acknowledge the structural barriers which may hinder opportunities for employment, further exacerbated by the effects of living in poverty as well as a pre-existing low-wage economy which exploits workers. In turn, the media often fails to address the complex relations and practices that may occur in the case of people who claim benefits and consumer goods. The maintenance of a consumer identity, which is reinforced by capitalist political economies, may well be a strategy people undertake to avoid alienation and retain some sense of citizenship.

There is a distinct fetishisation of objects in the articles which imply that the subject is fully equipped to be a consumer and that the poverty subjects experience is self-
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inflicted, produced through irresponsibility. Though discussed in a passing manner in the articles, such a focus on expensive commodities is purposeful and in the same manner, is purposely classist:

> *…working-class people are not primarily marked as lacking and disgusting through their poverty, but through their assumed lack of knowledge and taste. To be sure, they may be implicitly vilified through a suggestion that they are not spending their money properly - as in critiques that they are now the prey of a vacuous consumer culture – but this implied lack of thrift is in itself assumed to come from a lack of knowledge and taste which would, presumably, enable them to 'see through' consumerism (Lawler, 2005: 800).*

Ownership of consumer items is focused upon in the articles to distance and position the subject away from poverty, which is veiled. Instead, the subject is positioned towards an inability to prioritise that which is important, through a discourse of 'unknowing'. There is an implicit assumption that subjects have fallen prey to consumerism, which is not easily forgiven. When this 'unknowing' discourse is conflated with the irresponsibility and tastelessness ascribed to chavs, it shifts towards essentialist assumptions of perceived stupidity or ignorance located in the lower classes, producing a multiplicity of subject positions where subjects may be represented as either purposely, fraudulently, or naively misusing 'taxpayer money'.

To account for this subjectivity, at the very least, claimants should present themselves as being grateful for what they receive. As with the analysis in 7.1.3.3, asking for more is shameful and strongly condemned. In the case of Maggie, she asks for a larger house for her six children. It is not six children living in a one-bedroom house that is constructed as problematic, but that she is not grateful, satisfied, and thankful for what she is given. In terms of taxpayer money, such funds are constructed as charitable, as something one is lucky to receive, rather than an obligation as part of the welfare state.

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It can be conceived then, that rather than being something owed to the state, tax may well be perceived to be the theft of property – a cornerstone of the neoliberal order. It is then, much easier to shift these feelings of punishment onto a perceived other than to challenge the hegemony of neoliberalism.

However, it is difficult to speak of theft of property without drawing on the work of Marx (1865). In paying tax, there is an expectation that funds should be used by the state responsibly, with wealth distributed equally. However, this sense of possession of one's money, even when it has been taken in the form of tax by the state, alludes to practices which extend beyond the text and into the material.

Amidst a long series of government expenses scandals and a lengthy stint of austerity, feelings of injustice and dissatisfaction may go towards understanding feelings of scepticism around the use and misuse of taxes. When such dissatisfaction collides with the universal effects of the recession, unemployment, insecure employment, a low-wage economy, homelessness and disinvestment in health and social care, it may well make it difficult for the public to believe that the 'profit' that the government takes from each worker's wage is indeed being used as intended. When such a feeling collides with a growing trend towards nationalist rhetoric which fetishises the individual and targets problem populations through reform, a shift towards self-comparison occurs, which capitalism invites its populations to engage with.

In a world of winners and losers, those who feel their lives have worsened since the economic recession look towards the populations that political rhetoric proposes are living relatively comfortable lifestyles – at the expense of this unfair redistribution. One could then ask why it is not the elite that is othered by the public, however such negative rhetoric, for example about immigrants and benefit claimants, carefully steers the public gaze away from economic and policy failures on the part of the state.

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Drawing upon such arguments helps to understand how the contemporary working-classes have been reified in regard to their presumed productivity and how a dominant focus on the 'chav' within this reification has occurred.

7.2.3 Poverty and the Moral Spectacle

Media reporting which describes extreme cases of destitution and abject poverty positions its subjects as rare, unusual and as a unique exception to the 'reality' of poverty. Such representations of poverty invite the audience to feel shocked:

> THIS is the scene of indescribable chaos and squalor inside a one-bedroom flat shared by a jobless couple -- with SIX kids (Wilson, 2013, para. 1).

> Desperate Tim Salter struggled to even feed himself when controversial private firm Atos ruled he was fit for work, despite his failing eyesight (Traynor, 2013, para. 1).

The lives of the people within these stories are to be watched but never engaged with. They are always to be kept at a safe distance. Poverty is kept at arm's length:

> …The three eldest children sleep in the unkempt bedroom, which also has pen scrawled all over the walls and toys and clothes littering the floor…Maggie sleeps on a sofa bed in the lounge alongside Lilyrose and the twins sleep in Moses baskets -- while Gavin kips down wherever he can find a space (Wilson, 2013, para. 26).

In constructing such poverty as a spectacle and unusual, a rather insidious judgement rears its head – the assumption that poverty does not exist in such extremity. Subjects are positioned as having chosen to be in poverty through the decisions they make. This is underpinned by dominant ideas about individual responsibility.

Where participation is concerned in the context of neoliberalism and productivity, even poverty should be performed in an aesthetically pleasing way to appease those in a financially secure position. However, it appears that 'true' poverty is a contested idea, permeated by the 'deserving/undeserving' dichotomy. Ideally, poverty should be hidden fully from public view until it is summoned to be consumed by an audience for entertainment purposes. Poverty was constructed in Dickensian terms; people in poverty are positioned as very much at fault for failing to govern their actions.

Whilst there is no explicit reference to medicalised discourse in regard to poverty, the metaphors relating to such an interpretation are apparent when considered genealogically. When poverty becomes entertainment, it serves a biopolitical function. The exposé style functions to encourage conformity, where disciplinary power punishes those who fall outside of normative participation by exposing their moral transgressions. Such representations serve to regulate subjects who are made visible in the hope that unveiling them to the bourgeoisie will encourage governance over one's own body.

This may be done in the hope of producing subjects who are docile and therefore malleable to the confines of the capitalist political economy, to be shaped and moulded in regard to forces of production by placing them in a position of powerlessness. For Foucault (1995[1977]), creating a spectacle of subjects positions their 'deviance' as unreason. By unveiling subjects in such a way, it reveals inhumanity, animality and idleness which are exposed to the public gaze (Foucault, 1995[1977]). Failing this, this socially and politically situated practice is content with acting as a moral warning to others, lest they allow themselves to face a similar humiliation.

7.2.3.1 Slum Tourism: Poverty as Entertainment

In making a spectacle of poverty, an asymmetrical relationship of power is constructed between the privileged and the not-so-privileged, who are consequently othered. In describing in detail the physical space of the one-bedroom house, the author begins to take a gleeful route into slum tourism, relishing the opportunity to make a spectacle of what is constructed as unreason – positioning people in their irrationality, as having chosen to live in 'poverty'. This practice of slum tourism has important implications for subject positioning, wherein subjects are 'othered' (Frenzel, Koens and Steinbrink, 2012). This 'othering' is galvanised by elements of journalistic flair, where the author positions themselves as an outsider, troubling the physical space of the flat:

> *When I arrived I was taken aback by the sight of surfaces jammed with junk, filthy floors, shabby furniture and walls covered in pen scribbles…The kitchen sink was piled high with unwashed bowls and the cooker looked like it had never been cleaned…The bathroom was even worse with a broken loo seat tossed on the floor and shelves crammed with rubbish. Bizarrely a garden hose was fixed to one of the bath taps and the basin was so full of towels, empty bottles and other mixed-up junk it could not be used for hand-washing after going to the loo (Wilson, 2013, para. 4-8).*

The author of the article claims they visited the flat to see how the couple lived on benefits, constructing the physical space of their living conditions, which are suggested to be unclean and unkempt. The author fixates on such matters, which draws class-based discourses of classlessness and irresponsibility into the narrative, though at no point suggests that the unclean conditions described may be a product of poverty or limited living space. They are instead used to position subjects in regard to inferiority, as 'less than', as a shameful, contemptible other that is beyond belief – something which is emphasised when the author implies the family may not wash their hands *'after going to the loo'*.

Slum tourism commodifies poverty (Freire-Medeiros, 2009). It represents an exchange of some value, serving a moral function for the voyeurs who consume poverty for entertainment purposes and the cautionary moral tales it provides.

The poverty described is constructed as being outside of what normative 'poverty' should look like. This is compounded with a tone of shock and a sense of rarity in describing the scene. The tone is that of investigative journalism; a reporter tasked with generating a story on a rare phenomenon - '*indescribable chaos and squalor*'. The term 'poverty' is rarely used by those facing economic hardship, but rather, applied by those who are unfamiliar with it (Lister, 2004).

Despite the shock of witnessing what life looks like for a family of eight living in a one-bedroom flat, the sense of being appalled that follows is not of the poor living conditions but is one of disgust and horror with the family, who are positioned as making a conscious choice regarding their current situation, which is further wrapped up in discourses of class. It is poverty porn in its purest state; a representation of poverty and its subjects, made visible to be unceremoniously unveiled to entertain the privileged masses. It is devoid of criticism, other than that of the subjects themselves.

Despite the apathetic way in which language is orientated towards such representations, subjects were positioned as objects of human interest, though stripped of agency. Subjects are people, but not strictly human because they are 'less than'. The exposé style is constructed as warranted because subjects are constructed as unusual, alerting human curiosity, which is in turn, a naturalised, acceptable practice of surveillance. Consequently, whilst the subjects are positioned in regard to material, palpable poverty, it is never described in such terms.

When constructed in regard to discourses of individual responsibility and failure, poverty becomes a spectator sport. A comparison can be drawn here with Bethlem (Bedlam) Hospital – the first asylum. Whilst numbers may have been greatly exaggerated over the course of history, alongside reports of the coercive regime inflicted on those admitted there, Bedlam is historically renowned for the scandal of public visitation, where the 'mad' were put on display to be exhibited for visiting customers. Whilst those incarcerated at Bedlam were primarily displayed for entertainment purposes, they also represented a cautionary moral tale – a warning to spectators of the danger of not complying with the Protestant Work Ethic (Weber, 1958). A key focus of the 'moral' therapy received by the patients at Bedlam involved instilling the value of hard labour in the successful treatment of 'the mad'.

In such media-saturated times, poverty is made similarly visible to the treatment of the patients at Bedlam. Subjects are displayed to a braying audience to be scorned and jeered at for their idleness and moral deviance, whilst also serving their purpose as a commodity, consumed for entertainment purposes.

7.3 First Empirical Study: Afterthoughts

Benefits Street (Smith and Hull, 2014) represented just one in a series of 'poverty porn' programmes which constructed unemployment, poverty, and receiving benefits as an alien, shameful 'other'. Feeding into an apparent public fascination with contemporary political debates around unemployment and welfare, such representations provided ample opportunity for the British public to position themselves as far away as possible from unemployed, underprivileged, benefit claimants.

Set against a background of austerity and increasing responses to neoliberalism, an unprecedented 'knee-jerk' reaction occurred on social media. Many abusive tweets were claimed to have been sent in response to the conversation around #BenefitsStreet (Brooker et al., 2015). *The Independent* (Jones, 2014) reported that shortly after the programme's release, social media was teeming with abusive tweets, some of which called for those on *Benefits Street*, and those on benefits more generally, to be '*shot, hanged or gassed'*.

Such rhetoric has overtones of eugenicist discourse. Whilst scapegoating and othering is part of our past and will always be part of some of the darker periods in history, within such hostile rhetoric, people continue to be dehumanised based on their perceived societal and economic worth. The threat of ideological, but also physical violence brings with it damaging ideology, which though subtle in its workings, has crept back into the fore.

8. Chapter Eight: Second Empirical Study

8.1 Contextualisation - Extended Literature Review and Rationale

The way that mental health service-users are implicated in and navigate the welfare system is rarely discussed in the research literature. To present, the literature has focused instead on notions of 'disability' in regard to the current climate of welfare reform; a vague notion which often relegates mental health difficulties to an afterthought. This is becoming an increasingly pertinent concern - in 2017, 36% of PIP and 49% of ESA recipients listed a mental health condition as their primary impairment (Department of Work and Pensions, 2018c).

To date, qualitative enquiry has focused on mental health service-user attitudes and accounts of benefit-related practices and policies (i.e. Shefer et al, 2016), where participants expressed concerns about bureaucracy, demoralisation and the invisibility of their disability. To work towards social change, there is a need to take a deconstructive approach to such accounts by exploring the power relationships, systems and structures that produce and make available these affective experiences, constructions and positionings.

Focus groups were chosen for two reasons. Firstly, the use of focus groups enabled mental health service-users to make sense of and negotiate ideas collectively. This occurred in a safe environment where they already knew one and another well and had on-going support in place. Morgan (2006) offers that there are two different purposes when carrying out focus groups; they are either content-orientated, interested in the data itself, or conversation orientated, interested in the interactions that take place. Whilst focus groups are often employed as a method of data collection, there has been

less attention paid to the interactions that take place (Kitzinger, 1994). A focus on interaction has a valuable place in the use of focus groups:

> *When the participants are mutually interested in the discussion, their conversation often takes the form of sharing and comparing thoughts about the topic. That is, they share their experiences and thoughts, while also comparing their own contributions to what others have said. This process of sharing and comparing is especially useful for hearing and understanding a range of responses on a research topic. The best focus groups thus not only provide data on what the participants think but also explicit insights into why they think the way they do (Morgan, 2006: 123).*

In the focus groups I organised, I borrowed from both approaches, taking an interest in not only what was present in the text, in terms of discourse, but the shared repertoires, understandings and readings that participants co-constructed, negotiated and reproduced in their talk.

Secondly, the chosen format was similar to the discussions already taking place within a mental health advocacy group within the Yorkshire and Humber area, where service-users met regularly to discuss issues and concerns around being a mental health service-user, such as benefit provision and government policy on welfare.

The research aims were:

To explore how mental health service-users collectively negotiate and construct accounts of accessing the benefits system.

- To discursively explore how mental health service-users who claim benefits position themselves and negotiate identities in regard to rhetoric on benefits

8.2 'Experts by Experience' - Gatekeeping

I was initially put into contact with the mental health advocacy organisation where the research took place through a similar organisation, who believed, given their role as advocates, that there would be an interest in the research[17]. At first, I was only in contact with the manager of the organisation, though after building rapport with the organisation over many months, the role of management at the organisation lessened as the service-users began to manage access in place of the organisation, who instead supported participants in this.

The ability to build rapport over an extended period was in part due to a lengthy ethics application. This proved to be somewhat serendipitous. An account of my journey through the NHS ethics process is available in **Appendix B**.

In the meetings that followed in preparation for the focus groups, members of the steering group shared their stories, lives, and experiences, which was an invaluable experience. When I envisioned arranging access to participants, I wanted to reduce any power imbalances as much as possible. The specific organisation I worked with served to be a safe place for the people that accessed it. As a result, I felt I needed to communicate my passion for the topic with integrity and answer questions about my interest in it, as well as sharing my own experiences and plans. Given that I was entering this safe space as a researcher, rather than inviting participants into unfamiliar territory, this helped to neutralise any potential power imbalance in a way that seemed

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[17] When I applied for ethical approvals, I originally sought to access two different organisations. Although both organisations had expressed their interest in the research on behalf of their service users, one of the services could no longer facilitate access to relevant groups for the research at a later date, once ethical approvals had been confirmed. Therefore, the focus groups only took place in the mental health advocacy organisation discussed throughout this chapter.

less forced. There was a sense that the research was taking place because all parties shared similar interests.

8.3 Procedure

Participants received a flyer **(Appendix C)**, distributed by the organisation, which provided participants with the opportunity to opt-in via email. Upon receiving this email - further information was provided to the participant including the participant information sheet **(Appendix D),** focus group schedule **(Appendix E)** and newspaper articles **(Appendix F)**. Once this contact was made and participants confirmed that they would like to contribute to the research, permission was requested for a brief telephone call to take place.

Participants were provided with several date/time options to attend a focus group session. Two weeks before the commencement of the focus group, participants were sent a courtesy email regarding their participation, which enquired whether participants would still like to take part. Upon attending, participants were asked to provide informed consent **(Appendix G)**. The duration of each focus group was approximately one hour. Staff were available at the organisation to support myself and participants should problems have arisen.

8.3.1 Data Collection

Participants were invited to discuss topics relating to a focus group schedule. I facilitated discussions broadly related to government policy, negotiating 'disability' subjectivities, society, the welfare system, and unemployment. Whilst participants were knowledgeable on matters discussed in the focus groups, given that the topics related to their own lives,

it may have been potentially problematic to articulate positioning in discursive terms. Georgaca and Avdi (2012) argue that asking participants to validate subject positions may be difficult given that participant alignment or disagreement with subject positionings may not occur consciously.

Because of such arguments, the two empirical studies were structured so they tie together. The findings from the first empirical study were drawn upon to inform the basis of the second empirical study so that the focus groups were guided by these findings.

I drew upon the media analysis in the first empirical phase of the research to design the focus group guide for the second empirical study. To do this, I drew from my findings to set important topics that could be discussed broadly by participants, rather than, for example, setting specific questions. For example, because the first empirical study noted the many varied obligations that subjects had when represented by the media, such as being visibly disabled, I asked participants open-ended questions, such as 'what do people expect of the welfare system' and 'what does the welfare system expect of people'.

The findings of the first empirical study shaped the focus group guide for the second empirical study, where I could introduce the main discourses and ideas which were explored, viewing these as truths in popular discourse which could be opened up for discussion and negotiation with participants. This therefore shaped the aims of the second empirical study, where I focused the research aims around the collective construction and negotiation of these key ideas, alongside any that may also be important to participants in an open way.

Thus, the aims for the second empirical study focus on the active positioning of participants, through negotiation and construction. This emphasis was important given

that subjects in the media were largely passive, given that they were spoken about, rather than being spoken to, or writing about their own experiences.

Given that the methodology emphasised the potential for subjectivity as well as resistance and negotiation, I made the decision to emphasise these elements when designing the research aims as a means to create a process of data collection that made room for negotiation, resistance and co-construction of discourse between participants.

Rather than asking participants to simply agree or disagree with my findings, I instead shaped my focus group guide broadly around key discourses, such as prompting questions around the role of disability or of society in regard to their accounts of navigating the benefits system. I did this in order to avoid leading questions and to introduce the opportunity for participants to negotiate discourses and position themselves towards them in a meaningful way, based on their own accounts as opposed to, for example, telling participants what I thought was important.

Similarly, rather than asking participants to negotiate subject positions in terms of using what may have been language from a discursive vocabulary, something which participants may have been unfamiliar with, they were presented with potential 'truths' and important themes, such as disability. This allowed participants to take up, resist, or offer alternative discourses.

The focus groups elicited rich data which demonstrated a wealth of experience. Because the organisation from which participants were recruited was quite small, group members and staff knew each other and their histories well. They were well versed in having conversations about the benefits system. Therefore, the only person who had to enter

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unfamiliar territory was me, which was interesting; any power imbalance was in favour of a group of familiar people in a familiar environment.

Given that I had entered into an unfamiliar environment, I began considering how I could make the focus groups more comfortable, and by extension, how this would make conversations around a difficult subject flow easily. I decided that the academic side of myself had done much of the leg work and put her to one side, instead, conversing as I would more informally and choosing not to monitor how I speak, as I often instinctually do in academic contexts.

8.3.2 Sampling

Focus groups should ideally consist of between 5 and 8 participants, or between 5 and 6 people for topics which participants are passionate about or have significant knowledge and experience of (Kreuger and Casey, 2014).

I originally intended to recruit a flexible sample size of between 15 and 25 participants to ensure that the experience was comfortable, but also conducive to the research aims and underpinning methodological literature on focus groups, where spaces for discussion and co-construction of ideas could be fostered.

Ten participants were recruited, taking part in two focus groups. My original intention was to conduct three focus groups, consisting of 15 participants, however, due to the passion of the participants, who engaged fully and spoke at length, as well as the small nature of the organisation, a decision was made to run two focus groups. The data collected was rich and more than sufficient to meet the research aims.

Participants were recruited from a mental health advocacy organisation in the Yorkshire and Humber area. All participants were given the option to provide demographic information. All participants chose not to provide this information[18], though one chose their own pseudonym. The sample was heterogeneous, mixed by age, gender, and ethnicity.

8.3.2.1 Exclusion Criteria

Participants who disclosed a recent experience of serious mental illness or crisis to the staff at the mental health advocacy organisation did not receive a flyer inviting their participation, avoiding the risk of causing any undue distress. Participants who were known to lack capacity to consent by the advocacy organisation did not receive an invitation flyer.

8.4 Ethics

8.4.1 Approvals

When seeking favourable ethical approval, the research fell into somewhat of a 'grey area' with regard to capacity to consent. Although the risk of loss of capacity was deemed negligible by the NHS Research Ethics Committee (REC) and the University of Huddersfield School of Human and Health Sciences Research Ethics Panel (SREP), it was nonetheless important to ensure that systems were put into place so the best interests of participants were at the forefront of the research. This was further warranted as the

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[18] Understandably, participants were concerned that taking part in the research could be misinterpreted as taking up unpermitted work or as evidence that they are fit for work. I therefore gave participants a choice as to whether they provided this information. All participants chose not to provide demographic information. I believe concerns about the benefits system were the main explanation for this decision.

mental health advocacy group from which service-users were recruited was partly funded by a Clinical Commissioning Group in the Yorkshire and Humber area. This meant that the mental health advocacy organisation was part-funded by the NHS, therefore NHS ethical approval was necessary.

Ethical approval was sought from the Health Research Authority (HRA), with regard to the part-funding of the organisations involved via the NHS and the potential for loss of capacity during the research. The research study was reviewed by the Wales REC 6 Proportionate Review Sub-committee **(Appendix H)** and the University of Huddersfield SREP, who gave the research favourable approval **(Appendix I)**.

In following Mental Capacity Act guidelines (Gov.uk, 2013), it was judged that the current research could be undertaken as effectively with people who do have the capacity to consent, though still offered benefits to those who lack capacity. However, given that capacity to consent is a vague and intangible concept, it was still of importance to approach the research in a way which considered that people who choose to take part may not have capacity to consent, may have lost capacity between expressing interest and taking part, or may have lost capacity during the focus groups. To account for this possibility, several checks for capacity to consent were put into place.

The advocacy group sets up monthly sessions where service users can 'walk-in'. To give participants sufficient time to weigh up the decision to take part in the research, I decided that I would not attend these sessions to recruit participants. Instead, participants received flyers which prompted them to contact myself, should they wish to take part in the research. This further avoided the risk of any implicit coercion or undue influence to participate. Participants who expressed interest were provided with my university email address on the advertising flyer and asked to email to 'opt-in' to the research. Following this a telephone conversation with each participant took place, which

acted as a second check of capacity, checking that information was retained and weighed up over the necessary period, where capacity to consent could be assumed.

On the date of each focus group, capacity was checked once again when discussing the research and its implications with participants; it was ensured that the information provided in all documentation was understood and retained.

8.4.2 Confidentiality

Initial contact with participants was made by the organisation via their email database when the research flyer was disseminated. This maintained confidentiality because it meant I did not have unnecessary access to the organisation's service-user database or personal information about participants that I did not need, for example, referrals to third-party services. Participants were asked to provide the researcher with an email address, name, and telephone number to participate. Once the focus group discussions were completed, all contact information[19] was permanently deleted.

When making the initial telephone calls to participants, calls were made from an internal phone line at the university in a booked room to ensure that phone calls could not be overheard, to assure the privacy of participants as well as confidentiality.

Audio recordings were undertaken using an encrypted recording device. This data was transferred to a password-protected drive on a university computer immediately after the focus group was completed and then deleted from the recording device, as compliant with GDPR practices. The recorded data was later transcribed for analysis. All participant

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[19] email addresses, telephone numbers and non-anonymised names

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data was made anonymous and identifying information was removed from all transcripts. All participants were given a pseudonym and all quotations in consequent publications arising from the research will be anonymised.

The limits set around confidentiality were discussed with participants before and after the focus groups. Ground rules were established before the focus group began, detailing that any confidential information shared within the research should not be expressed outside of the context of the group without explicit consent from the person whom it related to.

8.4.3 Safeguarding

Participants were fully informed of their right to confidentiality unless there was a suggestion of risk to the participant or any other party, in which case the researcher would contact staff at the organisation, who would follow their safeguarding policy in deciding upon the next appropriate steps.

The focus group schedule did not probe criminal activity, though participants were informed that if they made a disclosure, then this may need to be discussed with the relevant organisations. No disclosures of this nature took place during the research.

In the case of a participant becoming distressed or upset during the research, there were staff available in the room to provide support to participants who wished to leave the study. Should there have been any indication that a participant was upset, I would have checked what the participant wanted to do next, whether that meant leaving the study, taking a short break, or receiving on-going support from staff at the organisation. Should

any concerns have arisen about the welfare of a participant after the focus group has ended, I would have contacted the advocacy organisation about this in the first instance.

As I discuss below, a participant did become upset during the research. However, this was managed with the support of staff at the organisation and was not deemed a safeguarding issue. The staff member present knew the service-user well and consequently knew what support the participant needed at the time. In this instance, the participant needed some time alone to calm down. I decided to stop recording at this point and allowed the study to come to a natural end, given the focus group schedule had been fully discussed at this point. Time was spent with the participant to talk through the problems they were facing. A plan of action was put into place at the organisation to manage and support the participant with regard to their personal situation.

8.4.4 Potentially Distressing Topics

It was anticipated that participants may have experienced distress at some point whilst negotiating the benefits system. However, distress as a result of the topic at hand was not anticipated given that the mental health service-users who attend the advocacy service regularly meet to discuss such issues. Nonetheless, care was taken to not cause any distress to participants – the wording of focus group questions was done carefully to avoid emotive or upsetting language.

I had originally planned to use newspaper articles to prompt responses from participants. However, before introducing newspaper articles in the first focus group, one participant noted that they would be extremely upset by the content of the articles, noting that they found being spoken about in a negative manner upsetting and frustrating. After discussing the matter with the staff and service-users who were

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present at the time, a decision was made to also discontinue their use for the second focus group.

8.5 Application of the Methodological Framework: Second Empirical Study

The theoretical applications of Chapter Six and the methodological framework discussed in Chapter five remain relatively unchanged in terms of the focus group analysis, however, there were some minor adaptations to this which were used to address the research questions and complement the use of focus groups.

In order to create chapter nine, the action orientation step (6.5.3) was further used to explore how participants used language to negotiate truths, for example resisting discourses of shame. With regard to positioning (6.5.4), it was important to consider not only how participants positioned themselves within the discourses established in the first empirical study, but how subjects position themselves in regard to others and broader discourses which are beyond, yet intertwined with welfare, such as discourses of disability and mental health. As discussed in the methodology chapters, in terms of subject positionings, for the focus group analysis, a more dynamic view on subject positioning was taken, meaning that subject positionings could be viewed as not only taken-up by subjects, but subjects could also position themselves from the positions of others, such as institutions, whilst also negotiating and resisting such subject positionings.

Though biopower was referred to in 'positioning' generally, in this context biopower was further drawn upon in terms of its material effect on people, rather than the more abstract, political interpretations offered previously, instead, focusing on the subject's account, with attention to action orientation and the role of subjectivity. Though the

work is a discursive thesis, I further attend to notions of affect and experience, particularly throughout sub-section 9.2.

As a result, at times, the following analysis may read to some in an experiential way that may not be typical of discourse work. This has been purposefully done. The phenomena discussed here were considerably more abstract than that discussed in the previous analyses; for participants, it was a 'sense' or 'feeling' of a changing epoch, something that was often intangible or difficult to put into words, though of significance to participants and reproduced in their accounts. This represents the implications of late-stage capitalism, where neoliberal discourses of individualism have become difficult to resist, manifesting themselves in talk around a changing world and a sense of suspicion located within the experience of that which appears natural. Taking a Marxist reading, I argue that people do not concretely recognise subordination or alienation but do feel and experience the implications of the inequalities that late-stage capitalism produces, which are reproduced through discourse.

An unanticipated focus was upon analyses of consumerism and alienation in 9.2; they began as a way of understanding some burning questions about some of the hostility and animosity between people within the same social group. When writing the chapter, this hostile rhetoric began to grow exponentially around Brexit, as political discourse began to invoke violence and communities appeared to turn upon themselves. It struck me that it was similar to how the working-classes seemed to be fighting amongst themselves in regard to discourse on benefits. Though it was unfamiliar territory, I believed that posthumanism, along with theories of consumerism, might offer some answers about the way we relate to one and another.

As such, sub-section 9.2 represents a minor divergence from the methodological framework, emphasising the 'realism' in critical realism and the role of materialism,

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more so than the analyses in Chapter 7 and 9.1. The reason for this is that ultimately this analysis is about alienation and how participants constructed their experience of relating to one another in a changing world, where individualism and alienation are becoming increasingly common. Because alienation is something produced through individualisation, much of the analysis in this section is based upon experience, taking a discursive turn towards the analysis of such. I am mindful that alienation, though a product of discourse within late-stage capitalism, is simultaneously something that is experienced, felt, embodied and in turn constructed in talk, for example in accounts of 'distance'. In 9.2, the Marxist and Foucauldian theoretical framework was maintained, whilst also taking a postmodern turn and drawing upon posthuman ideas.

In order to explore posthuman ideas in particular when crafting chapter nine, I extended the scope of the methodological framework to address wider issues in the literature. As a means to do so, I draw on the work of theorists such as Berlant (2007), Fromm(2002[1955]) and Braidotti (2013) as a means to untangle participant accounts which drew upon tensions around the notion of being human, to extend the scope of the Foucauldian and Marxist framework, and to understand the negotiation of the self and identity in the context of late-stage capitalism. The following chapter explores the analysis of these focus group discussions.

9. Chapter Nine: Second Empirical Study: Analysis

The following analyses explore a multiplicity of ideas that were important to participants; the first broadly explores the role of surveillance and how people with disabilities and mental health difficulties are subject to it in many forms, some coercive, some malign, some neoliberal, as well as others which are decidedly more subtle. The second sub-section takes a posthuman turn, exploring how participants troubled the growing role of technology in society, consumerism, a loss of selfhood and positionings of distance, both physical and metaphorical, which had implications for subjectivity.

In some instances, there were themes that I found interesting, but did not emphasise in the analysis because participants did not express them as issues salient to their accounts, such as feminist interpretations about gender. Nonetheless, there are glimpses of such interpretations in the following analysis, though these only extend as far as participants expressed their relevance to be. I privileged participant accounts in this way because I did not want to insert my own readings in a way that overpowered the accounts of participants, who are the experts of their own experiences. Given that I was using a discursive approach, I did not necessarily aim to give voice, but instead to preserve it.

9.1 Surveillance

Surveillance was an important practice which shaped and constructed how the benefits system is navigated by people with mental health difficulties. This is because surveillance is not only a disciplinary practice within the benefits system but extends its reach beyond this, becoming implicated in wider institutional practices.

The following analysis considers how the discourses of surveillance which participants accounted for were not the naturalised construction of such, for example, something that is done for the common good, or is visible, but is instead a malign regime of truth that problematised and stigmatised specific groups in society. In terms of the panopticon (Foucault, 1975) this form of surveillance sees all without being seen, yet casts a particularly keen eye upon benefit claimants, working covertly.

9.1.1 "Big Brother's Watching You!"

Although participants were not asked to give an account of their experience of navigating the benefits system, many chose to do so to articulate the system's failings, particularly with regard to mental health. In both focus groups, participants mentioned that they wanted certain points on the record, or that important points needed to be said in their critique of the benefits system. Participants drew upon a discourse of scepticism, constructing the benefits system as being agenda-driven, making efforts to remove entitlement to benefits wherever it can:

> **Nina:** *Nobody in this room is saying that there isn't a need for these protocols, what we're saying is that they are deliberately wrong-footing people who have problems on a daily basis. (Focus Group 1).*

> **Sarah:** *There's been a lot of cloak and dagger, to me and I think they've done it in the hopes…like they brought the PIP system in…to try and windle people out…I think they've done this to try and baffle people so that they'll either won't fill the forms out and they'll give in (Focus Group 2).*

This construction of 'cloak and dagger' serves two purposes; it suggests that the practices undertaken within the benefits system are Kafkaesque and have been organised in a purposely disorientating way. Secondly, the 'cloak and dagger' construct suggests that many of the practices which take place are purposely veiled from public

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view. In this sense, the benefits system, as an institution, is a perfect panopticon - it is always seeing, without ever being seen.

Participants further positioned themselves as being subject to surveillance, Nina simply states:

Big Brother's watching you! (Focus group 1).

The allusion to George Orwell's *1984* (Orwell, 2008[1949]) is purposely included here to lend context to the problematic practice of surveillance that participants described. The title of this section draws upon a participant quote to evoke the suggestion that surveillance, as described by participants, is not something that is done visibly, or for the common good, but is a malign regime of surveillance. In *1984*, Big Brother is named as such to personify and humanise surveillance, loaded with connotations of kindness, reassurance, and protection. Big Brother is constructed as being watchful and benevolent rather than what it truly is – a ruthless, pervasive, and invasive regime concerned with identifying enemies of the state who threaten the status quo.

In *1984*, one of the main ways the state deploys surveillance is through televisions; they are always watching, controlling public and private spaces. They are used to identify potential crimes involving thoughts, actions, behaviours, and body language that threaten the status quo, referred to by Orwell as *thoughtcrime, crimethink, facecrime* and *wrongthink.* The hegemony of the regime is reliant upon fear, enforced by Miniluv (The Ministry of Truth). Under the eye of Big Brother, people should *bellyfeel*, which entails a blind, unquestioning love of Big Brother. The cost of resistance is to be rendered 'unhuman'.

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The protagonist of the novel, Winston, felt he had a good understanding of how surveillance was being deployed under the watchful eye of Big Brother, for example, he knew that toilet cubicles were one space which was most strongly watched because the regime considered individualism or being alone for too long to be suspect. The Ministry of Truth is tasked with controlling the will of the population, managing thought criminals. Winston is taken to Room 101 in The Ministry of Truth, which makes use of the way that state surveillance profiled populations, using Winston's greatest fear to break his spirit and remove him as a potential source of resistance. In the Ministry of Truth, Winston learns that the state has detailed records on his every movement, thought, and behaviour. Winston comes to understand that he was subject to a far-reaching form of surveillance beyond what he could have ever imagined. Faced with the might of the regime, Winston abandons his search for truth and comes to love Big Brother.

The above analogy considers the subtle yet coercive ways that surveillance can work, and further to this offers truth as having a potentially problematic consequence within surveillance. Furthermore, participants drew upon a dispositif of honesty, positioning other benefit claimants, who may not appreciate the surveillance that takes place within the benefits system, as being 'too honest':

> *…unfortunately, they fall down a deep hole because they've been too honest because they think that's the way you've gotta do it (Eve, Focus Group 1).*

Being 'too honest' did not necessarily mean that claimants advocated being dishonest, but instead evoked an image of a benefits system which works to 'wrong-foot' people, underpinned by a malign form of surveillance. Participants considered that as a consequence, they had to learn how to articulate themselves effectively to ensure their mental health was fully understood. This is an act of resistance in an otherwise unequal relationship of power between the claimant and the benefits system:

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> **Doll:** *Getting back to what we're talking about, if my voice, if I feel my voice isn't heard and I think I'm quite a domineering, articulate person, what chance does anybody else have*
>
> **Nina***: Not a chance (laughing) (Focus Group 1).*

Furthermore, the benefits system was constructed as being overwhelmingly oppressive through language which orients the state towards a representation of dictatorship. Participants constructed their relationship with the benefits system as being one of social control, produced through an expectation of compliance:

> **Eve:** *and you go back to the question, what does the welfare system want from you? I don't think you can answer that because they don't have…*
>
> **Nina***: Can I…? Compliance*
>
> **Eve:** *Yeah, that's the basics. That's only one thing is compliance, that's what it is, but that's all I can say of the welfare system*
>
> **Jess***: Compliance is a very big one isn't it…And it's like a sinister take on compliance because if you don't comply*
>
> **Doll:** *That's why I use the word because it's exactly that, it's do what you're meant to do, or…*
>
> **Jess***: …we can tighten and tighten and tighten until you're nearly strangled by compliance and that's because you've got nothing left*
>
> **Doll:** *You're dying because you've got nothing left*
>
> **Steven:** *It almost seems bordering on dictatorship*
>
> **Doll:** *It's ruthless. I'd go one step further, and this is really polarising, but I'd almost say it's a way of culling the population (Focus Group 1).*

Jess refers to being 'strangled by compliance', which evokes the notion of slow death. Slow death refers to the gradual wearing out of the population. In this case, slow death does not necessarily mean slow death via labour but certainly shares some commonalities. In this context, slow death marks a return to the construction of Kafkaesque systems which participants considered difficult to navigate. This means considering not only the discursive production of subjectivities (Stenner, Barnes and Taylor, 2008) in regard to the welfare state, but also situating the lived experience of neoliberal capitalism within it (Cvetkovich, 2012). This raises questions about affect, considering how late-stage capitalism and the practices produced by it make people

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'feel'. Jess' account of slow death reifies arguments made by Berlant (2007), where the precarity produced by the welfare system and the negotiation of work is not only physically exhausting, but mentally and existentially exhausting too, particularly for those who exist and negotiate their identities on the margins of late-stage capitalism. This slow death is not only about physically being in work, but in the contemporary context also relates to negotiating ideas around, or on the perimeters of work, such as benefit-related practices and the move towards an increase in abstract labour that characterises the benefits system.

Participants considered that the benefits system is purposely difficult to navigate because it is meant to wear people down until they no longer try to claim what they are entitled to. This sense of compliance as being physically and mentally wearing is also impacted by an expectation of self-governance.

The state was constructed as having power over the wellbeing of citizens, despite its failings:

> …We are bombarded in the media all the time about failings with CAMHS, failing with this, we're gonna inject money into this. We're the taxpayers as well and it's…**appalling to know that they still hold a key on our wellbeing.** So that tells us when everybody's joked about these things about a postcode lottery…I…don't think citizens here are absolutely oblivious to things, people put things in their own terminology how it explains to them. And do you know, when somebody outright says the government's a liar, or that service is a liar, you can understand where they're coming from (Eve, Focus Group 1).

Surveillance is evoked here because participants suggested that the government represents itself as supporting people, whilst knowingly acting to the contrary, functioning as a system that deploys practices which not only covertly watch people, but subtly controls them. This practice of surveillance is reclaimed by participants and turned back on the state. In doing so, participants produced a regime of truth by positioning the state as being profit-focused, 'unveiling' its motivations. These failings were not

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restricted to how people with disabilities are being failed. Participants noted that even within the economic focus that drives the way the system functions, these commitments are also being failed:

> **Doll**: They are paid by a third-party company, who is retained…to massage figures for the government. There's nothing independent about them. ATOS have now rebranded to 'The Independent Assessment Authority'…same people…same heads and I'm just gonna add this on because I want this included in the recording, their service guarantees to the government have been failed for four years consecutively, but they've had their contract extended…tell me how it's not a flawed system.
>
> **Jess**: And how much are they charging for these services? (Focus Group 1).

Through this dispositif of 'being too honest', participants positioned themselves as being well aware of the failings of the current system but offered that to protect their wellbeing, they must find ways to articulate their mental illness in a way that registers with the benefits system. Participants accounted for a fear that information may be used against them or to penalise them, constructing the benefits system as an ominous, watchful gatekeeper. Doll notes that if the DWP were aware that she was taking part in the research, she could be sanctioned, subjecting claimants, such as Doll, to both real and imagined surveillance:

> **Doll:** They don't have their own voice and they don't feel like they have anywhere to go to have these conversations and then they're scared because they get penalised to come and do something like this. If…somebody from the DWP was walking in here right now I'd be on sanction because I'm fine and my carer isn't here. Nothing to do with the fact that he dropped me off at the door and will pick me up at the door and I know all these people (Focus Group 1).

This surveillance is so ingrained that it can function as imagined surveillance - a soft-paternalistic warning to regulate one's body and behaviour. Drawing upon the analogy of Big Brother and the way that 'truth' was troubled in accounts, participants were conscious that they were speaking candidly about their experience within a safe space

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and that they were protected by anonymity, though alluded to the potential

consequences of speaking outside of such a context:

> **Zack**: *well…to be honest with you…erm…I'm not gonna be polite because there's no…politicians hopefully here!*
>
> **Sarah**: *oh no, no… (Focus Group 2).*

There is an interesting contradiction within this. Participants felt that activities, such as

the present research and the advocacy group which they take part in were conducive to

recovery, emphasising the value of having a voice when navigating the benefits system:

> **Zack**: *You know when you're frustrated with the system and **you**…you're trying to do a good thing and that's why I said to (**Redacted**), I wanna participate.*
>
> **Jackie**: *I think sometimes as well it's about getting voice across*
>
> **Elsie**: *it's when you're a sensitive person innit*
>
> **Jackie**: *you have got a voice; you've got a right to a voice and to be able to take part in something like this is…you know, a way of getting your voice out there*
>
> **Alan**: *Yeah, it's important, yeah…*
>
> **Sarah**: *people like you, Becky, we know that there's somewhere there's trying to be that little path of righteousness in this mad world of insanity (Focus Group 2).*

> **Jess**: *You know, and just generally how it's portrayed and like you say…where is the individual voice in all of that? And if anything can counter, add and help to empower individuals then I'd like to be a part of that (Focus Group 1).*

Nonetheless, participants did express feeling at risk of being penalised for taking part.

Participants suggested that within government benefit policy, the role of recovery is

underappreciated and that benefit-related practices were often counter-intuitive to

recovery:

> **Steven**: *I think also we could see a lot more recovery because you have service providers providing these services to inspire people and you know, boost their wellbeing…But then, it gets to a point where they're accessing benefits and going through the ESA Assessments…erm they go through an absolute terrible time*

during that assessment. This system's not working and everything that that service provider…that's done previously just washed away and that person's gone right back down. (Focus Group 1).

Doll*: It is self-fulfilling prophecy…Because you get a bit better, so you act as a certain…so you have to be slightly better to access a service because you have to recognise that you need help. So, you access a service, and normally you access a service because the NHS is so stressed that it's a year wait and you wanna get better today because you've made that choice. Which is….to put it, in a nutshell…you're being punished for getting better. The second you get better you are financially punished because that financial support is taken away from you. If you show one iota of getting better and I think recovery is not like when you get better from a cold - alright, I'm good now. Mental health is for the rest of your life (Focus Group 1).*

Participants positioned themselves as being penalised by the benefits system for engaging in mental health recovery-orientated activities. They positioned themselves as subject to surveillance because taking part in such activities can be construed as being fit for work. There is a strong basis for feeling such a way, given that participants described a government which consciously, systemically, and purposely discriminates against them:

Zack*: They cannot…give you any legal advice anymore, that's what I've been told for (***Redacted***). That is the case…but that's another thing which is negative for people with health issues because…if they are discriminating against people,* **which they are***, it's blatant discrimination against…disabled people…everybody who's got an illness or a disability, they are discriminating against those people and…if you wanna make a change to the system, you can't anymore. Legal aid has been removed…*

Sarah*: They've done as much as they can possibly* **do** *so it dunt look like they're doing owt wrong*

Zack*: …and the other thing as well is…the ministers and…the civil servants, the people who actually think of these legislations, draft them up and do everything…there are issues and they are aware of these issues. But they have deliberately…*

Sarah*: They choose to…ignore*

Zack*:* **Deliberately***, in my opinion. I'm giving my opinion because I'm just…an average person, I don't work for anybody, do anything…but, in my opinion, the way I read it is…they know the majority of what they're doing is harming people…and they are aware that they are saving money by doing it and the main purpose of creating this system, the way that they have, this Universal Credit, the way they've implemented it and subsequently the lack of help and support and removing that help and support… (Focus Group 2).*

As Zack and Sarah discuss, the benefits system operates through and constructs multiple truths simultaneously; it is offered that the government consciously and deliberately discriminates against people with health conditions and disabilities, though represents itself as not doing so. Jess considered one of the most dominant truths which shapes this:

...the undeserving and the deserving...poor (Jess, Focus Group 1).

Participants further considered current discourse around claiming benefits in society. The focus here was overwhelmingly upon the notion of the undeserving poor and a scrounger subject position:

Jess: ...the perception that's fed out to us constantly by the media about these people who are benefit scroungers. And that's an old one but it's still regurgitated time and time again...

Eve: Oh, yeah, absolutely

Steven: It is

Doll: Absolutely

Jess: doesn't it? So those people, over there that I don't even see never heard about but ooh they're monsters, ooh they're having my money (Focus Group 1).

Becky: ...What sorts of things is society saying about people who claim benefits, at the moment?

Sarah: ...Scroungers

Zack: Yeah, lazy

Jackie: Scroungers

Alan: Scroungers

Zack: Lazy

Alan: Taking our money

Jackie: Taking advantage of the system (Focus Group 2).

Participants offered in their accounts that there are two competing truths at play. They consider that the benefits system is actively, deliberately, and consciously harming and

discriminating against people with disabilities, but also that the societal perception of benefit claimants marks a deviation from their own accounts of navigating the benefits system.

Ultimately, in being positioned as a scrounger or as undeserving, people who claim benefits are constructed as either fraudulently claiming benefits or failing to take individual responsibility by not regulating their bodies, despite a capability to do so. Participants described being acutely aware that these constructs may be made available through practices of surveillance. The media was constructed as a key source of surveillance through which these assumptions are made available and consequently naturalised:

> **Steven: ...**the way things are being fuelled...you just get these programmes like...what's the one on Channel Four? Life on Benefits and stuff like that. Well, there's two sides to the coin in't there? You know they never, never ever show the other side to the coin...like how people are struggling with food banks and stuff, they never show that side it's always...and you always get a headline in the newspaper don't you about Joe Bloggs who's claiming whatever benefit, we've seen him dancing in a night club in Leeds...putting a garage up for his friend, that immediately comes out dunnit?...but they never show the...bad side of it do they how people...how somebody's struggling
>
> **Jess**: ...but they can't dangle these examples in front of you...they're mythological, aren't they? You know, these are media representations, how do they represent **everyday individuals**...They don't, it's a myth isn't it, it's a reality that's given out to us constantly and it's a little bit...
>
> **Steven**: it's fuelled by the media, the BBC...Channel Four, whoever it may be
>
> **Jess**: ...it's ironic cos we...pay these licences to the BBC...to feed us these... (Focus Group 1).

Such assumptions serve to construct people who claim benefits in regard to a discourse of deviance and further to this construct surveillance as not only covert and malign but as something which is deployed selectively. This discourse of deviancy works interdiscursively, simultaneously drawing upon discourses of morality, individualism, and criminality.

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9.1.2 Deviancy & Biopower: Mental Illness and Regimes of Truth

With regard to mental health, surveillance emerged in a decidedly biopolitical way. There were several examples of this, though one of the strongest examples was how bodies were managed and subject to surveillance, particularly where bodies contravened social norms. In this section, the focus is upon the biopolitical construction of deviance in regard to the regulation of bodies. Such bodies are problematised and by consequence, a positioning of the deviant, self-indulgent body is made available. In one focus group, Nina discussed her experience of attending a PIP assessment:

> **Nina:** *… I went for me ESA assessment …I walked in there and they knocked me down for me nutrition…I was two points off getting…me PIP…and when I spoke to (**Redacted**) who's the gentleman who does a lot of tribunals…he put it plainly that I'd lost points…that that they'd windled it round to suit their selves…to get me points off so that they could get me off and I just went you wot. Cos I just…I din't get it, I got the paperwork and I just to be honest wi ya, I just put it in't drawer. Cos it were just too much…and I just said right…so…am I getting this wrong, I've walked in that room and she's seen that I'm overweight and thought well there's nowt wrong with her nutrition (Focus Group 1).*

Doll, who also has a diagnosis of borderline personality disorder (BPD), concurred with Nina's account, explaining that part of having a diagnosis of BPD meant that for her, food was a form of self-harm. Doll continued to explain that the nuanced, subjective experience of having a mental health difficulty largely goes unnoticed in benefit assessments:

> **Doll:** *…In my…PIP rejection they mentioned my BMI six times in the first paragraph…tell me how that's got anything to do with what's in here (**points to head**) cos it hasn't…*
>
> **Becky:** *It's…interesting that your BMI is even sort of…referenced in an assessment of...*
>
> **Nina:** *It goes back to physical dunt it?*
>
> **Becky:** *I understand that, but it does seem like…*
>
> **Doll:** *it's disassociation*

> **Becky**: I understand the reason…
>
> **Eve**: well they don't
>
> **Becky**: then why is it there?
>
> **Doll**: I…to them I'm slovenly, I'm lazy, I'm workshy…and oh well you've got tattoos so you're alright then. Never mind that I've got tattoos to cover up the self-harm scars that I've got, that they're a way for me to cope (Focus Group 1).

A perceived inability or unwillingness to regulate one's own body suggests two underlying assumptions, which are explicitly noted by Nina and Doll. Firstly, is the assumption that one's weight is an indicator of an absence of mental distress – as discussed by Nina, who referred to how this was used to reduce her score during her PIP assessment.

This may then mean that part of the reason mental illness is seen as outside of disability, is due to a systemic differentiation of the two. In the absence of a health condition that can be visibly gazed upon, people with mental health difficulties who navigate the benefits system are bearing a far heavier burden of discourses of individual responsibility. Doll reiterates this point, drawing on a discourse of visibility:

> It's the preconception of what somebody who's depressed and any other thing in there that comes under the thing of mental health. It's the preconception before you even step in that building of what it's gonna look like and if you don't fit that…like I've said before…the dribbling Victorian asylum person…you're fine (Focus Group 1).

Therefore, if mental illness cannot be seen, participants described being positioned away from their health condition and instead towards lax individual responsibility. Such assumptions are no longer about being fit for work but come to be an assessment of an individual's character. It is of no coincidence that these assumptions of individual responsibility are simultaneously the values of neoliberalism. What Doll and Nina describe is a system, that in its lack of expertise, looks upon mental illness and deploys surveillance to find any alternative explanation viable. This is a system that works on the

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premise that a claimant is lying and seeks to provide a truth. Such practices of surveillance, where the system unearths and exposes 'truths', transforms itself into a practice of investigation and scrutiny, steeped in assumptions of scepticism around the debilitating effects of distress, rather than being a fair and objective assessment. Participants strongly constructed the benefits system as being far from value-free.

Secondly, signifiers such as weight and tattoos were perceived by Doll to lead to assumptions being made about their character and how they are positioned by others in regard to productivity and morality. Such assumptions are biopolitical in that negative readings are taken about how one regulates their own body, particularly where a decision is made to suggest that being overweight or having tattoos is in some way an excess of sorts that is not characteristic of having a mental health difficulty, but instead, characteristic of deviancy. Kosut (2006:90) suggests that "*the notion of the tattooed deviant is an enduring construct*".

There has been much research literature that has historically helped to normalise medicalised and criminalised discourses around tattooing, particularly within quantitative, correlational research. In '*Relationship of Tattoos to Personality Disorders*', Post (1968: 516) states:

> *The purpose of this paper is to show that the presence of a tattoo, or tattoos, can serve to indicate the presence of a personality disorder which could lead to, or is characterized by, behavior which deviates from contemporary social norms. The value of the establishment of a correlation between the presence of a tattoo and social deviancy would be most beneficial in that it could be a readily discernible mark of predisposition toward such conduct.*

A further example of the legacy of assumptions about deviance, difference and pathology could be the use of tattooing in Nazi concentration camps, where tattoos were used as a means of identification – in particular, as a marker of deviance and of problematic

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populations who needed to be carefully watched. When Doll positions herself in regard to a benefits assessor's perspective, she states:

…you've got tattoos so you're alright then (Focus Group 1).

This offers the availability of multiple knowledges and naturalised assumptions. Firstly, it could have been assumed by the assessor that Doll had the financial means and the capacity to have a tattoo. It could have been assumed that a willingness to undertake in a practice that has been historically construed as deviant could be taken as a blatant disregard for the status quo - a privileged position which has been traditionally reserved for the able-bodied and non-disabled.

However, for Doll, tattoos were very much relevant to her experience of distress and journey towards recovery given how she constructed tattooing as a coping mechanism and insofar, a practice of avoiding assumptions of deviancy rather than reproducing them; as Doll noted, she used tattooing to cover self-harm scars. Nonetheless, in taking up the position of an assessor, Doll constructs tattoos as a signifier of her perceived bodily and moral deviance, which alerts institutions to a perceived need for surveillance, particularly of her character.

Regarding the focus on weight, it is notable that Doll refers to the use of Body Mass Index in her assessment; a medicalised, yet flawed measure of weight. This introduces a regime of truth where bodies are pathologised and noted for their differentiation from a 'normal' body (Monaghan, Hollands and Pritchard, 2010). Although Doll offers her own truth about how BPD affects her relationship with food, her account has to compete with this regime of truth which is underpinned by medicalised, pathologised discourses of body management which indicate an ideal weight, rather than one based upon the average population.

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Such discussions of weight are indicative of contemporary biopolitical narratives that respond to neoliberal concerns, where obesity has come to be constructed as problematic, framed by language around public health concerns, such as 'epidemic', focusing upon the responsibility of the individual to account for their own health. A notable example of this is the 'Change 4 Life' initiative which features advice and tips about how families can better regulate their food intake, bodies, and fitness (Change 4 Life, 2019).

Discourse on obesity has drawn the attention of Foucauldian critique. Such critique has worked to deconstruct the self-indulgent body and challenge the way that certain bodies are positioned as morally abject and indicative of poor self-discipline (Metzl and Kirkland, 2010; Wright and Harwood, 2009). If biopolitical practice takes such an interest in problematising the unhealthy body, there is a need to ask how unhealthy bodies are positioned within the context of the benefits system and further to this, how and why is this discourse made available in an assessment of mental, rather than physical health?

Health is constructed as one of the many responsibilities that a person has within society. It holds people duty-bound to maintain not only a physically attractive body, based on ideas which have long been circulated by the media and advertising industries, but also to maintain a productive, able, and fit body:

> *…the product of the media and advertising industry. This discourse portrays the fit and thin body as not only healthy, but also beautiful and sexy. The unfit body is ugly, unsexy, and unpopular. Although frequently presented in "scientific" and "objective" terms, talk about health is not value-free; it is a moral discourse. The unfit and overweight body is deviant. It is associated with personal irresponsibility and immorality. Lack of fitness is the individual's own fault--she maintains an unhealthy "lifestyle"; she is lazy, gluttonous, idle, unvirtuous…As Foucault tells us, knowledge is not neutral--conceptions of normality and deviance are manufactured so as to create the types of bodies that society needs. It would hardly be productive in a capitalist society to economically penalize workaholics (Pylypa, 1998: 25-26).*

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Reducing the points awarded in Doll's PIP assessment functions as disciplinary practice, given how she is financially penalised for her failure to present a body which adheres to beauty standards, but also of the neoliberal, pathologised and medicalised norms upheld by capitalist society which does not perceive subjects as anything outside of their potential to be part of the labour force.

Subjects are encouraged to take up practices of self-surveillance and self-governance because of this two-pronged discourse, for example, calorie counting. However, given that such discourse of the body is underpinned by moral discourse, a lack of a fit body is constructed as something that subjects do purposefully, willingly, and consciously, representing yet another example of disregard for the status quo. Doll echoes this when describing the assumptions that she felt were made about her weight:

> *…to them I'm slovenly, I'm lazy, I'm workshy and all these things (Focus Group 1).*

If a subject is seen to be shirking their duty-bound obligation to both themselves and society in terms of governing, managing and maintaining the productive body, then a more explicit form of surveillance emerges. One's body is then transformed from being a private matter to one of public interest, where subjects are made accountable and punished by institutions, such as the benefits system, for failing to meet socially constructed obligations of bodily autonomy. The practices that are taken up by institutions in regard to discourses of obesity respond to neoliberal concerns, though this is subtle. This is because the stake that the free-market has in the production of healthy bodies has long been veiled behind discourses of desire and liberation:

> *Get undressed--but be slim, good-looking, tanned! (Foucault 1980: 57).*

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What is striking, is how an 'unfit' body has been used to assess an individual as being fit for work in an assessment of mental health. The only conceivable explanation is that an assumption of individual responsibility is veiled within the decision to judge a person to be fit for work. This is contrary to the goal of the assessment, which is to assess capability, rather than what a person cannot do – something which is specifically stated in government guidelines on the matter (Department for Work and Pensions, 2009). However, there is always room for 'what is the person doing wrong' or 'how are they being deviant' to be considered, which suggests assessments are neither objective nor value-free. Such presumed deviancy is then taken as an indicator of an absence of distress, as well as a practice that is undertaken by subjects which demonstrates their ability to take up work.

In short, mental health is not being approached with the gravity it necessitates or warrants but is reduced to what are framed as a series of deviant decisions, underpinned by a moral discourse which 'demedicalises' and delegitimises the experience of mental illness. This is evidenced by Doll in her account of a PIP assessment, where there was a focus on her character and weight, rather than her mental health; she simply states:

> …It's disassociation (Focus Group 1).

This focus on individual responsibility is a moral practice of surveillance that seeks to individualise and locate problems in the self, removing the concept of ill health altogether, consequently denying a 'disabled' identity that people with mental health conditions may lay claim to. In short, this face-value surveillance lays the experience of distress firmly at the foot of the subject and asks how they can better account for their bodies to make them more productive. It offers psychological explanations for being unproductive, but these are explanations that are conducive to removing entitlement to benefits, rather than the psychological explanations of distress that claimants know well

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and articulate. Even in an account of their own experience, the claimant is silenced and subjugated.

9.1.2.1 "Pull Your Socks Up": Governmentality and the Capitalist Political Economy

Although much of the neoliberal dogma of self-improvement discussed so far has been very much implicit and soft-paternalistic with regard to moral surveillance, it does offer neoliberalism as the next stage of capitalism as expectations of self-improvement become more explicit and coercive. Within the late stages of capitalism, self-improvement is no longer an expectation that subjects are nudged towards but is a demand. There were striking examples of a more coercive form of paternalistic neoliberalism:

> **Zack:** the problem is if you say to them, oh I can't get out of bed most days because of my medication or I'm too tired, well they say stop your medications…and wake up earlier or…wake up early or go to bed early and you'll get up early…and stop your medications because if your medication's making you drowsy…then why are you on benefits!
> **Jackie:** I've heard it all… (Focus Group 2).

This practice of moral surveillance distances itself from mental health diagnoses in favour of seeking out moral faults, failures, or individualised explanations. Participants discussed being advised to stop taking their medication, articulating in their accounts that doing as such would be counter-intuitive to recovery:

> **Nina:** there's no one better authority on your own health than you. That's why I'm articulate! Cos I'm living it! (Focus Group 1).

However, moral surveillance was not simply deployed by the state or the benefits system, but as Steven discusses, is also deployed on a local level:

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Steven: …I think I've told people before about a friend of mine, so-called friend…down the road and he sort of knows…the issues I've been through, but his general…assumption is every time he sees me, no matter how much I've told him about me mental health, its oh well you'll be okay when you get a job…and it's like, he doesn't…get mental health and he thinks that the…

Nina: the answer is a job

Steven: the answer is to get a job

Becky: work is good for your mental health

Steven: work is good for your mental health

(Audible sighing)

Steven: yeah you know what I mean he doesn't…understand the process…until he's actually been in that situation himself. So, I think his example there is an overall assumption of the public's perception…

Eve: basically its…going to the old school where pull your socks up mate and get out there

Steven: pull your socks up don't be a lazy bugger claiming benefits and you know, you'll be alright, your mental health will recover if you get a job, whatever it may be… (Focus Group 1).

As Steven indicates, work is not only presented as good for you in his account of an interaction with a neighbour, but work is constructed as an integral part of recovery and mental ill-health as symptomatic of non-productivity. In the quote above, the participant's co-construction of their disdain for the 'work is good for you' discourse is palpable. Steven described how his male neighbour proposed that work can serve as a material reification of the self and that productivity will not only alleviate distress but that it is the cure.

9.1.2.2 The Role of Gender

After Steven's account had finished, Nina, Jess and I shared concerned glances:

Nina: Do you not…I mean, I might be wrong saying this Steven, but…**it's almost like it's because you're a man**. You're expected that you should work…

Steven: yeah

Jess: it's a kind of emasculation…

Becky: Masculinity and…

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> **Steven:** *exactly, what they don't know is what I do and what we do as volunteers…they…don't wanna ask about that…you know, what I'm actually doing to give back… (Focus Group 1).*

Two dilemmas emerged from this conversation; firstly, although Steven did not make sense of his account in the same way, the females in the room took concern with how Steven's account of his neighbours' talk constructed work as being an essential part of masculinity. Part of the reason that this may have been problematic for Nina, Jess, and I, but not for Steven, is because of how productivity has come to be construed and naturalised as an important signifier of masculinity. It may, therefore, take a positioning outside of masculinity to produce these assumptions. Such discussions further introduce the role of capitalism and the implications it has for subjectivity in the context of productivity in terms of identity and the self.

A critical, feminist reading of capitalism offers that there are certain expectations laid upon men in regard to productivity. There is a subtle undercurrent of shaming practice within this masculine construction of capitalism, where not being in work functions in society to emasculate men and leaves them particularly vulnerable to neoliberal discourses of self-improvement. Essentially, being productive has become a naturalised position, particularly for males. Productivity is offered in the above account as an important way through which masculinity is constructed. Furthermore, it is represented as an important signifier of what it means to be a man and to have value as a man.

The second dilemma emerges from Steven's frustration that volunteering work is devalued. Work is strongly constructed as being an economic contribution. Steven positions himself as located within this dominant subjectivity, though expresses frustration that volunteering is not valued by society. This indicates the fetishisation of work as physical labour; although Steven's contribution is important, the dominant focus upon economic productivity negates the social and psychological elements of his

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contribution to society, such as how he helps, supports, and advocates for others. In sum, there is an expectation that productivity means the physical production of a commodity, particularly for males.

Further to this value placed on certain types of labour, Jess considers how gender is positioned within a discourse of productivity:

> *Jess*: *we conform to it in a way, don't we? It's that work ethic…it's been kind of…*
>
> *Nina*: *indoctrinated*
>
> *Jess*: *yeah and fostered and…and that's…our values…and they've been planted upon us, that paid work, and it's stratified as well…oh well what do you do for a living and…then you get the other end of it,* **oh I'm just a mother**
>
> *Eve: I'M JUST! And I hate that…I'm just a cleaner because…that's where you fall within the…hierarchy there is in society…I'm just a mother*
>
> *Jess*: *and then you're valued on what you do!*

Participants highlight that productivity is an ethic which intersects with gender within a hierarchical society, assessing productive value and positioning subjects in regard to discourse on productivity. This assessment of productive value is an act of surveillance which draws upon what are often archaic assumptions about gender when positioning subjects in regard to wider discourses of productivity. Because gender was so pronounced here as a subject position, surveillance can be firmly located as an issue for feminism. Domestic and caring roles are often devalued and overlooked, as noted in the quote above. Domestic roles in society reify assumptions about what constitutes women's work, which is inherently devalued by society, yet naturalised as largely being the responsibility of women, such as parenting. As with Steven's account of volunteering, this devalued status is constructed in regard to the lack of physical production of commodities, which takes dominance over emotional, mental, and psychological labour.

Whilst productivity was constructed in a gendered way that responds to neoliberal concerns, productivity also had implications in terms of class. This notion of class was troubled by participants, who reclaimed practices of surveillance to disrupt classist assumptions of benefit fraud.

9.1.3 Benefit Fraud as Classless

Participants acknowledged that in any system in society, there is room for people to take advantage. It was described as part of the human condition to do so:

> **Zack:** *…benefit fraud **exists**, let's not beat about it (Focus Group 2).*

Here, Zack positions himself as part of the 'reasonable mainstream', conceding that benefit fraud does occur:

> **Zack***: people…who shouldn't be on benefits who are getting benefits. I agree, there are people like that out there, not gonna disagree… (Focus Group 2).*

The 'reasonable mainstream' subject position offers a reclaiming of citizenship because it subverts positionings of otherness and deviance that people with mental health difficulties who claim benefits often find themselves constructed in regard to, as discussed in 9.1.2. Although surveillance is naturalised here, surveillance is constructed towards more traditional conceptions, where surveillance is deployed upon all and visible to all for good reason. However, Zack simultaneously suggests a more malign, covert form of surveillance occurring alongside this, which chooses only to see fraud within a certain context, committed by certain people. In making such a claim, Zack resists a suggestion that fraud is a class-based crime:

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> **Zack:** *…It's only **one percent** which is a drop in the ocean… Obviously with **any** system, and it's been proven…there was something about housing benefit where five people in the housing benefit office they got caught embezzling funds…and they were **IN CHARGE** of funds…but the point I'm tryin'a make is that…fraud happens in every system, there is a degree, a small percentage… (Focus Group 2).*

Zack offers a classless representation of the human condition; he acknowledges that there is a small degree of benefit fraud that takes place, though draws upon a discourse of classlessness to resist some of the prevailing rhetoric around the benefits system. Zack offers a positioning which achieves a middle ground between mainstream and otherness; he offers agreeability, he subverts otherness, though is still able to subtly challenge the status quo, yet maintain citizenship and a 'disabled' identity.

Zack does not deny that benefit fraud takes place but offers an example where benefit fraud has occurred that is not committed by benefit claimants, but the people who manage them. However, as Zack notes in reference to the mass media:

> *But…they don't really talk about that (Focus Group 2).*

Zack suggests that the media plays a role in skewing representations of benefit claimants, particularly regarding class. Zack represents one example of the use of politicised voice in the focus groups. A political voice should be taken to mean active engagement with power struggles, rather than a specific political allegiance. All participants made use of a political voice, albeit in their own subjective ways. For example, in 9.1.2 Doll and Nina focus in particular on systems, processes and naturalised assumptions as a means to disentangle and critique power systems in institutions like the benefits system. For Zack, his politicised voice was used to critique the media. The following sub-section considers how participants troubled the role of media representations in society, focusing in particular on the politicised voice that many participants expressed.

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9.1.4 The Media and Corporate Rule

Although the benefits system was strongly criticised, participants identified the media[20] as being responsible for negative rhetoric on claiming benefits.

Participants positioned the media as being in a considerable position of power and influence which the public is often powerless to, to the extent that the media's impact fuels public opinion and government policy:

> ***Zack:*** *…the media, for the last ten years…is responsible for creating that hostile environment…it's like the whole Brexit thing, which I know is a totally different subject. The media caused a whip-up, the public, **the general public**…lapped it up when it comes to pointing out…cos when you're reading a news story it's not always both sides of the coin……you're reading something which is an editorial, something which somebody's put in front of you in the way they want to show it…and **the problem is the general public will just accept it because they think its gospel truth*** *(Focus Group 2).*

> ***Eve****: …I think that those kind of media…' panics'…do feed into organisations, cos' when we watch it, we get conditioned and it's a fear that…yeah…the need to get it right really. To stop the wrong labelling really (Focus Group 1).*

The above accounts offer an interpretation of false consciousness and the psychology of the masses. As Blackman and Walkerdine (2001) note, when attempting to understand why the working-classes did not or could not take up the revolutionary aims he envisioned, Marx[21] suggested the notion of 'false consciousness', where bourgeoisie

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[20] Although the first empirical study explored media representations of people with mental health difficulties who claim benefits, a decision has been made not to link the current analysis to this. This is because the arguments made are qualitatively different in both analyses; whilst my own theoretical stance rejects essentialist readings of the media, the current analysis marks a return to such an understanding. I have chosen to distance these two parts of analysis to avoid suggesting that my own stance represents 'truth', whilst that of participants does not, which would be problematic. Voice is preserved here, exploring how participants made sense of their relationship with the media and the subject positions produced through these accounts.

[21] Though Blackman and Walkerdine (2001) ascribe the idea of 'false consciousness' to Marx, Marx did not make reference to the idea specifically in any of his work – false consciousness is a Marxist

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ideology, which is upheld by the media, obscures the working-class masses with ideology, blocking them from their true vision: consciousness of their exploitation. As Blackman and Walkerdine (2001) go on to argue, it is not difficult to conceive how cultural and media theorists come to synthesise Marx's ideas about false consciousness with an '*understanding of vulnerable working-class minds too easily swayed by the easy gratification of the mass media and mass consumption'* (65). Indeed, a similar interpretation is offered in the above account – that some people can 'see through' or 'see beyond' ideology and have a full view of reality and truth, whilst the 'general public' has their vision blocked by ideology and enjoy consuming 'moral panics' in the media, i.e. '*the general public lapped it up'*.

In both focus groups, the media was constructed as the overseer of truth and as having a monopoly on knowledge. The media was constructed as having significant control over the way government functions and how it works to shape public attitudes. The media was not constructed as working within and between institutions but working above them, bending them to its will. Participants suggested that whilst they were subject to surveillance by the benefits system and local surveillance through public opinion, ultimately, the media is the true source of this coercion and oppression. Participants believed the power that the media has is so strong, it has the potential to condition people:

> **Zack:** *…the person without disabilities and without mental issues, they've conditioned them…literally. Newspapers too, specifically TV channels, channel five, the sun and all that anyway. They campaigned…for a change in the system and ultimately what they did was they cherry-picked certain things like about people having too many kids and all… (Focus Group 2).*

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idea, derived from Marx's theories of social class. Hence, a citation has not been provided for Marx here.

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Zack positions people with disabilities and mental health difficulties as being outside of the general public – a rare practice of self-othering which produces spaces for resistance. By positioning such groups as outside of the general public and immune to the effects of the mainstream media, Zack echoes Goffman's (1963) theory of stigma, given that the participants share diagnoses with people they relate to in the media, but also work with people with similar diagnoses as part of the service-user advocacy group. They simultaneously become both the 'wise' and 'own' in terms of subject positioning; they are 'experts by experience'. In contrast, people who have little contact with disability or distress become the 'unwise', whom Zack positions as being susceptible to naturalised assumptions in the mainstream media. This was further offered in the first focus group, where participants distanced themselves from the mainstream media:

> **Jess**: …it's ironic cos we…pay these licences to the BBC…to feed us these kind of…brain conditioning ideas that divides society in the way it does (Focus Group 1).

Furthermore, the language used by Jess draws upon a psychological repertoire, referring to ideas such as conditioning, which were used to construct discursive practices of power, manipulation, and control in reference to the role of the media in society. The media was not positioned as having a co-constructive relationship with government, but instead of having domain over it. Eve and Jess offered explanations for this:

> **Eve:** but what is it, its big business, in't it? And bad news sells (Focus Group 1).

> **Jess**: …the very good corporate rule (Focus Group 1).

Thus, the media is also a practice of surveillance, albeit in a different way to which the benefits system is. Whilst the moral surveillance of the benefits system uses truth to encourage re-uptake into the workforce, the media uses truths in such a way because it has a vested interest in sustainability and profit.

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9.1.5 Subjectivity: Who Watches the Watchmen

In the first focus group, participants spoke about their contact with NHS employees such as Psychiatrists and General Practitioners. As the conversation progressed, participants considered how the care provided by NHS employees differed to the professionals who assess health conditions within the benefits system. The NHS was constructed in regard to a discourse of accountability, positioned by participants in regard to wider organisational bodies, such as the GMC (General Medical Council). However, it was noted that this accountability was less distinct for benefit system employees. This was particularly important where mental illness was concerned; participants shared scepticism surrounding the competency that practitioners within the benefits system might have when assessing a claimant with a mental health difficulty. A strong sense of frustration was shared in terms of the experience of attending a benefits assessment due to a mental health difficulty:

> **Nina:** *To me…what frustrates me they should be looking at individual cases not putting mental health under one umbrella i.e. this is how someone is with mental health because it's not…and it's like when I went for me ESA assessment, he wa sat there and he were throwing loads…I mean I'd just had a breakdown, he was throwing loads and loads of stuff at me and at one point I went THIS IS NOT LIKE BIPOLAR, THIS IS LIKE BLAH I mean THIS IS SERIOUS and he just looked at me and he went I think we've got enough information, he got up and he went…me ex-husband went come on Nina* and the bloke cem out and he said do you want to go out the side door cos he could see that I was so distressed, but I'd literally held it together up to that point and I just lost it because it were like questions he were asking me, won't even cutting it for how my mental health shows and…It won't even relevant. So, it goes to show that they've already decided what mental health causes and…how it meks you so that just questions… (Focus Group 1).*

Nina's account highlights how the neoliberal fetishisation of the individual within the benefits system is counter-intuitive to gaining a full understanding of a person's experience of mental illness. This individualisation makes it very difficult for subjects to account for the subjective and intangible experience of distress because the questions

within the assessment do not facilitate the articulation of such an experience. This individualisation is not of the individual, but of the subjective experience of mental illness, where one single truth is provided for this.

If participants are not positioned in regard to this truth, then they are re-positioned away from a diagnosis altogether. Nina further suggests that practitioners have already made a judgement as to how certain mental health diagnoses present or manifest themselves and that a person must fit within these abstract criteria to be eligible. Subjects must adhere to a medicalised, myopic regime of truth, or risk being positioned away from distress altogether, a feeling that was shared collectively in the group when prompted:

> **Becky**: Is there a sense that you're being fit around a system?
> **Nina:** Oh yeah
> **Doll:** Absolutely
> Steven: Yep
> **Eve:** I think that's it (Focus Group 1).

Doll uses the example of a 'normal' day to illustrate this point further:

> **Doll:** there's a lot of shades of grey between good and not good and it's understanding that unlike any other illness, it's as individual as the person. You know, if you have…a medical diagnosis of cancer, leukaemia, anything like that…it's in a book and it's like one plus one equals two and this is what a two looks like. Mental health, that's not…at all. We all recover differently, we all react differently, we all cope differently and that is not reflected in the current benefit system (Focus Group 1).

Doll offers a representation of mental illness as being subjective and intangible, which the current system is unable to capture, particularly where employees do not have the necessary training. A discourse of expertise is drawn upon to highlight a lack of parity between physical and mental health and further to this, to construct parallels between

the professional conduct of NHS employees and that of practitioners within the benefits system:

> **Doll:** *…you go to doctors who are meant to be 'independent' and…they study for X amount of years and…they know you personally and yet you go…for ESA specifically, you do thirteen weeks of sick note, old-fashioned sick notes, basically a doctor's saying you're not well enough to work and this is ongoing and this is why and these are the things that you're going to be referred for. But somebody who sees you for forty minutes in a Work Capability Assessment supersedes all of that! In most instances, ATOS employs healthcare professionals who are overworked, underpaid nurses, radiographers, physiotherapists –**NOT** mental health professionals (Focus Group 1).*

Doll notes that this scepticism around the competency of practitioners in the benefits system is due to a lack of expertise in mental health, but further highlights that it is a systemic problem. She offers that a failure to fully engage with the experience of mental distress is impacted by the pre-existing low-wage economy and the exploitation of workers.

Further to this, it was noted that the role of the GP has changed. Whilst once considered a source of adequate care, participants considered how the doctor-patient relationship has transformed[22]:

> **Jess**: *Well the roles of doctors are kinda changing now there's more expectation and kinda falling into that policing mode as well…and that confidentiality has been changed somewhat…where data has been put into a spine for instance and data sharing and you've got to opt-out of your data being shared. I think there's something a little (**sceptical tone**) mmm…but they're trying to keep it objective…but a little bit err…worrying, put it that way. The whole nature of data and how it's being used and changing the nature of people's roles and…that trust and confidentiality they used to have with doctors and professionals seems to have gone now (Focus Group 1).*

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[22] As of December 2019, the rights of benefit claimants have been transformed with regard to GDPR compliant procedures. On the ESA50 form, there was previously a section where claimants could say whether or not they wanted their GP to receive a copy of assessment outcomes. This has now been removed, meaning that the DWP can now contact a claimants GP, without their permission, to state that no further sick notes should be provided, and that the claimant is 'fit for work'.

After the individual themselves, doctors were seen to be an authority on health, however, participants further suggested a complex power relationship that has transformed in the contemporary context. This transformation was underpinned by discourses of loss of trust and scepticism. These discourses were constructed in regard to surveillance, of which participants expressed being subject to in spaces within and beyond the benefits system, such as when they visit their GP.

This power relationship suggests that the person claiming benefits takes-up two subjectivities when they see a GP – they are simultaneously the 'patient' and the 'claimant'. This does not suggest that the power held by doctors is inherently bad where knowledges of confidentiality and policing are made available. Instead, a further power relationship is offered where professionals are being leant upon by the state, transforming the profession into a practice of medicalised surveillance and by extension, a practice of social control, exerted by the state and reinforced by compliant health professionals. This further demonstrates that although invisible, there is a sense that the benefits system has a growing, almost insidious, presence in wider institutions.

A further example of this is charitable organisations. Doll referred to the recent government-commissioned 'gagging orders':

> **Doll:** *…this is not known by the general public on purpose…most support systems within communities, set up by communities because there is a huge need, they end up getting charity status or they're commissioned by the council. Those pots of money come from the government. So, within the intricacies of applying for that money, you are not allowed – and you have to sign something to say…you are not allowed to detrimentally say anything against the government. So, you are automatically setting up a system where…the people who've been failed by the system, but you can't lobby against it…and this is the thing. So, on the surface, in the media, it looks great, we've got this initiative and we're doing that and we're doing men's mental health and there's more money in art and recovery. But every single one of these groups have to sign up to say if you want this money to do good, you **can't** comment on the government. Including, might I add, Mind, the mental health charity. The biggest mental health charity in the UK will not and cannot and how is that not a conflict of interest? (Focus Group 1).*

'Gagging orders' entail a contract between the DWP and an organisation. They state that the organisation receiving funding must act with regard to the reputation of the DWP. Many charities have claimed that government-commissioned gagging orders do not impinge on their ability to speak out, whilst the DWP themselves simply concluded that they do not use gagging orders at all (What Do They Know, 2013). In 2018, an FOI request was made into the matter of gagging orders. After a waiting period of four months, Disability News Service (2018) wrote an article detailing the five contracts which were released by the DWP as a result of the requests. These contracts stated that contractors must not:

> *[bring] into disrepute, damages the reputation of the Contracting Body or harms the confidence of the public in the Contracting Body.*

Further to this, it emerged that the clause was not exclusive to the Work and Health Programme but had been in use from as early as 2015. The clauses have been described as 'Orwellian' (The Canary, 2018).

The presence of the benefits system within work done by medical professionals and charitable organisations, as discussed by participants, constructs the benefits system as having extended its reach to wider institutions which are being shaped and transformed by a profit-driven agenda, an ideology which participants strived to trouble and make visible. Participants positioned themselves as powerless within the shift towards free-market rule and the consequential power relationships it produces between institutions and subjects, particularly where surveillance is concerned. This makes it somewhat difficult for people with mental health difficulties to take up a political position, should they wish to do so:

> *Becky*: … *it feels as though mental health has to be apolitical*
>
> *Eve*: *Yep*
>
> *Becky*: *Although it's intrinsically political because you're surrounded by political systems?*
>
> *Doll*: *Yep. Yeah, yeah, yep.*
>
> *Becky*: *So, you can't break away from...*
>
> *Doll*: *If the government was a business it'd have been bankrupt years ago. Most people wouldn't use it anymore…if it was a shop and you had that level of service and you went in to buy a loaf of bread and you came out with a car, you'd be like I'm not going there again. But we have…we have no choice and that's the problem (Focus Group 1).*

Nonetheless, participants found resistance within their own terms. From this position of powerlessness, they were well prepared to highlight government failures. They emphasised that failings were because of a governmental agenda that seeks to accrue profit above all.

9.2 Consumerism and Alienation: A Breakdown in Society

This section explores a changing society, where elements of late-stage capitalism, such as neoliberalism, consumerism and the growing role of technology have played an important role in reconstructing a sense of selfhood, which has implications for how people relate to one and another. Participants accounted for the dilemmas this produces in the self. These dilemmas take place in a contemporary society that was described by participants as having become increasingly complex and abstract.

The following analysis further highlights the construction of a growing sense of distance between humans, considering the implications this has for people when negotiating and navigating positions and identities within such a world. It was offered that there must be a reclaiming of 'human'. To explore this, the construction of what it means to be 'human' will first be considered. Following this, the analysis considers how participants used

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language to reclaim a 'disabled' identity as mental health service-users, and how this was used by participants to position themselves closer to human, shifting disability from a societally devalued position, towards one of contribution and citizenship, producing alternative knowledges of productivity.

9.2.1 Losing 'Human': The Abstractness of the Social World

9.2.1.1 The Singularity is Near

In *The Singularity is Near*, Kurzweil (2005) notes that in the near future, technological advances will grow exponentially. As such advances rapidly gain traction, Kurzweil argues that human beings will find themselves unable to keep up with the pace of such changes, eventually finding themselves out of the loop as everyday life and society are profoundly disrupted beyond repair, eventually resulting in the end of human life as we know it. This results in the singularity, where humans and machines merge and the dominant form of life is self-improving robots.

Given that Kurzweil makes many bold predictions that are akin to something one might expect to find in science fiction, it is unsurprising that he has been criticised for his exhilarating, yet grandiose argument. Yet it is worth acknowledging that posthumanism does have its roots in science fiction.

I draw in particular upon critical posthumanism, such as the work of Braidotti (2013), acknowledging that social constructionism has its limitations. As discussed above, I acknowledge that in this analysis there is an emphasis on the affective and the experiential, simply because an account of the alienated human cannot rely upon social constructionism alone. As Braidotti (2013) argues, there is a need for a new vocabulary which captures the scope of subjectivity, for example, in terms of what discourse can

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capture, such as the personal, psychological, and material, raising representation as an issue for critical theorists. This turn necessitates a magnified focus on the material when providing a post-humanist account of the subject which rejects individualism and acknowledges the changing parameters of human life:

> *Most of us who were trained in social theory…have experienced at least some degree of discomfort at the thought that some elements of our subjectivity may not be totally socially constructed…Part of the legacy of the Marxist Left consists, in fact, in a deeply rooted suspicion towards the natural order and green politics. As if this mistrust of the natural were not enough, we also need to reconceptualise the relation to the technological artefact as something as intimate as close as nature used to be. The technological apparatus is our new 'milieu' and this intimacy is far more complex and generative than the prosthetic, mechanical extension that modernity had made of it (Braidotti, 2013: 82-83).*

This reading relates to the role of technology in disrupting human life, which was troubled in participant accounts.

9.2.1.2 Distance: Separating the Person and the Human

Participants constructed the social world as having become increasingly abstract. Within this, participants positioned themselves as being distanced from others, both physically and metaphorically. This discourse of distance is constructed in two ways, referring to distance from one and another in terms of physical proximity in a distinctly material way, but also referring to an abstract, metaphorical, and affective feeling of imagined distance. This echoes claims made by Ahmed (2004), where emotions are not solely experienced but are productive in terms of the capitalist political economy. Participants described how society produces practices which embolden distance:

> ***Eve:*** *…we live in a society where they actually are putting the barriers down. So, you've got your people who are doers and the…*
> ***Doll:*** *Worker bees*

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> *Eve*: Yeah…the deliverers of…the processes that are not the best for people and happily do that (Focus Group 1).

As Eve and Doll discuss, this separation is steeped in the capitalist political economy, which bestows power and citizenship on those who participate fully. Those whom participants considered to have such power are positioned as being the gatekeepers of the systems and practices which claimants navigate. In a Marxist sense, a class division is offered, whereby participants suggest the existence of the ruling classes who have the power to shape the lives of the lower classes simply because they are productive; this productivity bestows power on the recipient. In turn, this other, which the participants positioned themselves towards, is constructed as being relatively powerless. Power is a privilege afforded to productivity and those positioned in regard to it. The punishment for non-productivity means experiencing the detrimental, affective consequences of this relationship. Participants constructed benefit-related practices as abstract, highlighting a discourse of distance:

> *Nina*: they're behind a telephone
>
> *Doll:* …It's that abstract idea of a sanction
>
> *Eve:* and that allows them to do it
>
> *Jess*: I think in every area of your life on a telephone, people become removed, actually person has become removed
>
> *Doll:* it's getting worse as well, with universal credit it's worse!
>
> *Jess*: and more out there, and more isolated
>
> *Doll:* You're more disempowered, universal credit doesn't even have a phone you have to do it online. They don't even speak to you (Focus Group 1).

Here, a dispositif of 'hiding' is implied where the distance that is produced veils the human claimant, distancing it from the view of those who manage systems. Participants positioned practices of distancing as having implications for the self, constructing these as being isolating, disempowering and dehumanising, i.e. *'they don't even speak to you'*.

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This practice was constructed as happening where situations have emotional gravity, working to veil both poverty and distress by offering what is constructed as an apathetic response in return:

> *Why are we always reading…that somebody's committed suicide because they've gone down to the jobcentre, they've been told that they've nothing, they're on the phone…wanting crisis…they've got no electricity, they ant even got a…scratch of food in just give em' summet for their dinner and they're like oh no sorry can you ring back tomorrow…(Focus Group 1).*

Nina further offers that this distance between people and the institutions they navigate is not something that occurs naturally, but instead serves a specific function. Participants considered that these abstract practices work to enact a separation of the human and the person:

> **Nina**: *Do you not find though that it's easier to dismiss somebody if you're not looking in their face?*
> **Doll:** *Oh absolutely!*
> **Nina**: *You look in someone's face and they're a human (Focus Group 1).*

The discursive practice of distancing produces alienation and unequal power relations, in which subjects positioned themselves as powerless. When such abstract practices of distancing are drawn upon, a splitting of the person occurs. The human ceases to exist and is consequently transformed from subject to object. The person as the object is no longer afforded the agency that would be allowed of the human and further to this, by no longer being human, empathy is neither expected nor owed by society. Further to this, when the benefits system is hidden from view but continues to oversee those navigating it, the notion of the panopticon is once again evoked, supporting the claim that this distancing produces tenuous power relationships in the context of the benefits system.

In this section, the way that people use technology, such as telephones, as a metaphorical barrier, has been considered in terms of how such barriers veil the material, such as poverty, but also work to veil the emotional or the psychological, such as accounts of distress. Participants positioned productivity as being synonymous with power and agency, particularly when technology is deployed to veil the emotional burden of working in the benefits system. However, participants further expanded upon the role of technology, suggesting it is not only those with power who veil 'human', but that technology itself is beginning to play an important role in the construction and reification of the self in a changing society. In sum, people can make use of technology to reproduce power relationships, but technology also serves this function without a human actor.

9.2.3 The Empt(ier) Self

The role of the human was constructed as being increasingly precarious, not only within the benefits system but more widely, as part of a changing society. Participants constructed the human self as something that is gradually diminishing because of technological advances:

> **Jess**: *That's literally how people feel and as we're galloping on with technology that we have, people's roles in society are shrinking (Focus Group 1).*

Jess positions 'the human' as disappearing from society. As well as considering how people's roles in society are changing, Jess further considered that material things in the world are gradually disappearing from view and further to this, that humans are threatened with the prospect of being displaced from the labour force:

> *…we have…self-service…just an example, in a supermarket…I tend not to use them…vainly trying to keep someone's job on the line, but that's just an example*

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> *of how…the material everyday practical things like driving in a car thinking I'm using a gearstick…and money, actually visible money, it's all disappearing, isn't it? (Focus Group 1).*

Jess evokes a sense of liminality. In turn, she gives light to the suggestion that the rapid pace of technological advance has begun to reconfigure the role of the human in society and work as we know it. The notion of self-service in supermarkets reifies neoliberal discourse, eliciting ideas around self-reliance in an individualised society, which in this example, involves distance from other people, even to the extent of accepting help from others. Technology offers an individualised, insular alternative to human contact, which coincides with the widening of access to consumer practice. Here, Jess constructs the material as fundamental in constructing what constitutes human but notes that this is disappearing from view as the growing role of technology threatens the human, displacing important knowledges of dependency and the necessity of human contact.

One can then offer the cybersphere as a new humanism, a claim which is echoed by Harraway (1991):

> *They were not man, an author to himself, but only a caricature of that masculinist reproductive dream. To think they were otherwise was paranoid. Now we are not so sure. Late twentieth-century machines have made thoroughly ambiguous the difference between natural and artificial, mind and body, self-developing and externally designed, and many other distinctions that used to apply to organisms and machines. Our machines are disturbingly lively, and we ourselves frighteningly inert (Harraway, 1991: 152).*

For Harraway, we are already assimilated; a fusion of technology and the human, amongst other relations, where dominant economic and social conditions are produced, yet are difficult to step away from. Technology is constructed as functioning in a disciplinary manner. As Jess offers with regard to the role of technology in supermarkets, technology functions to further reify individualism in response to neoliberal concerns of the free-market and consumerism, with an expectation for people

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to regulate and reconstruct the self in response. As Jones (1999) argues, contemporary technologies are technologies of the self:

> *…our most recent technologies are indeed particularly ones of the self. They conflate the narratives we construct about who we are with ones we construct about who we are in relation to technology, rather than in relation to one another. One might even say that these are not only technologies of the self, but selfish technologies. The affective dimension of network technologies is difficult to assay, but is of great importance (Jones, 1999: 222).*

The human is not a naturally occurring notion but is produced in discourse. The growing pace of technology does not occur in a vacuum but reifies valued, normative subjectivities that are pertinent to the capitalist political economy. The notion of the 'human' was constructed in participant accounts as being tethered to the material world, representing that which is natural; a signifier for participants which constitutes reality. However, technology, given its dominance, has come to be assimilated as part of what constitutes this natural, material world in a contemporary context. Technology becomes discourse because it represents a 'truth'; it becomes a technology of the self (Foucault, 1988) because it regulates and reconfigures the construction of the self. When this occurs, Jess suggests that material loss, such as contact with other people, produces a palpable psychological loss of selfhood, where reality, as it was once known, begins to transform.

Unlike Cushman's (1990) notion of the empty self, where the self is soothed by consumer goods, participants suggested that the growing role of technology, rather than filling the self, only seemed to render it yet more empty. This discourse of the 'lost self' was considered in participant accounts:

> **Nina**: *…I feel like I'm…losing me own self…me brain's going stagnant…*
> **Eve:** *That's what we do (Focus Group 1).*

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Similarly, unlike Gergen's (1991) saturated self, participants did not describe growing technology as broadening and expanding social relations, but as having drastically diminished them instead, serving to exacerbate a divide between people. Within this discourse of the lost self, participants described people as gradually becoming distanced from one and another:

> **Jess**: *I think in every area of your life…people become removed, actually, person has become removed (Focus Group 1).*

Further to this loss of the self, humans were positioned as being relatively powerless within society as technology has gradually begun to take up some of the roles traditionally carried out by humans. This complements Braidotti's (2013) suggestion that the relationship between the human and the technological other is indeed a "*postmodern predicament*" (89) because technology plays an important part in constructing and reifying the self. Furthermore, technology was constructed as superseding and absorbing the human, whilst decentring and displacing relations between them and disrupting what has come to be understood as 'natural'. In turn, participants constructed a discourse of 'the emp(tier) self' amidst a demand to reify the self to keep up with the changing parameters of capitalist society.

9.2.3.1 More Human than Human

As technology imposes limitations on the productive capacity of humans, technology replaces the need for humans to play a role within certain areas of the labour force, particularly where the use of artificial intelligence is concerned.

Discussing new materialism, Fox and Alldred (2018) suggest that abstract concepts, such as imagination, memory and thought, are important when considering materialism

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because although they are not strictly material in themselves, they have the capacity to produce material effects.

Nonetheless, when human intelligence and memory can be effectively replicated in non-human actors, the line between 'person' and 'human' is blurred. The benefits of technology, combined with the human capacity for intelligence is clear – such technology has all the capacity of being human without being subject to the human condition; if it fails, it is easily fixed and most importantly, it can be exploited infinitely, without ever resisting its role in the means of production. Such technology can function as close to human as conceivably possible but without risk of self-awareness, consciousness, or resistance. This represents the very 'commodification' of human life, or at least of its productive capacity.

As discussed in Chapter Seven, the way that neoliberalism encourages self-improvement is circular and infinite. Because the human can never truly meet this pervasive expectation of constant self-improvement, it is eventually transcended by technology that maintains human-like skills. However, what separates technology and 'the human' is the human condition, specifically, the potential to fail. This potential to fail is contrasted with technology's capacity to achieve what the human cannot – perfection.

Thus, in the context of the labour force, this search for constant self-improvement has been transformed - replaced by a search for perfection. This search for perfection has important implications for subjectivity as it splits the human, as it is known, into two separate subject positions – the human and the person. This splitting of human is veiled in a discourse of liberation, it offers cost-effective ways of maintaining the means of production, reducing the burden of human labour by providing technology that is intended to improve and simplify human life, whilst gradually diminishing the value the human has to society. This occurs within a hegemonic discourse of productivity which
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continues to expect people to take up a productive role in society, but limits opportunities to do so. Inevitably, this leaves the person yet further removed from the means of production and alienated from the labour force. This acts as a reification of the struggle over the mode of production, not unlike that of the Luddites discussed in 3.2.2, who revolted against another liminal period when they saw their jobs threatened by machinery during the birth of the Industrial Revolution.

This sense of alienation within a rapidly changing society was expressed in the focus groups. When co-constructing her account, Doll noted feelings of alienation from the workplace as a result of navigating benefit-related systems and practices. Doll laments the fruitlessness of this struggle:

> **Doll:** *…If you're not providing for this society then you're not…*
> **Nina & Doll** (together): *Valuable*
> **Doll:** *So why should we bother (Focus Group 1).*

Here, Doll accounts for alienation from the workforce and the wider dogma of productivity. For Doll, this discourse of productivity is inescapable, because even when a person is in employment, this does not necessarily mean they are valuable, or valuable enough. This is likely exacerbated when a subject negotiates multiple subjectivities, for example, a 'disabled' subjectivity, given that disability is a materially devalued status (Mitchell and Snyder, 2015). This leads to a dispositif of '*why should I bother',* which entails feelings of alienation and disenfranchisement from the wider remit of productivity.

Jackie also constructed an account of alienation. These feelings of alienation extend beyond alienation from the workforce because of difficulties navigating the benefits

system. Jackie describes alienation in terms of feeling outside of society, considering how society positions her as less than human:

> *You know, I've brought children up on me own, three boys, and they've done magnificent and then to be treated like…you don't exist…all of a sudden in life (Focus Group 2).*

In Jackie's account of alienation, she constructs a subject position of the 'non-existent human', despite drawing on alternative knowledges of productivity, namely, as a parent to successful children. Jackie positions herself in regard to the viewpoint of society; she is a person, though not necessarily human because alternative knowledges of productivity are devalued by comparison to the production of commodities.

This alienation is indicative of the individualising tendencies of humanism, which produces normative ideals to which people must aspire to. Goodley, Lawthom and Runswick-Cole (2014b) speak of humanism's imperialist tendencies, the colonising implications of which serve as a practice of othering and positions those outside of its Eurocentric core as '*less than human or inhuman'* (2014b: 343). This is constructed in regard to humanism's Eurocentric underpinnings, which offer the human as male, white, masculine, heterosexual and able-bodied (Braidotti, 2013).

Coincidentally, these ideals respond to neoliberal-ableist concerns given that alternative positionings are subjugated in favour of this Eurocentric ideal. Alienation was constructed in regard to the capitalist dogma which emphasises productive potential, a deviation from which produced a 'less than human' subject position. This humanist discourse on productivity values normative subjectivities, which subjects constructed as being unreachable, thus producing a dispositif of 'not being valued' and alienated positionings. Such subjectivities are a concern for critical disability studies, which troubles the naturalising implications of constituting the 'human' in a myopic way:

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> *Quite simply, disability complicates the myopic perspective and non-representative nature offered by humanism. Our sitpoint is that disability is the quintessential posthu-man condition: because it calls for new ontologies, ways of relating, living and dying. Posthuman and critical disability studies share an antithetical attitude towards the taken-for-granted, ideological and normative under-girdings of what it means to be a valued citizen of society (Goodley, Lawthom and Runswick-Cole, 2014b: 348).*

Goodley, Lawthom and Runswick-Cole (2016) draw upon a dis/human position to address these concerns, offering that a reach for normalcy is not itself problematic, but that it is the very notion of normalcy that needs to be troubled, something which disability is well placed to challenge and disrupt. In the following section, I offer the contemporary, liminal period as a potential site of resistance from which to trouble normativity, particularly in regard to the way that consumerism and responses to neoliberalism function to construct dominant ways of being.

9.2.3.2 Utopia or Dystopia: A Post-Scarcity Society

In this analysis, posthuman theory has been drawn on to illustrate the idea that growing technological advance constitutes a period of liminality that has dilemmas for the self. I argue that whilst this change can be met with cynicism, technology also represents the markings of a new epoch which presents new opportunities for resistance that may not have been previously viable. This offers a new renaissance - a shifting culture around work and its role in society. Consequently, post-work discourse may offer opportunities for real change. With a declining need for human labour, as technology takes up such roles, I argue that this need not necessarily mean a loss of human, but a regaining of it. If we are living in a world that does not require as much abstract human labour as was once necessary, then one may envision the possibility of a move toward post-work society, given that society has already begun to implement the automation of many areas of abstract labour.

This may also open up the possibility for a shift towards a post-scarcity economy, given that the means to produce such an ideal exist. Bastani (2019) offers technology as being essential to producing a post-scarcity economy, where technology can reduce the cost of commodities and provide liberation from labour. Echoing the work of Harraway (1991), Bastani (2019) centres his manifesto on the argument that the rapid pace of technology need not be a threat but instead viewed as a site of resistance and empowerment by embracing a shift towards equality and away from potentially damaging, hegemonic, fetishised discourses of hard work.

9.2.4 Reclaiming and Reconstructing 'Human'

As discussed previously, participant accounts troubled a discourse of distance. In relation to distance, participants constructed positionings of 'less than human' and 'the lost self'. Although such narratives seem to disempower, given the alienation they represent, participants further drew on these positions to produce alternative knowledges, co-constructing accounts of what it means to be human, considering discourses of empathy and productivity, alongside the implications that individualism has for subjectivity and selfhood.

9.2.4.1 Discourse of Empathy: Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?

The novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep* (Dick, 1996 [1968]) is set in post-apocalyptic America, comprised of humans and androids, who are incredibly hard to distinguish between. At the end of the novel, the protagonist ponders what makes humans human, concluding that whilst humans, androids and animals all exhibit intelligence, empathy is the only uniquely human trait. In this section, the way that participants constructed human nature is considered. This is not to say that human

nature exists as a truth, but instead, considers how participants reconstructed 'human'

to reclaim it.

A discourse of empathy was drawn upon by participants, who discussed their motivations

for taking part in the research. Participants took part in the hope of helping others in

similar situations:

> **Steven:** *…it's not just about you it's about everybody else as well…your cause is for everybody…everybody's cause is for you…*
>
> **Doll:** *Yeah! I don't want anyone to go through what I've been through*
>
> **Eve:** *but I don't think that anyone who's working wants to go through it…cos it's quite frightening…if somebody's been stable…*
>
> **Jess**: *…it's a great device isn't it, because it is frightening to…compare yourself? (Focus Group 1).*

Whilst locating accounts in their own experience, participants positioned themselves as

having been lucky or fortunate by comparison to others, producing emotionally driven,

empathic accounts:

> **Doll**: *…I was…at a faith event…in the church and my heart broke for this poor guy. I heard him come into the church, he'd been…next door…to the jobcentre…he'd been told that his universal credit still wasn't in payment…he was about 45, 50? Well dressed, obviously some sort of situation where he's ended up being out of work, he's struggling…he was very respectful…he said, they won't let me use the phone, I dunno how to do the internet…I've got no money…I've got no food and the foodbank have told me I've already had four things from them this week, I'm not allowed any more. British Gas have given me some electric to tide me over, but I've got no food and I don't wanna go to my daughter's again…because I don't wanna take from her. So, the church let him use the phone. He's like, I'll pay you, he's got like pennies…that broke my heart…we're sat in this room having this conversation because people who are currently in crisis…they don't have their own voice and they don't feel like they have anywhere to go to have these conversations and then they're scared because they get penalised to come and do something like this…I feel my voice isn't heard and I think I'm quite a domineering, articulate person. What chance does anybody else have? (Focus Group 1).*

Furthermore, participants positioned DWP employees and politicians as distinctly lacking this empathy and consequently othered them. They considered that one's employment is secondary to the obligations that humans have to one and another. This is where participants begin reclaiming human by constructing the human condition as being hinged on a discourse of empathy, positioning those outside of this as deviant:

> **Zack…***you reap what you sew and don't think that just because it's your **job** that you don't have a moral obligation…what you **do…***is what's gonna come back to you*
>
> **Sarah***: karma's a… (self-censored)*
>
> **Zack***: but we can all be honest…in me saying that their mentality is that of psychopaths. They are psychopathic. They are not…*
>
> **Sarah***: real*
>
> **Zack***: …not what I would call normal*
>
> **Sarah***: compassionate*
>
> **Zack***: …people. Compassionate, there to help, because in my opinion, the system, the government, the local council, these systems are…*
>
> **Sarah***: corrupt! (Focus Group 2).*

Participants reified discourses of deservedness, evoking the notion of 'karma' as a fitting punishment for people who fail their moral obligations to one and another in society. Those who oversee the benefits system are positioned as non-normative, amoral, and outside of 'human'. This functioned as a practice of othering, where the 'other' is cast against what are constructed as fundamental traits and obligations that constitute being a 'normal' person. Participation in society is constructed here as reaching far beyond productivity, finding a home in social relations and compassion for others instead.

Participants drew upon essentialist discourse, making use of psychological explanations that identify a lack of a valued trait as a form of resistance. Somewhat ironically, these are the same explanations which are often used in the benefits system to explain why a claimant is unemployed. What this does represent, is participants using the very same

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discursive resources that are often used to oppress them, turning them back on to their oppressors and saying: it is not we who are not human, it is you!

This reaffirms the splitting of the person and the positionings that arise from it – the person and the human. In this instance, the human becomes a person due to a perceived emotional deficit – they are living entities, but devoid of important human traits like compassion and empathy.

Participants resisted a discourse of 'less than human' which they often find themselves positioned towards, by reconstructing and redeploying such discourses. Those involved in benefits-related practice were constructed as deviant and deserving of such criticism for having failed to be human, which entails empathy and compassion, or a lack of therein. It is an act of shaming by the otherwise shamed.

Participants resisted the dogma of the capitalist order which suggests that the only way a person can have value is when engaged in labour, replacing this with the value that compassion and empathy for others has to society, which is constructed as being what it truly means to be human. Participants produced alternative discourses of human value where the other becomes the 'otherer' and the shamed become the 'shamer'. Though once subject to the gaze of the panopticon, they turn their backs on it, challenging the unequal balance of power it produces and the economic interests it serves.

9.2.4.2 Constructing the Productive Self: "I've Paid My Fucking Taxes"

Despite constructing empathy as an important cornerstone on which the welfare state was built, participants troubled not only a distinct lack of empathy in the welfare system but its lack of regard for their value to society, emphasising the alternative knowledges of human contribution and productive value, discussed in the previous section:
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Doll: *Welfare! I'm sorry but it's like…welfare…it is not there for my welfare…If anything, it does everything to go against my welfare…I'm a human being the same as everybody else. I have a condition which could be any number of things – that doesn't diminish me as a person that doesn't diminish my…contribution to the people around me that I love and to the people in a wider situation (Focus Group 1).*

Eve: *We're the taxpayers as well (Focus Group 1).*

Zack: *The funds belong to everybody. I don't care what people say that oh if you don't work you don't have a say I don't believe in that…we still contribute to the economy…disabled people, mentally ill people, they still need help, they still need to eat, they still need clothing…They still contribute…**we** still need to live. And to live we need the money and so if the money's coming through taxation. We are spending that; it's going back into the economy (Focus Group 2).*

In their accounts, participants produced knowledges around productivity. Doll emphasises the value of relations within and between humans, offering an alternative contribution to society that is outside of traditional discourses of productivity, yet equal to them. Similarly, Zack suggested that people with disabilities or mental illnesses are often positioned away from citizenship because of a perceived lack of contribution, though like Eve, he firmly positions people with mental health difficulties or disabilities who claim benefits as **taxpayers**.

Rather than challenging the hegemony of capitalism, participants work within it, reconfiguring and disrupting knowledges of productivity, suggesting that benefit claimants can and do play a valued role within the wider remit of capitalism. Disability is negotiated and reconstructed as a source of contribution to society, in turn shifting disability from a devalued status, to one which is valued and productive. Participants created spaces where they can exist both within and outside of the relations of capitalism.

Participants further drew on discourses around capitalism, positioning the welfare state as part of relations in consumerism. The welfare state was discussed in terms of buying a faulty product; a transaction where the business is obligated to uphold their end of the bargain:

> **Doll:** *…I worked from sixteen up until the point where…I got ill from a traumatic thing**…**nothing to do with me. I lost **everything.** When I say **everything,** I mean my home, my family, my house, my possessions, **EVERY-THING.***
>
> **Eve:** *your self*
>
> **Doll:** *In (**clicks fingers**) that. No control over it. I've been trying to get back…better ever since. I worked in Central London for big corporations and I earned a lot of money. **I paid my fucking taxes**…I'm getting what's **due to me,** what I put into. I was sold the idea of paying taxes and national insurance so that I would be protected if I need the help of a welfare state…and now that is failing me. **So, where's my money**? Gimme it back (Focus Group 1).*

Participants drew upon the very same discursive resources that make up neoliberal society, emphasising discourses of consumerism, individual responsibility, failure, and economic concerns. Doll suggests that if systems demand that subjects must not fail and must take responsibility, then the very same should be asked of the system, in that it should not fail. This represents an act of turning late-stage capitalism on its head, framing it in the same context of failure that subjects are often positioned within and making the very same demand for self-improvement that is often asked of benefit claimants.

9.4.2.3 *"Basic Seems to Have Disappeared"*

Despite expressing alternative discourses of productivity, participants positioned themselves as relatively powerless to discourses of individualism that are becoming increasingly noticeable in society. They considered that the basic needs of the population have gradually become less important as the value placed upon human life has

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diminished as people become increasingly distanced from one and another. Jess offers that poverty, both visible and invisible, has become naturalised:

> *…It now seems to be acceptable…that we have such a rise in homelessness. And I'm not just talking about people visible on the streets, I'm talking about people in rented accommodation…Temporary accommodation…and the…impoverishness seems to be more acceptable, food banks, suicides through benefits cuts…this is death through benefit cuts (Focus Group 1).*

Jess offers that poverty takes on many forms in contemporary society, but all of these are naturalised. Broader society is constructed in complete parallel to the humanising construction of empathy and compassion discussed previously. Society is constructed as indifferent, apathetic, and emotionally distanced from poverty and human suffering.

Participants suggested that people are not simply being failed by the volition of the state, but that there has been a collective loss of regard in society for the welfare of one and another as distance, in both emotional and physical terms, has opened up a divide in society. This divide was constructed as being built upon a historical legacy around the poor and those in receipt of benefits; participants accounted for naturalised assumptions of such:

> **Doll:** *…benefits is scrounging, benefits means that you're…not educated, you don't wanna work, you're a freeloader. You know…and you're down there… (Focus Group 1).*

A long historical legacy of naturalised assumptions of benefit claiming has resulted in a metaphorical, ideological divide in society, which encourages othering and self-comparison between populations. This self-comparison is steeped in consumer culture, as well as naturalised assumptions about the working classes.

This sub-section offers that where empathy is lost, so is human. To reclaim the human, participants reconstructed the human condition, making available alternative knowledges of value within and between people. Participants further troubled the way that society incentivises individualism and distance between people, considering the discursive function of such practice, particularly in terms of social cohesion, hostility, and divisions in society. Empathy is offered as the antithesis to the neoliberal dogma of late-stage capitalism, given that participants constructed empathy as the only way to reclaim human. In expressing discourses of alienation, participants began to disrupt the dominant political dogma and accounted for a need to do so. Nonetheless, individualism was constructed as a considerable barrier to putting reconfigured knowledges of productivity into practice.

9.2.5 Individualism: 'Things are Incentivised All Wrong'

The role of neoliberalism in late-stage capitalism has been alluded to in accounts discussed so far. Nonetheless, participants did specifically consider how political change has fostered and shaped an increasingly individualised society. In turn, this individualism shapes how the human has been conceived and reconfigured in western society, which devalues interdependence. Markus and Kitayama (1991) argue the independent self is tied to western culture, which values normative assumptions of autonomy and self-restraint.

9.2.5.1 Divide and Conquer

In reference to growing individualism in society, participants described how culture has transformed in response, shaping how people relate to one and another:

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> *Sarah*: *it's always, can you not turn to someone else*
>
> *Zack*: *Yeah, but what they don't realise is that society doesn't **work** like that anymore…because of the way things have changed.*
>
> *Sarah*: *People are all for their self.*
>
> *Zack: exactly…families really don't help each other that much anymore, the way I've grown up*
>
> *Sarah*: *It's fractured, in't it? It is fractured. That…community spirit… (Focus Group 2).*

Communities were constructed as having shifted away from collectivism and towards individualism. Within this individualised culture, people are positioned as having become insular and self-serving, rather than dependent and supportive of one and another.

Participants constructed the benefits system as constructing itself as a last resort for financial support; an institution which selectively deploys a discourse of dependency, expecting people to have strong support systems to depend upon in times of need, yet also practice self-reliance at the same time. Participants accounted for the value placed on individualism in western society, though also described an expectation of what Markus and Kitayama (1991) describe as interdependence, where '*the-self-in-relation-to-the-other'* (225) constitutes individual experience. This is paradoxical to the increasingly individualistic culture of neoliberalism that the benefits system has long responded to. Inevitably, this presents dilemmas for subjects, who construct the self in regard to individualism but are simultaneously expected to practice dependency, which is otherwise problematised.

Participants referred to political change, specifically problematising the role of neoliberalism in contemporary society:

> *Jess*: *…individualism to an extreme, so these kind of neoliberal extremist policies and when I use those words, I don't mean to be kind of…*
>
> *Doll: no, they're very, very apt.*

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> **Jess**: …all kicking in so yeah (Focus Group 1).

The fetishisation of the individual is held to account as being a contributor to a gradual breakdown in society, with neoliberalism as something that has worked to destroy communities. Community is constructed as being unable to thrive within individualised conditions, given that it is constructed as a signifier of social cohesion. During discussions, Jackie asks Elsie, an older member of the focus group, whether she has noticed that the sense of community which once existed, has begun to disappear:

> **Jackie:** …but I bet at your age [Elsie]…you've noticed like there's not as many…Darby and Joan's or there's not as many community centres open like there used to be for you to go to
>
> **Elsie:** oh no, it's all gone.
>
> **Jackie:** it's all gone an't it? And them were one of't cheapest things they could run. I mean a lot of em used to go for a smoke and a cuppa tea and a chat. Nobody used to ger 'em up on a morning (Focus Group 2).

Participants further referred to systemic, political changes which have resulted in a declining sense of community:

> **Jess**: …there's been so many political changes and things like going…mental health tips into this and it's this destruction of communities and staple industries things that we used 30 years ago (Focus Group 1).

Furthermore, Jess suggests that community identity is broadly constructed in regard to social cohesion, a strong welfare state and the role of industry, of which have been particularly affected by responses to neoliberalism and privatisation:

> **Jess**: So, as…we're seeing it rolling on as it's shrinking the welfare state and privatising and everything so it's putting everything into that realm of privatisation (Focus Group 1).

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Participants offered that this destruction of community works subtly; it is not overt destruction from the outside, by a powerful few. Instead, with a helpful nudge from the dogma of capitalism, participants positioned communities as being encouraged and incentivised to destroy themselves, sewing tension and feelings of animosity from within:

> *Jess: …It breeds resentment*
> *Eve: and it really breeds the most negative things*
> *Jess: and aggression…*
> *Eve: and it causes isolation to people*
> *Jess: it's quite sinister isn't it?*
> *Eve: people become harassed and victimised*
> *Jess: insidious*
> *Eve: they're victims to people*
> *Jess: it's very, very, very sinister*
> *Eve: It is! And they're causing that (Focus Group 1)*

Furthermore, Doll offers the construct of 'Divide and Conquer'. This construct is located as a working-class issue, entailing a class struggle. However, this struggle occurs amongst the working-classes, rather than between classes:

> *Eve: …I think they've…got people fighting amongst themselves on a level…losing the plot of what it's really all about…you know, as to that, we can all make snap decisions…and assumptions about people but when that's driven the way it is, it becomes a serious thing. Well I'm not having it*
> *Doll: It's divide and conquer at its worst, basest form (Focus Group 1).*

Participants offered two practices that are deployed to produce this construct, considering how the working-classes turn the gaze upon one and another within the neoliberal era. The following analysis considers how participants accounted for practices which have led working-class communities to dissolve into individualism and division. In 9.2.5.2, I explore how capitalism encourages self-comparison in reference to commodities and capital. In 9.2.5.3, I explore how self-comparison elicits communal

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practices of surveillance. In 9.2.5.4, I consider the implications that the analyses have for subjectivity.

9.2.5.2 "They've Got Seven Children and I've Only Had Two": Self-Comparison and Capital

Participants frequently offered a practice of self-comparison when those who are employed, drawing upon this practice to account for how people who do not claim benefits position people who do. This practice of self-comparison refers to how people appraise the deservedness of others in regard to the capital they accrue. This discourse of deservedness intersects with discourses of productivity and perceived contribution to society when evaluating an 'other':

> ***Becky***: *So, what current understandings or views of benefit claiming do you think there are in the media...what assumptions, what stereotypes, what narratives...?*
>
> ***Nina***: *that people on benefits are getting more than someone's wage that they've worked for, for that week, or that month. How are they driving round in that car, or they've got that for their kids or there's massive Christmas presents at Christmas and they're on benefits...you're begrudged a standard of living*
>
> ***Doll:*** *yeah...it's definitely, in my opinion, benefits is scrounging, benefits means that you're...not educated, you don't wanna work, you're a freeloader. You know...and you're down there and people who are, well I go to work all week and I do forty hours and why can't you do that?*
>
> ***Eve***: *So, who's working on minimum wage and proud to be working and out there doing it, will see somebody with like you say with a lot more than them on benefits and it's like I'm not having that...they don't have to explain but they've got a beamer outside and they've had a house converted and...they've got seven children and...I've only had two! Do you know what I mean? (Focus Group 1).*

The individualised focus of neoliberal society, coupled with its existence within late-stage capitalism, prompts scepticism regarding the welfare system and the responsibility of those in receipt of benefits, rather than questioning the absence of a living wage. This then begs the question as to why the individual claimant receives such scepticism and criticism, but little of this scorn is directed at the state, or to capitalism, which may

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produce what are conceived to be unfair and unjust systems. It further needs to be asked, what function this practice of self-comparison has in terms of positioning and constructing the self.

In *The Sane Society*, Fromm (2002[1955]) argues that people who are living in an irrational society, will in turn act irrationally. Fromm further describes popular culture in shallow terms, suggesting that popular culture reifies consumerism, leaving man with an instinctual, compulsive desire to buy into consumerism, enamoured with the possibility of infinitely consuming newer, better things. Rather than enjoying the consumption of commodities, Fromm argues that it is simply the ownership and purchase of such commodities that humans seek; this occurs at the expense of meaningful human relationships, which in turn, is detrimental to the sanity of populations. Fromm offers that the mentally healthy person is:

> *…the productive and unalienated person...who relates to the world lovingly, and who uses his reason to grasp reality objectively; who expresses himself as a unique individual entity, and at the same time feels one with his fellow man… (Fromm, 2002[1955]: 268).*

Fromm focused upon the alienation which has been produced by modernity and offers an understanding of the function that self-comparison may have:

> *The psychological results of alienation are [that] man regresses to a receptive and marketing orientation and ceases to be productive; that he loses his sense of self, becomes dependent on approval, hence tends to conform and yet to feel insecure; he is dissatisfied, bored, and anxious, and spends most of his energy in the attempt to compensate for or just to cover up this anxiety (Fromm, 2002[1955], 263-264)…This alienation and automatization leads to an ever-increasing insanity. Life has no meaning, there is no joy, no faith, no reality…The danger of the past was that men became slaves. The danger of the future is that men may become robots. True enough, robots do not rebel. But given man's nature, robots cannot live and remain sane, they become "Golems," they will destroy their world and themselves because they cannot stand any longer the boredom of a meaningless life (Fromm, 2002[1955]: 352).*

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Fromm (2002[1955]) offers that capitalist society is a great source of alienation and that this alienation can be problematic for the self. The arising feelings of insecurity, anxiety and dissatisfaction, as well as the need to compensate for social attractiveness, are produced by capitalism and consumerism. This offers an understanding as to why such self-comparison occurs and why there is an underpinning discourse of hostility.

Thus, I argue that hostility and competition occur when humans try to compensate for the alienation and subsequent psychological affect that capitalism reinforces. Consumerism has become so pervasive a way for people to construct themselves, that it produces dilemmas in the self, where people strive to find meaning in life, but stumble, because individualised society has all but removed the relevance of human connections, not dissimilar to 'ideological dilemmas' (Billig et al., 1988). People instead find meaning in the dominant socio-economic order, competition, and comparison.

Marx and Engels (1965[1848]) proposed that the working classes are unaware they are engaged in a class struggle. There were subtle undertones of anger and injustice represented when participants positioned those who undertake practices of self-comparison. This suggests that self-comparison is borne of alienation; a dissatisfaction with one's exploitation where one is not fully compensated for the fruits of their labour, but lacks an adequate outlet to vent their frustration, given that, as Marx and Engels suggested, workers are not aware of their exploitation or subjugation. This is assisted by a historical legacy of constructing work as the norm and worklessness as deviancy. The unfulfilled self may then be the reason for this self-comparison, driven by systemic inequalities in society which produce alienation that is projected onto an 'other', given how capital gain and the material are strongly valued in society.

Participants considered that people are generally impacted by social and economic inequalities produced by capitalist society, which participants constructed as being largely unforgiving:

> **Zack:** …if you're working they try to take a chunk out of ya, if you're …on disability they try to take a chunk out of ya, if you're on jobseekers they try to take a chunk out of ya, if you're a pensioner they try to take a chunk out of ya if you're somebody who's…paying your taxes and you own your own business, they take a chunk out of you as well…everything's structured…in such a way that even having savings penalises you in so many departments, I'm not talking, forget about benefits I'm talking about the wider sort of area, it penalises you in such a way that just because you're saving for a rainy day, you'll end up getting asked oh where's this money, oh why've you got, how much've you got, why've you got a couple of thousand pound, why you got two, three thousand pound in your bank account… (Focus Group 2).

Nonetheless, as one participant argued, society purposefully encourages those who are subject to systemic inequalities to fight amongst themselves, rather than challenge its hegemony:

> **Eve**: I think…they've got people fighting amongst themselves on a level (Focus Group 1).

The scepticism produced by this encourages a form of local surveillance, discussed below.

9.2.5.3 Policing the Community

Participants identified practices of local surveillance which have been deployed within and by working-class communities. This local surveillance is underpinned by practices of self-comparison and discourses of deservedness. Communities effectively police themselves, based on these assumptions:

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> *Eve*: So, who's working on minimum wage and proud to be working and out there doing it, will see somebody with like you say with a lot more than them on benefits and it's like I'm not having that, so they're given a...helpline aren't they? Well, a fraud line… (Focus Group 1).

When discussing this surveillance, participants positioned themselves strongly towards a discourse of scepticism:

> *Eve*: well, you don't have to pay anybody to sit outside your door's anymore. Watching benefits street, you've already set the communities…up in uproar…so, this is not…people have actually said it years ago people used to sit outside their homes they used to drive up and they used to have people watching when they used to benefit things right?...(Focus Group 1).

This scepticism was centred around the role of neoliberalism within contemporary society. Eve offers a glimpse of this, suggesting that naturalised assumptions of benefit claiming have become so hegemonic that the relationship between the state and communities has transformed. Eve offers that through this construction of 'divide and conquer', overt surveillance on the part of the state has become unnecessary, as communities have come to subject people who claim benefits to a more communal, covert form of surveillance. This further responds to the neoliberal ideology of government with a small 'g', consisting of relatively low levels of regulation. This presents a reified discourse of 'The Big Society', though it has become malformed and twisted, working against, rather than towards social cohesion. This is a version of The Big Society that draws on communities to work together and solve problems, but these are not the problems of the community, they are those of the state:

> *Eve*: Well, we're helping the government wi' costs there because what they're doing, they're setting in in the communities, for you to say, here's the helpline… Do you know what I mean? You have power there to do your job and it should not be the community (Focus Group 1).

This discourse of 'divide and conquer' not only protects the hegemony of the capitalist order by sewing division amongst communities but further maintains the neoliberal emphasis on the detached role of small government, which reduces community cohesion and in turn, the potential for resistance.

9.2.5.4 Relating to One and Another: Subjectivity and Reality

With regard to the diminished potential for resistance, I asked participants why this self-comparison occurs, why this discourse of divide and conquer happens and why there isn't more resistance. Participants offered that people are taught to position themselves in regard to a discourse of complacency, or even apathy, early in life. Jess offered that how people relate to one and another within capitalist society is ingrained at an early age and that this diminished hunger for resistance is taught:

> **Jess**: I think Plato's analogy of the cave is just wonderful. If we was taught that at four…it's relating to reality…you get some people born in a cave and their realities are controlled by people who have the mirrors. So, they are forced to look at mirrors and that's the only reality they have, and they're stuck in that cave and that's all they know. But that has been **given** to them. So, you bring them up into the light and it's very confusing and frightening isn't it...but I'm trying to boil it down. So your realities are given to you and you don't think beyond it… because that's **all you know** stuck in that cave and…in Plato's time, they didn't have actual mirrors they just had brass coloured things that were…you know, not so good images as well so
>
> **Becky**: Like distorted?
>
> **Jess**: very blurred, distorted images of what reality is (Focus Group 1).

Jess constructs people as being a product of their circumstances, who are only able to make sense of themselves in regard to knowledges which are available and dominant, providing an eloquent explanation as to how assumptions about reality come to be naturalised. She further echoes Marxist sentiments, where the ruling classes control the ruling ideas, providing false consciousness to the proletarian masses who are given distorted versions of the truth, with little room for subjectivity. It is suggested that

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looking beyond the realities that are given to people and questioning hegemonic systems and power relationships in society is a considerable cause of tension, which produces dilemmas within the self.

In his allegory, Plato (2017[375 BC]) offers that the prisoners mistake what they are seeing in shadows on the cave wall as reality[23]. If a prisoner is released, he will have his binds removed and escape the cave into the sunlight. At first, the sunlight is blinding because the prisoner refuses to believe it is reality, though comes to realise that what he once accepted as true is meaningless. The prisoner returns to the cave to tell the remaining prisoners what he saw on the surface, but they refuse to believe him because he is blinded by the darkness of the cave, as he was with the sunlight. He offers to set them free, but they threaten to kill him if he does, interpreting his journey as having been harmful.

Ultimately, participants concluded that there has been a breakdown in society, that society has lost some sense of humility which has affected how we relate to one and another. Although participants described discourses of powerlessness, they found resistance on their own terms by offering new knowledges, such as asserting the need for a focus on the human in an empathetic society, whilst negotiating and disrupting dominant discourses. This included the rejection of individualism or the subtle act of repositioning themselves back towards productivity as the 'taxpayer', a position which people who claim benefits are often pitted against in political rhetoric. Participants offered that not only do they have a right to be political and have citizenship, but they are also human because taxpayer and benefit claimant are not mutually exclusive positions.

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[23] In Jess's explanation, she referred to mirrors, rather than the shadows which Plato referred to. In Plato's analogy, people are born in the cave, but are shackled and imprisoned there. With little else to do, the prisoners guess what shadows will come next.

9.3 Second Empirical Study: Afterthoughts

In 9.1, it was suggested that surveillance is one practice through which people may be shamed. In both focus groups, there was no reference to shame in explicit terms. This indicates a strong sense of resistance around being shamed or feeling ashamed; shame was implicitly acknowledged by participants, yet they wholeheartedly refused to take up such a position. Participants reconstructed surveillance as being malign and unnecessary, as something that works to disenfranchise and remove benefits from people, rather than being surveillance which is practised for the common good. Here, shame was not overt but was deployed covertly to encourage subjects towards conformity and subordinance and in doing so, reduce the potential of any threat to the status quo.

Furthermore, by considering the benefits of a post-scarcity economy, discussed in 9.2, popular culture has the potential to disrupt and trouble the normativity that capitalism reifies, particularly in reference to consumerism. In the spirit of Halberstam's (2011) work, the ideas discussed led me to consider the Pixar film *Wall-E* (Stanton, 2008), with regard to the individualising tendencies of late-stage capitalism. The work of Halberstam (2011) considers the role of subjugated knowledges in popular culture, exploring the potential that these spaces have for making available alternative discourses.

Pixar's *Wall-E* offers a criticism of the neoliberal values that have allowed consumerism to rapidly expand to an alarming level; though technology prevails, it is not this that is problematic, but individualism. The film is set in a dystopian future where humans have bought into values of individualism so strongly that they have become mindless consumers, devoid of consciousness and agency. In contrast, robots have taken up what were once human roles and behaviours; they have quirks, personalities, feel emotion, exhibit consciousness and are far more rational and sentient by comparison to their

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human counterparts, who have become driven by gluttony and fulfilment of the self. The humans in the film are represented as unmotivated, in both mind and body, because they no longer need to use either. Their bodies have become vessels and their minds are unused because the need to do so has been rendered unnecessary - the humans can change things like their clothing with the flick of a switch and are waited on by robots, everything they need is readily available. Robots may not strictly understand what it means to be human, but their ability to demonstrate human-like abilities transgresses that of the humans in the film – in the instance of *Wall-E*, he constructs identity in regard to the world around him. The posthuman sentiments in the film are barely hidden from the surface.

Whilst *Wall-E* is an image of a not-so-distant dystopian future on the brink of apocalypse, it does not signal the promise of robots becoming similar to or replicating human traits, or the promise of unbridled availability of commodities, but the risks of society losing what it means to be human by buying into the individualised, neoliberal culture of consumerism made possible by late-stage capitalism. It is consumerism in such an extreme form that is the antithesis to humanity; *Wall-E* saves the earth, not because he is a robot, but because he has managed to retain some semblance of what it means to be human, likewise, humans have become remarkably like robots.

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10 Chapter Ten: Discussion

10.1 Overview and Structure

The thesis explored representations of people with mental health difficulties who claim benefits within newspapers and mental health service-users' accounts. My focus was on mental health difficulties in regard to claiming benefits because an in-depth analysis of such was absent from the research literature (e.g. Garthwaite, 2014; Lindsay and Houston, 2013). Nonetheless, this presence was warranted given that mental health difficulties are the primary reason for claiming benefits worldwide (OECD, 2010). Furthermore, having a mental health difficulty or being a benefit claimant continue to be maligned and stigmatised positions in society.

Although many people negotiate these two positions simultaneously, the complex interplay of this has warranted little interest in the wider research literature, which often explores disability more broadly, incorporating mental health difficulties within disability, with little consideration of the nuanced situatedness of distress within contemporary conservatism. During the analysis I drew on principles of the work of Marx and Foucault to understand the role of power in the context of late-stage capitalism, exploring the governance of subjects in regard to neoliberal discourses on claiming benefits, mental health, and disability.

The final chapter overviews the empirical work done. These discussions are situated relative to the rationale of the research and its aims. I further consider the specific contributions that this work makes to psychology, locating the work within the wider research literature, considering its implications for research and practice.

I begin with a brief summary of the key findings of the two empirical phases of the work, before moving on to consider the methodological and theoretical contribution to knowledge.

Following this, I elaborate on the empirical contributions to knowledge. These discussions are structured around the research aims for ease of reading, where I consider these with reference to the wider research literature. I then offer a collection of reflexive and theoretical accounts, which draw together my reflections on the research journey. 'Future Recommendations' are considered before concluding the thesis with messages of hope.

10.2 Summary of Findings

10.2.1 First Empirical Study: Media Analysis

The first empirical study involved a media analysis of newspaper articles. The broad aim of the study was to explore how the media represented people with mental health difficulties in regard to claiming benefits, considering how representations are situated within late-stage capitalism.

10.2.1.1 Shame

Shame was explored with regard to its discursive power as both a noun and a verb. This meant that shame, though embodied and affective, can also be done to people, for example, newspapers positioned people as generally feeling ashamed for claiming benefits, but also shamed benefit claimants, for example through an 'expose' journalistic style.

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Shame was an obligation; it represented a form of distress, powerlessness, or social undesirability that subjects must accept as punishment for their transgressions. Subjects could also be repositioned back towards shame by newspapers, represented as 'shameless' and 'unashamed'. Shame was deployed in regard to discourses of productivity, responsibility, morality, and legitimacy in newspapers. Shame represented a response to neoliberalism - an expectation to better govern the self by realigning it with the confines of the capitalist political economy.

10.2.1.2 Class Struggle and Classlessness

In 'Class Struggle and Classlessness', I explored how discourses of shame intersected with class-based representations and assumptions when newspapers represented and positioned people with mental health difficulties who claim benefits. I considered how subjects who claim benefits were represented as using shamed positions to 'other' people from an 'othered' position. I argue that this practice of redeploying shame is an everyday act of resistance which challenges an imbalance of power.

I further discuss how class intersected with discourses of productivity and how newspaper representations responded to neoliberalism, encouraging self-governance, maintenance of the status quo and compliance. I further consider the commodification of poverty as a form of entertainment with reference to 'poverty porn', 'slum tourism' and 'chavs', considering how newspapers drew upon knowledges readily available in popular culture to produce caricatures of the working-classes, whilst veiling poverty, deriving humour and responding to neoliberal concerns of individual responsibility.

10.2.2 Second Empirical Study: Focus Groups

The second empirical study involved focus groups with mental health service-users. The broad aim of the study was to explore how mental health service-users collectively negotiate and construct accounts of accessing the benefits system, exploring how service-users position themselves in regard to rhetoric around benefit claiming and negotiate their identities.

10.2.2.1 Surveillance

Participants positioned themselves as subject to a malign form of surveillance in multiple ways; participants negotiated surveillance around a dispositif of being 'too honest' and constructed the benefits system as ill-equipped to address the nuanced, subjective experience of distress. Participants offered that characters and bodies are assessed when accounts of distress do not meet naturalised, individualised, and medicalised expectations, which construct regimes of truth around mental ill-health. Although the benefits system was criticised, participants suggested that whilst they were subject to surveillance by the benefits system and local surveillance through public opinion, the media also played an important role in their oppression.

10.2.2.2 Consumerism and Alienation: A Breakdown in Society

Participants constructed the notion of 'A Breakdown in Society', where society has begun to devalue human life due to the value that neoliberalism places on knowledges of individualism, producing a discourse of 'distance' which has implications for selfhood, identity, and how people relate to one and another in late-stage capitalism. Although participants positioned themselves as relatively powerless, they found resistance on their own terms by offering new knowledges, problematising the alienating effects of

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technology, individualised society, and divided communities. Participants asserted the need for a focus on the human in an empathetic society, rejecting individualism by repositioning themselves as the 'taxpayer'. Participants reclaimed notions of 'human', resisting the suggestion that 'taxpayer' and benefit claimant are mutually exclusive positions.

10.2.3 A Theoretical and Methodological Contribution to Knowledge

I developed a discursive method which drew on the work of Willig (2008) and Parker (1992), uniting the work of Marx and Foucault under the banner of critical realism. This entailed a focus on power as biopolitical, disciplinary and productive, but also emphasised the role of the material and the economic.

In Chapter Five, I offered a multiplicity of ways through which the work of Marx and Foucault can be brought together to generate new knowledge. I argued that Marx and Foucault can contribute to one and another in a variety of ways which transforms and extends the work of each. By bringing these together, I produced a method which offers power as biopolitical and disciplinary, but also economic and material, where bodies and private lives are shaped and controlled in regard to dominant discourses. Dominant discourses are not only produced over time around accepted truths but are competed over by powerful systems and institutions. These accepted truths do not occur organically but are inseparable from economic concerns, which are contingent on history and shaped by neoliberalism, constituting power as both productive and disciplinary.

To answer my research aims, I drew on the work of Willig (2008) and Parker (1992) to produce a nuanced discursive method. I found the method to be particularly useful in terms of grounding power in its situated context. This encouraged me to think about what was at stake within and beyond discourse. I believe that the method may be useful

in exploring neoliberal accounts and representations of marginalised groups more generally, for example, the representation of asylum seekers. This echoes a reference made to an argument by Prilleltensky and Nelson (2002) in the opening pages of the thesis, where it was argued that the main goal of critical psychology is to create alliances with marginalised groups, whilst working to challenge power imbalances – something which the method of analysis was specifically geared towards. Therefore, there is room for such nuanced discourse work to be linked to political practice and to be part of a wider process of social change (i.e. Aitken et al., 1996; Parker, 2007b).

Furthermore, I do not believe this methodology needs to be restricted to an analysis of the media alone. For example, one of the very early ideas for the thesis was to look at the production of accounts in online newspaper comment sections – something which the method would be particularly useful for in terms of exploring subjugated knowledges and the ideologies that are being responded to.

Therefore, I believe there is value in writing about the application and contribution of the method. In particular, I would like to write about the contribution that is made by the method for a wider audience and also to consider what applications it may have beyond the thesis. When I originally designed the method, I structured the steps by imagining I was teaching the method to undergraduate students, therefore there is room to build upon this in terms of communicating the value of the method.

10.3 Research Aim 1

- To discursively explore how newspapers represent mental health and distress in regard to claiming benefits.

10.3.1 The Multifaceted Role of Shame[24]

In Chapter Seven, I discussed shame as a multifaceted concept with reference to the production of shameful positionings and shamed subjects in newspapers. Shame is embodied, affective and felt, but also political, social, and discursive; subjects can feel shame and can be represented by newspapers as being ashamed, but shame can also be done to subjects who are constructed in regard to shamed positions, for example where newspapers repositioned subjects as shameless and unashamed where they were deemed not to be performing their shame sufficiently. Nathanson (1987) argues that shame has many faces. This argument is supported in the thesis, where shame is not only felt in many varied ways but can be reinforced and function in a multiplicity of ways too.

10.3.2 Shame as a Power Relationship

Because shame can be done to people, functioning as disciplinary practice, it can be conceived that shame produces a power relationship that positions subjects towards powerlessness, relative to that of the shamer. Shame is an important phenomenon when exploring representations of distress, given that chronic shame has been linked to psychological difficulties (Goss and Allan, 2009). Furthermore, accessing the benefits system, inadequately performing shame, and failing to perform distress visibly, were represented as being inherently shameful, inviting subjects to better govern themselves.

10.3.2.1 A Discursive Construct of 'Less Than'

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[24] Shame was not initially the focus of the thesis; however, this came to be of importance in the media analysis. I discuss such incongruencies in more detail in 'Further Reflections'.

This power relationship serves an important social function because it constructs identity. Shame is multifaceted, not only is it a practice which encourages conformity to social norms but is simultaneously a practice of everyday resistance when managing shame. The study of shame is particularly relevant to the work of Foucault because it demonstrates the productive, rather than the overtly oppressive function of power. Similarly, shame is something that may bear interest for Marxist scholars; shame, in the context of the benefits system, was underpinned by ideas of productivity, and by extension, class subordination.

Throughout the analysis, a 'less than' subject position was constructed. 'Less than' was produced with reference to discourses of individual responsibility and productivity, but also constituted a practice of othering when it intersected with class. 'Less than', in the media analysis, constituted discourses of worth and deservedness, relative to another. 'Less than' transgressed beyond what discourses of 'inferiority' were able to explain because it constructed subjects as being in inherently shameful positions due to a deficit in character, locating a lack of individual responsibility or productivity in an 'other'. Given that productivity was so dogmatic when constructing value in people, claiming benefits was constituted as an obligation to feel shame, which was enforced if not taken up by choice. Within shame is an obligation to accept a position of 'less than'; this represents the powerlessness that shameful positions produce (Gilbert, 2003), but further offers that shamed positions do not occur naturally but are practices of disciplinary power, tied up in discourses of inferiority.

'Less than' offers the potential for resistance where subjects resist shame, inferiority, and powerlessness. Subjects with mental health difficulties who claim benefits were represented in articles as laying claim to discourses of legitimacy and validity in 'othering the other', discussed in Chapter Seven. However, in doing so, an 'other' took their place, who was constructed as either an immigrant or masquerading as mentally ill,

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undeserving of the support that the subject is rightfully owed. Though this is hardly positive, given that someone is othered at their expense, it does offer the potential for those otherwise constructed as 'less than' to resist such assumptions, tipping the power relationship back in their favour, representing an everyday practice of resistance. This argument is supported by the work of Patrick (2016), who notes that 'othering' is defensive engagement with citizenship. The discursive practice of 'othering the other' offers that the lower classes can resist and redeploy shame onto an 'other' as a means of resistance[25].

In my analysis of newspapers, I found subjects with mental health difficulties who claim benefits were largely represented through shame. These discourses of shame were intertwined with economic concerns, such as productivity and ideas of a visible underclass, but also with concerns of power, such as subject positionings of inferiority and 'less than'.

10.4 Research Aim 2

- To explore how newspapers position subjects in regard to neoliberal practices and the capitalist political economy.

10.4.1 Introducing Failure

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[25] In the focus groups, participants also took up this practice, though redeployed it upon an 'other' who is relatively more powerful.

When exploring shame I considered the power relationships it makes available, how it is deployed, how it positions people, how shame produces biopolitical practices and the potential for shame to produce resistance.

In the analysis, failure denoted subverting and resisting a valued knowledge in the context of late-stage capitalism. It is an act of resistance, even though it may not be done with this specific intention. Failure is intrinsically linked to shame because failure has come to be conceived as shameful, where any contravention of the status quo is deviance. Even resistance is shameful, which is likely why resistance seems an impossible task. Failure, whether it is the failure to be productive, failure to present as physically 'disabled' or failure to feel shame, is a threat to the status quo because it represents a breach of one's social obligations to society. Therefore, failing subjectivities are met with disciplinary power (Foucault, 1977). These are neoliberal because people are encouraged to do better, whether that means accepting shame or being productive. Nonetheless, shame represents a neoliberal form of social control.

Many 'failing' subjectivities were represented in the media; these included the unconscious subversion of societal norms, such as not living up to expectations of productivity, or moral and character failure, where a person is constructed in regard to essentialist assumptions about problematic traits, weaknesses, or deficits when accounting for distress. Further examples included financial failure, such as the 'choice' to be in poverty or on benefits, and further to this, deviation from normative ideas of bodily autonomy and mastery of one's mind, for example, the representation of subjects who 'chose' to experience distress or take their own lives.

It is striking that the markers of normalcy are set so impossibly high, that it is difficult not to fail somehow. For example, in Chapter Seven, I discuss the stories of Martin and Colin, who despite aligning with discourses of productivity, are positioned as 'asking for
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too much' by expecting fulfilling, secure work. In 'Future Recommendations' I return to this idea of failure, where I focus on its productive potential for creating resistance.

10.4.2 Winners and Losers

Failure is particularly shameful because distress is constructed as something that can simply be overcome with the right will. This echoes the dogma of capitalism, where there can only be winners and losers in society. It is about survival, not of the fittest, but the resilient. The capitalist political economy focuses itself upon the physical production of commodities and does not consider the role of mental labour. This is why distress is negated as an adequate reason to claim benefits; poor mental health is conceived as a conscious choice, born of weak character; a lesser relative to those who have mastery over the mind and the mental hygiene others do not live up to.

It is of little surprise then, that neoliberal discourses of resilience are now taught to primary-school children and mindfulness is offered in inherently stressful workplaces. As late-stage capitalism evolves, institutions deploy practices in response to neoliberalism, encouraging the take-up of responsibility and self-governance. Examples from the literature include government-commissioned research which promotes the dogmas of *work as good for you* (Freud, 2007) and *work as the best route out of poverty* (Waddell and Burton, 2006), of which are enshrined in contemporary welfare policies. Further examples include a discourse of '*the defective self'* (Gergen, 2007:150) and the use of technologies of the self (Foucault, 1998) in positive psychology, where psychological interventions are used to modify unwanted behaviours, cognitive functions, or emotions (Friedli, 2014).

Progressive discourse on mental health has given way to neoliberal discourses of individual responsibility. This has grave implications, given that mainstream psychology has become part of the machinery of capitalism so easily, upholding neoliberal discourse.

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Though positive psychology, with reference to its use in the benefits system, was discussed in the literature review (i.e. Friedli, 2014; Friedli and Stearn, 2015), the thesis explored beyond the function of positive psychology within the benefits system, considering this as part of a rapidly expanding form of neoliberalism that emphasises self-governance and locates problems in the self.

This analysis demonstrated the far-reaching effects of late-stage capitalism, where the media locates faults, failures, and flaws in individuals, who are cast into the competitive spaces that capitalism creates, where people must overcome what are constructed as self-imposed barriers to living a productive, valuable life.

10.4.3 Locating Shame and Failure as Neoliberal Practice: A Marxist Reading of Power

Benefit claimants can never be shamed enough – in capitalist societies, shame is deployed through neoliberalism, underpinned by assumptions that poverty, dependency, and distress are products of choice, rather than of inequalities, circumstance or necessity, featuring a defined emphasis on individual responsibility and self-governance.

The function of shame is to maintain subordinance; as outlined throughout the analysis, shame is always done relative to an 'other' in capitalist spaces, which encourage competition and self-comparison. Although a discourse of shame was invoked with regard to distress, poverty and claiming benefits, these naturalised assumptions were all underpinned by the same dogmatic expectation – productivity. Shame, therefore, is a disciplinary practice which responds to and is cogent with the interests of neoliberalism, concerned with issues of capital over cohesion.

If the poor could be shamed out of failure, reason would have it that they could break out of poverty. Yet, given that capitalism thrives on the existence of a defined class

division, the proletariat lifting itself out of poverty would not necessarily be useful for capitalism, given that it thrives on their exploitation, using neoliberalism to prod them towards a never-ending cycle of self-improvement. Capitalism relies upon the social division of labour – there must always be a working-class, ready to be exploited, otherwise, opportunities to generate profit are at risk, as is the hegemony of capitalism.

The relatively powerless must always exist. Shame serves the function of maintaining the status quo; it is never meant to be escaped but is circular and infinite. As Scheff (1988) notes, shame silently promotes conformity. Shamed positions are useful for capitalism, but it is the management of shame that capitalism truly profits from. In the opening of Chapter Seven, I introduced shame with reference to Ahmed (2004), exploring its political function. Shame responds to neoliberal concerns, making available dominant, normative subjectivities that align with the interests of capitalism, emphasising the productive potential of subjects. There is an expectation of adhering to norms amidst the threat of the disciplinary potential of shame, deployed in the form of social marginalisation, powerlessness, and loss of citizenship.

Humans have always engaged with such battles. In the contemporary period, the management of shame is tied up in consumerism; a constant battle against inferiority by seeking out newer, better commodities and ultimately, social desirability. Shame is not only a matter of power or relative powerlessness but a matter of political power.

10.5 Research Aim 3

To explore how mental health service-users collectively negotiate and construct accounts of accessing the benefits system.

10.5.1 The Burden of Individual Responsibility

Discourses of individual responsibility were emphasised in both empirical studies. This suggests that people with mental health difficulties who claim benefits are navigating two subject positions which particularly emphasise individual responsibility - having a mental health difficulty and being a benefit claimant. This also gives credence to the role that neoliberalism plays in reinforcing such discourse, given that it was evident in media accounts, but was also taken up and renegotiated in focus group discussions.

These positions are constructed in regard to a demand for self-governance. However, when subjects navigate both positions simultaneously, it is done at the expense of any meaningful recognition of distress. People who take up both positions must navigate the self around an expectation to perform naturalised assumptions of disability and are further held accountable for failing to do so.

10.5.2 An Assessment of Character

The juncture between distress and disability was widened, drawing upon regimes of truth around distress. Participants positioned the benefits system as constructing mental ill-health as trivial, passing, as located in the person, entailing a lack of self-governance and problems of character. Ultimately, participants constructed the benefits system as responding to neoliberalism, where mental ill-health is something one should overcome; participants recalled being advised that if they were fatigued, they should go to bed earlier, wake up earlier and stop taking certain medications. Such representations were

echoed in the media analysis, where mental illness was described as 'treatable' (i.e. Woodhouse, 2014).

The only exception to this in the media analysis was back pain, which like mental illness, fails to hinge itself upon a discourse of visibility which carries constructions of legitimacy – in the media both were spoken of with a subtle undertone that implied a malingering subject position. This visibility is important for whether subjects can be conceived to have responsibility for their health. Participants troubled this expectation to visibly perform distress in particular.

Throughout the focus groups, participants took up a position wherein they viewed themselves from the perspective of the benefits system, troubling some of the malign, naturalised assumptions that are made about mental illness. Participants accounted for how the benefits system constructs good mental health as normative. Conversely, they accounted for how an inability to maintain good mental health is construed as failure and weakness, produced through choice. A perceived lack of self-governance transformed how people were positioned, construing subjects as being expected to, yet unable to maintain good mental hygiene. Like disability, mental ill-health is not exempt from the expectations of neoliberal-ableism.

When discussing a discourse of surveillance, participants accounted for how the benefits system positioned their bodies as deviant, tied up in the consequences of threatening the status quo. Furthermore, they considered how this construction of deviancy often served to veil discourses of distress in cases where their performance of distress did not match up with medicalised regimes of truth. In such cases, participants accounted for how the benefits system would provide alternative knowledges around problems of character and self-governance, which subjects had to compete with. These ideas of poor

character and a lack of individual responsibility were constructed as taking precedence over psychological explanations for distress in the context of the benefits system.

10.5.3 All in the Mind

Although the media largely represents subjects with mental illnesses as lacking control and agency (Nairn, Coverdale and Claasen, 2006), these subject positions are transformed where economic concerns are considered. When productivity is at stake, agency is selectively returned to subjects, who shed dominant discourses of instability and danger and have responsibility for their actions returned to them. This is noted in participant accounts which emphasised the expectation to allow oneself to be 'cured' by taking up work. When this responsibility is returned, the role that mental health plays in stories is veiled, focusing instead upon conscious actions, such as the choice to have a mental illness or claim benefits, where distress is constructed as a product of character weakness, rather than a 'real' mental illness.

When constructing assumptions made in the benefits system, participants accounted for an assumption that they have allowed their mental health to distract them from being the ideal neoliberal citizen, for example, when participants accounted for how markers of perceived 'deviance' are focused on, at the expense of their mental health.

10.5.4 Disability and 'Less than'

One of the most prominent examples of 'less than' was distress, relative to disability. Participants articulated how mental health holds a devalued, trivialised existence in the assessment of benefits, where mental distress is assessed based on popularly held regimes of truth and dominant, medicalised discourses of disability that transgress distress, such as visibility. Where people did not fit these narrow explanations of what

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mental illness should look like, an objective assessment was replaced by an assessment of character.

10.6 Research Aim 4

- To discursively explore how mental health service-users who claim benefits position themselves and negotiate identities in regard to rhetoric on benefits.

10.6.1 Negotiating Identity: Selfhood and the Material in the Context of Consumer Capitalism

In Chapter Nine, I introduced the notion of the 'Empty(ier) Self' as an original contribution to knowledge, offering a way of understanding consumerism as a phenomenon which highlights the psychological effects of living in late-stage capitalism. This draws upon Marx's (1959[1932]) ideas about alienation to understand the psychological implications of constructing the self in late-stage capitalism. This work builds upon the works of Gergen (1991) and Cushman (1990), discussed in the literature review.

I offer that the contemporary context of the UK marks a new epoch for work, which has implications for how we relate to one and another and the remit of subjectivities which can be drawn upon to construct the self. This means that subjects have begun to construct themselves in a liminal period, having begun to feel the material consequences of neoliberal discourses of individualism. This individualised discourse is no longer simply a phenomenon that is spoken about in academic circles. Instead, participants suggested that individualism is beginning to have a material impact on their lives; how they construct identity, how they negotiate the self, and how they relate to others.

Individualised discourse has begun to shift from being an abstract concept to something which participants tried to articulate the implications of by drawing on a dispositif of 'distance', constructing themselves as being positioned outside of what it means to be 'human'.

In the focus groups, participants constructed society as having become increasingly individualised, denoted by a discourse of 'distance'. Participants noted a material loss of 'community spirit' as society has become fractured, leaving communities divided, corroded by a material 'buying-into' of neoliberal values of individualism, exacerbated by the effects of austerity. As Grimshaw and Rubery (2012) note, in the context of the Cameron government, austerity-related changes represented a distinct shift towards neoliberalism. The reach of austerity goes beyond issues of poverty, health inequalities, food deprivation, and welfare conditionality and is beginning to have serious implications for subjectivity, which are largely psychological, related to selfhood.

Focus group accounts regarding selfhood offered a key theme of existential crisis when trying to position oneself comfortably in a changing world. This echoes the findings of Psychologists Against Austerity (2015), who claim that feelings of humiliation, shame, fear, distrust, and powerlessness are 'austerity ailments', driven by hostile public policy. I further build on these findings, arguing that neoliberalism not only produces affective experiences of hostility in individuals but has stretched beyond this, embedding individualism within communities, producing alienation and division.

Ultimately, participants noted change, borne of a sense of suspicion, where a rapidly evolving, individualised society has had material, psychological and ideological effects on subjects. When accounting for the role of technology, participants constructed the self as being decentred, produced through positionings of being 'lost', 'less than', or 'empty' in terms of 'human'.

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One of the most important ways through which people construct themselves has gradually become less important and is disappearing from view – other people. Consumerism and technology play an important role in this distancing. One of the most strongly expressed signifiers of late-stage capitalism was the changing role of technology, which has begun to reify the construction of work. For example, participant accounts refer to a discourse of 'less than human', expressing concerns about being displaced from the labour force by technology, for example, by self-service checkouts.

In the media analysis, participants were only ever constructed in regard to their productive potential, producing this discourse of 'less than human'. This finding was echoed in the focus groups. Because of this, subjects found themselves wrapped up in a relationship between the human, technology, and consumerism. Participants constructed their relationship with technology and consumerism in largely negative terms, drawing upon a discourse of distance to account for how the benefits system positions them as 'less than human', how the role of technology threatens their role in the labour force, and how technology produces affective accounts of 'distance' from the material world and one and another more generally.

Participants positioned themselves in regard to notions of emptiness and alienation within these relationships. These feelings of alienation extended beyond work, the benefits system, and productivity, towards society and humanity more broadly. As I discussed throughout 9.2, rather than simplifying and improving human life, participants constructed consumerism and technology as inadequate replacements for meaningful human connections in a world where the value of human life and the human itself are becoming displaced.

10.6.2 Disrupting 'Shame'

Shame was not raised as being relevant to accounts of navigating the benefits system as a mental health service-user. However, I offer that although participants did not negotiate shamed positions, this does not necessarily mean that shame is not part of navigating the benefits system. Instead, this may represent the management of shame, by avoiding and denying it (Nathanson, 1992).

Shame can be conceived as an unspoken taboo (Scheff, 2003). Participants did not account for shame explicitly, though did feel the need to implicitly reject shamed positions. Whilst participants did refer to shameful discourses, such as that of the 'scrounger', such terms were treated as a source of derision. Participants were certainly aware that such stereotypes may be drawn upon to position them, though distanced themselves from such a positioning, implicitly defending against shame by rejecting and disrupting subject positions that are informed by shame, such as that of the 'scrounger'. This speaks volumes to the hegemony of shame, given that although participants were otherwise outspoken on matters on the experience of distress and navigating the benefits system, they chose not to touch upon shame.

Nonetheless, shame does not simply stop here. As highlighted in the media analysis, rejecting shame is not sufficient enough to avoid shame entirely. Shame has become so normalised and enforced in rhetoric that it has been constructed as the burden one must take up when claiming benefits. In Chapter Seven, I noted the power relationship between the shamer and the shamed regarding assumptions of productivity. Such assumptions are intertwined with discourses of individual responsibility, which draw into question the legitimacy of distress and in turn, deservedness of benefits. This functions through surveillance on all levels and is ultimately a punishment. Shame has become an

obligation, where subjects are expected to experience some form of psychological distress and social detriment for not adhering to the status quo.

Shame is a social expectation. Those who do not take shame up willingly become shameless or unashamed. As I noted in Chapter Seven, being legitimately 'unproductive' is hinged on the visible presentation of disability. When failing to perform distress within the confines of a myopic view of disability, shame is difficult to avoid. Discourses of scepticism are invited in, functioning through surveillance, realigning the subject as not only shameful for engaging in inherently shameful acts, such as accessing the benefits system or masquerading as mentally ill but as unashamed and shameless, because the subject has been forcefully returned to their rightful place.

Shame is a form of disciplinary power because it can be enforced on subjects by others to regulate bodies and behaviours. Skårderud (2007) argues that even shamelessness may be shameful. In addition to this argument, I offer that shamelessness is not only shameful but is more shameful than simply accepting shame because it represents a refusal to accept relative powerlessness and to adhere to the status quo. This challenges the dogma of productivity and disrupts naturalised assumptions, inviting in not only discourses of shame, but those of deviancy.

Participants were articulate in the language of shame and knew the naturalised assumptions they are often positioned towards well. Yet, they resisted a position of powerlessness by redeploying the language of shame, becoming the 'shamer' and the 'otherer' when criticising the benefits system.

10.7 Further Reflections

10.7.1 Recommendations

10.7.1.1 From Distress to Disability: The Need for a Politically Situated Model of Distress

Throughout the thesis, I chose to contextualise distress within disability. This was because of arguments made by Marx (1990[1867]), which construe disability as a consequence of capitalism, where people do not become 'disabled' through an essentialist state of being, but because of how the dominant socio-economic order defines the parameters of their exclusion and entry. The function of using this understanding of disability not only worked to destabilise traditional assumptions but also highlighted how health and work have become intertwined under capitalism.

Nonetheless, the question of my initial motivation for writing this thesis remains; a curiosity as to why mental health is so often distanced from disability rhetoric, which as noted throughout, often carries with it positionings of 'legitimacy'; a justification for one's position in society. I argue that this distancing of distress from discourses of disability is not done naively, but is systemic, rooted in assumptions about the experience of distress that one would hope were long forgotten. Mental ill-health cannot compete with dominant discourses of disability, though is expected to.

Many of the discourses I trouble in the thesis, such as visibility, are simultaneously dominant discourses of disability. As a consequence, distress is always measured in terms of a lack or excess of such qualities, such as the ability to be subject to surveillance, or agency, which though often ascribed to people experiencing distress in the form of individual responsibility, is taken away from people with disabilities. A legitimate experience of mental illness is always judged on its ability to conform to

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ableist assumptions, which mark its entry or exclusion from disability and therefore legitimacy. It is important to acknowledge the differences in experience, for which visibility plays an integral role (Banks and Kaschak, 2003; Davis, 2005).

People experiencing distress are unable to meet naturalised assumptions and social expectations of the abnormal body. They can never be rendered visible enough to be truly perceived as '*deformed, maimed, mutilated, broken, diseased*' (Davis, 1995: 5), to be gazed upon as with physical disability. The subjective experience of distress subverts and destabilises the notions of normal, classical, and organised bodies. Even within devalued statuses, such as disability, there may be devalued and valued subjectivities. Mental ill-health carries with it a form of ableism because of a dominant assumption that ill-health must be performed visibly to be a 'disability'. As discussed in Chapter Two, benefits assessors have been known to refute a claim related to mental ill-health based on the claimant smiling. The ability to be gazed upon and present oneself as visibly distressed has become a part of perceived eligibility for benefits in some cases. Of course, this is not always possible in the case of mental health difficulties.

Drawing upon Stead's (2013) work on women's negotiation of gender identities, it can be argued that those with mental health difficulties as well as those with conditions which are not visibly manifested are an oppressed group, required to navigate complex assumptions of 'true disability'. Subjects therefore must be consistently self-aware of how disabled subjectivities are performed. People must render themselves visible or invisible in different circumstances, they must be physically gazed upon to receive support, but risk stigma, scepticism, hostility and even violence, should they fail to be visible, but also if they succeed.

Visibility is a contested and troublesome position, should people with mental health difficulties be expected to take it up. Subjects face being placed in a catch 22' scenario.
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People with mental health difficulties risk being stigmatised as pathologically different, inferior, or intrinsically risky because of visibility and disclosure. They are expected to perform disability adequately whilst avoiding assumptions of difference, providing that safe spaces for disclosure are available.

This tension is particularly relevant to the context of the benefits system, given that the use of the biopsychosocial model of disability and related government policy calls for an emphasised focus on and scrutiny of the performance of mental illness in order to ascertain whether claimants can live up to dominant, acceptable and normative conceptions of 'true' disability. This involves the performance of having a 'legitimate' mental health difficulty. However, this performance is perpetually measured alongside dominant and normative ideas of disability in society, particularly of those which are visible, medicalised and pathologised. Therefore, the failure to perform within dominant discourses in benefit assessments poses the risk of a subject being constructed as someone who is masquerading as mentally ill, and therefore as someone who does not have a 'legitimate' disability or an entitlement to support. These dilemmas are hinged on discourses of visibility, driven by naturalised assumptions of disability and issues around the disclosure and performance of distress within them.

The other option is to choose not to disclose their needs, taking up a less visible position to avoid stigma and discourses of inferiority and deviance, at the cost of addressing their needs. Do they disclose their difficulty, risking marginalisation, as well as ridicule, hostility, and scepticism, whilst navigating institutionalisation and the medical gaze? Or do they simply take up the stressful position of secrecy, possibly at a personal cost, which in turn may only serve to justify and legitimise stigma and dominant discourses of suspicion?

The sense of pity and tragedy ascribed to the notion of disability is equally as disempowering as the sense of secrecy that is taken up by those with mental health difficulties within the benefits system. Nonetheless, entitlement to support and notions of acceptable dependency are legitimised by such notions of pity and tragedy. Given a long history of activism, people with mental health difficulties, in resisting assumptions of pity and tragedy, may well retain some sense of agency. The real contradiction is when this agency is equated to ablest notions of capability, particularly within the benefits system, where the parameters of disability are ever changing. People with mental health difficulties are then trapped in a Kafkaesque cycle which expects adaptation when performing disability in culturally acceptable ways, whilst the goalposts are constantly shifting.

The performative action of positioning the disabled self is transformed into a 'game of truth' (Foucault, 1997). 'Real' disability and perceived worthiness are subject to an apparent truth-telling, informed by naturalised assumptions of what disability looks like. Subjects are constructed in regard to the visible physicality of disability, which distress can neither compete nor conform with.

It is important to note that the lack of thought for mental health within the wider remit of disability is not intended as a critique of critical disability studies. Mental health and disability have long been construed as qualitatively different experiences; this is not exclusive to the research literature but also reified in the media, political rhetoric and institutional practices and systems, for example where the media draws upon a medical model of disability to negate the seriousness of experiencing distress.

I argue that the field of critical disability studies, in the context of the research, is indeed one of the closest allies in understanding the impact of welfare reform on mental health

service-users and that disability is a necessary framework to draw upon to inform this understanding.

Indeed, it would be unfair to level such a critique at the field. I feel that critical disability studies, particularly the work of Goodley, Runswick-Cole and Lawthom (2014a), which has been drawn on extensively to understand disability in the thesis, purposely does not define disability – it is a position to take up as one chooses. It may well be that critical disability studies avoids setting the impossible ideal of disability for people with mental health difficulties. It would arguably be counter-intuitive to do so, and critical disability studies may well be aware of the role that it could play in inadvertently oppressing people through such practice.

What is necessary, is an approach which builds on the ethos of critical disability studies by troubling and resisting the implications of problematic discourses of disability on distress. Such an approach could consider the philosophy of critical disability studies in a way which is mindful of mental health as a lived experience that is wrapped up in knowledges of disability. Attention must be paid to the spaces for resistance that are opened up when drawing upon disability to understand distress. I offer that the Power Meaning Threat Framework (Johnstone et al., 2018) offers some potential towards this shift.

10.7.1.2 The Power Threat Meaning Framework

The Power Threat Meaning Framework (PTMF) (Johnstone et al., 2018) proposed an alternative to functional diagnosis which emphasised embodied experience, the construction of narratives, agency, and subjective experience in a contextually specific way. Traditional models fail to do this, given that they generally aim to understand bodies, rather than thoughts and feelings. The PTMF moves away from looking at

behaviours through a medical lens, where they are assumed to be oriented in the body, instead suggesting a range of ways through which theory and practice can begin to explore behaviour, whilst still offering the benefits that diagnosis can provide, such as signposting interventions.

Given that many of the models of disability discussed are built upon a legacy of naturalised assumptions of disability, people with mental health difficulties have largely been incorporated into such explanations as an afterthought. A problem lies therein – whilst the social model offers some insight into the metaphorical and societal barriers facing people with mental health difficulties, it largely does more harm than good, upholding neoliberal-ableism by representing such barriers as part of the natural order.

Though a model cannot truly capture the subjective experience of mental health difficulties or disabilities, I accept that such models are a necessary part of supporting people. They play an important role in practice and if used ethically, can support and empower people. What I do argue, is that if distress continues to be so far removed from disability in policy and research, where poor mental health is constructed as disabling, rather than a disability, for example where newspapers describe poor mental health as 'treatable', then there needs to be a model of mental health as disabling, which is specifically tailored for those with mental health difficulties.

Such a model would need to remain mindful of the wider socio-political context and the right of service-users to resist traditional notions of disability in reclaiming a sense of agency, but also that service-users may equally align themselves with disability. It must have strong philosophical underpinnings, given the ability for other parties to use such tools to oppress, with little theoretical basis, as has occurred with the application of the biopsychosocial model in the benefits system. Ultimately, such a model must be geared towards a critical framework, it must be mindful of oppression, developed to help the

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people it intends to, and be willing to recognise and challenge instances of oppression wherever they may occur. The PTMF (Johnstone et al., 2018) is a politically aware model that is sensitive to its place in society and discourse. It is ultimately focused upon meaning-making that is co-produced with service-users. The framework acknowledges how neoliberalism has medicalised and individualised distress and deviance, which are then linked to social control, offering some movement towards such a model.

In order to achieve such a framework, it is necessary for it to be designed both by and for mental health service users. This means being mindful of not only important issues of power and context, but the goals that people have, bringing their hopes and aspirations to the fore-front of the model's use with a view on making progress towards them. In the context of the benefits system, the application of such a model may well mean exploring what good, meaningful and fulfilling work looks like to a person, how they negotiate their take-up of work, and the steps that can be made towards achieving such a goal.

Importantly, whilst this is something that the benefits system often fails to emphasise, there is, by extension, a risk of reifying the idea of work as a health outcome – this is where a holistic, contextually-sensitive model becomes of importance. Thus, rather than returning to the idea of work as a health outcome, it is instead necessary for such a model to do exactly as it promises – recognise the risk of power imbalances and the notion of threat, for example the detrimental effects of receiving a sanction.

It is then, not a manner of arbitrarily pushing people to take up abstract labour that should be the goal of such a model, but of acknowledging the benefits as well as the risks; of acknowledging that having a good relationship with work is far more conducive to one's mental health than having a poor relationship with work, such as zero-hour contracts, exploitation and low-wage labour. This means considering that the notion of
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'work as good for you' is not a complete answer, but that it is far more complex and subjective than this. A model which explores the nuances of distress in the context of the benefits system must situate itself within and be reflexively aware of its situated position with wider rhetoric; it must acknowledge that it is not necessarily abstract labour that may be good for a person's mental health, but that good, meaningful work may well be.

I base these arguments within the focus group discussions from chapter nine, where participants thoroughly acknowledged that they want to work and certainly did not want to be unable to work because of poor mental health. Rather than being conducive to their take up of work, the benefits system was instead constructed as being detrimental to such aspirations, acting as a barrier due to the power imbalances and relationships it produces, for example surveillance, discussed in chapter nine. Viewing such experiences through the PTMF resolves some issues that the current biopsychosocial model of assessment cannot, in that it views such barriers as being a product of context, rather than located within problematic people. Furthermore, the application of this model in situations where mental health service users claim benefits, for example by clinicians in GP settings, could function to offer and signpost support within this context, bearing in mind the damaging psychological effects that negotiating the benefits system may well have in the case of pre-existing mental health difficulties.

10.7.2 Challenges

10.7.2.1 The Representation of Distress

Discourse on serious mental illness was present in participant accounts yet was inexplicably absent from much of the media reporting in this period. This is somewhat baffling, given that 1.2 million of the 2.3 million people who have a mental health

difficulty and claim benefits or are out of work have a serious and enduring mental health condition (HM Government, 2009).

Logic would have it that media reporting should be dominated by narratives on serious distress, yet it was not. Nonetheless, the experience of serious mental illness and benefit claiming was well represented in participant accounts. This is intriguing because general media reporting of distress often constructs sensationalised discourses of risk, danger, and instability, where mental health conditions, such as schizophrenia, receive much attention. Whilst acknowledging that schizophrenia is misrepresented in the media (Owen, 2012), the research literature to date does not acknowledge that schizophrenia is underrepresented in certain contexts, such as the context of the thesis, yet overrepresented more generally.

Though schizophrenia otherwise appears to gain significant media interest, it was not a topic of note in the corpus. This suggests that not only is schizophrenia invoked as a narrative in some instances, but in others, such as the context of benefits, it is rendered invisible.

One could argue that schizophrenia does not receive attention because it is not sufficiently entertaining, though a legacy of sensationalised media representations suggests otherwise. It could reflect an assumption that schizophrenia is perceived to be disabling and firmly located in the individual, making it difficult to critique, difficult to derive humour from and difficult to expect an individual to 'govern' themselves out of.

The absence of serious mental illnesses like schizophrenia may be underpinned by discourses of danger, risk, irrationality, and unpredictability in the workplace, positioning such subjects as far away as possible from discourses on work by rendering them absent from them. Inevitably, this does little for people with serious mental illnesses like

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schizophrenia who want to work and recover, because they are left behind, removed from the narrative altogether, whilst it is otherwise foisted upon subjects with 'treatable' mental illnesses.

10.7.2.3 Focus Groups

I initially planned to organise three focus groups, though because the organisation from which participants were recruited is relatively small, there were few participants available. I believe this is for two reasons; firstly, because talking so openly and critically about the benefits system carries an inherent risk. As participants stated, taking part in my research could have been construed as taking up work, risking being sanctioned.

Secondly, I believe this reflects the current dearth of service-user advocacy organisations. This shortfall is one example of the material effects of austerity. Service-user advocates have become a hard-to-reach group; however, such groups do want to have their voices heard and I hope to continue to build on such relationships.

Although I had originally intended to include a larger sample size, undertaking two focus groups was a better decision. The participants were passionate about their experiences and had gone out of their way to take part so they could have their accounts 'on record'. I felt I had a personal obligation to capture each of their accounts fully to do them justice. Conducting more focus groups would have risked losing the richness of their accounts at the expense of having a larger sample size.

I felt that the focus groups went particularly well in the thesis and that they were also a valuable way through which to generate new knowledge. I have noted elsewhere that I was concerned that the focus groups would be forced and onerous but instead found that

the participants and I both found the experience cathartic and useful because we were passionate about the subject at hand.

Although there was a focus group schedule, discussions were most valuable when I took a minimal role within them, where participants could talk about what mattered to them, rather than what I anticipated or expected might be important. This was one of the most beneficial aspects of all because it took the discussions and the analyses to unexpected places, such as in 9.2 where posthumanism was drawn upon. In the case of focus groups, particularly for discursive work, I take the position that it is less important to be a researcher and more important to listen, allowing oneself to be guided by what matters to participants, rather than guiding them.

10.7.3 Incongruences

10.7.3.1 Media Corpus

On reflection, I maintain that newspapers were a useful medium for answering my research aims. This was because such a medium constructs truth by producing 'newsworthy' stories, but also communicates messages in a way that means audiences can engage in political and social phenomena. Furthermore, as discussed in 6.2, newspapers are unique in that they are geared towards their own economic survival, taking up an evolving role within the expanding cybersphere and emerging forms of new media. Newspapers are not solely concerned with the practice of communicating information, but make judgements about what is newsworthy, whilst also promising to entertain.

Nonetheless, there is room to expand the work to explore other types of media. For example, in 7.2 I took a specific interest in material representations of poverty porn, particularly the ownership of commodities. There is room to explore this further because there is little research which explores the topic. Although newspapers provided a brief glimpse into the phenomenon, they did not allow for a rich analysis of the topic. As with newspapers, which construct what is 'true' and 'newsworthy', there is room to consider how poverty porn documentaries construct 'reality'. This would require a turn towards visual methods, of which the thesis did not aim to investigate. This may be a point of interest for future research.

With regard to the analysis of newspapers in the thesis, although I included articles from *The Guardian* in my corpus, any substantial analysis of these failed to make the final cut in the write-up of the thesis

This is a rather large, yet unexpected incongruence – I did not check the source of the articles as I wrote up the analysis as I had separated this information from the texts, only checking this when I came to cite articles in-text after I had finished writing the thesis. This was purposely done because I had originally found many of *The Guardian's* articles particularly dull on a first read-through. Nonetheless, they inadvertently did not feature in the analysis and I chose not to force these where they were not relevant. I believe the reason for this is that *The Guardian's* articles were all very similar and shared the same narrative.

Furthermore, although articles from *The Guardian* did construct truth, they largely focused on representing truth concerning the failures of the benefits system and how mental health is implicated, rather than subjects themselves. This is an interesting finding in itself, given that the construction of truth omitted benefit claimants from the

narrative. However, my research aims were concerned with representing subjects, rather than the construction of truth concerning the benefits system itself.

Therefore, the use of articles from *The Guardian* would not have allowed me to fully answer my research aims as little analysis can be offered beyond noting that subjects are absent from the stories. This is because articles from *The Guardian* read in an objective manner that did not conform with the typical media aim of promising to entertain as well as inform. Such articles did not feature subjugated knowledges on which to hinge an understanding of why or how subjects were represented in a certain way.

Discourses that were more salient to the thesis and its aims were discussed and prioritised. The word count of the thesis did not allow for more in-depth discussion here; despite coding and analysing the entire corpus, about a quarter of the full corpus of articles has been discussed. In hindsight, I would consider focusing on tabloids to explore how newspapers produce truth and newsworthiness, whilst also promising to entertain. I further acknowledge that there is significant room to continue such work.

10.7.3.2 Paternalism

Though discussed in the literature review, paternalism did not appear significantly in the analysis. However, this does not necessarily mean that paternalism does not have a role in the benefits system. Instead, a lack of explicit mention represents how the benefits system has transformed in the contemporary era, in response to neoliberal concerns. It is not that paternalism is not a part of benefit-related practice, but that direct threats are no longer necessary because the imagined threat of sanctioning, destitution and 'preventable harm' (Stewart, 2016), much of which is reinforced through surveillance, is strong enough a deterrent to threatening the status quo.

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The benefits system no longer needs to spend money to force people to comply because it has been outsourced to the community who police themselves through shame and othering. This is further encouraged by an increasingly individualised society that has embraced consumerism. Paternalism on the part of the government is no longer necessary because a decade of austerity has created 'The Big Society' in all but name.

10.7.3.3 Shame

Shame was not an immediate focus of the research initially. This is reflected in the review of the research literature, which alludes to feelings of shame but does not offer an in-depth analysis of such. Nonetheless, shame came to be of significance in the media analysis and was implicitly accounted for in the focus groups.

10.7.3.4 Class & Consumerism

Although I drew upon the work of Marx, I feel I initially underestimated how strongly claiming benefits is represented as a class-based phenomenon. I started writing the thesis under the assumption that receiving benefits does not necessarily indicate one's class in contemporary society, given that the proliferation of zero-hour contracts puts everyone at risk of financial instability and exploitation, something which is not exclusive to being working-class. Since the 2008 economic recession, class appears to resonate strongly in a material sense, where a visible underclass has been produced through signifiers of worth, character and consumerism.

I would be particularly interested in research concerning visual representations of class in regard to commodities, which I touch upon in 7.2 when discussing an image of *The Jeremy Kyle Show*. I was surprised that I was unable to find any research which

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explored how the media emphasises signifiers of unearned and undeserved consumerism.

10.7.4 Navigating the Theoretical Framework: A Reflexive Account

As discussed throughout the methods sections, I originally began this work with a theoretical framework that drew on the work of Foucault, producing an initial analysis based on this. Concerned that there might be other considerations at play that I was neglecting, I introduced the work of Marx so as to understand issues such as work, discourse around the economy, and ideas about productivity in more depth. I maintain that this was a useful approach; it added a theoretical richness to the analyses produced, giving insight into the situated context of the benefits system, whilst adding a certain analytical nuance.

Nonetheless, this synthesis was certainly not without its own flaws and tensions, particularly when it came to bringing together the work of Marx and Foucault. I was mindful that I needed to be aware of the suggested impasse between the two. I was also acutely aware that if I were to produce a methodology, I needed to do so in a way where the two theorists could find some form of middle-ground, compromise or agreement.

Originally, I started by reading what other theorists thought of the relationship between the work of Foucault and Marx, though found a lot of this uninspiring given it was very much focused on why the synthesis would be difficult or even impossible, rather than emphasising the potential for such a union.

Dissatisfied, I decided to return to the core material, focusing more on what Marx himself had argued, rather than what others believed he had said. This later shaped my

analytical approach to the theoretical framework, where I made the decision to tread very carefully, keeping in mind that Marx and Marxism are two very different things, something I didn't really think about before. This is why the methodological principles draw specifically on ideas developed by Marx, rather than Marxist ideas, for example false consciousness.

Because I wasn't originally familiar with the work of Marx, I began reading his work, focusing mainly on *The Communist Manifesto (*Marx and Engels, 1965[1848]) and *Capital* (Marx, 1990[1867]). I was well aware that I would be unable to read all of Marx's work, but instead needed to read what was important to grasp his theoretical ideas sufficiently. As I was already familiar with the work of Foucault, I chose to read Marx's work from this perspective, asking what Foucault might make of certain arguments, always reading Marx's work from a perspective which centred the role of power.

In Chapter Five, sub-section 5.3 was entitled 'Reading Marx after Foucault' because I felt that it reflected my process of immersing myself in the theory well. When I was reading the work of Marx, I was finding far more agreement than expected; I saw that like Foucault, power was very much an important part of Marx's ideas, as were the roles of subjectivity and history. They shared the belief in the importance of fundamental principles and therefore, I believed, the potential to try and do something different with these, in a way that maintained the views of the authors at their core but could also introduce nuance when brought together.

As discussed in the thesis, I produced this 'bringing together' of Foucault and Marx through a process of compromise, for example where there was the potential to stumble upon substantial issues (for example the nature of power and its ownership). I also drew

upon processes of extending and borrowing, for example using Marx's ideas to develop a nuanced perspective on subject positionings in context.

I recall at earlier points in the PhD, being unsure as to what my ontological position would be, spending quite a bit of time trying to work out where I stood. It was not until I moved into the theoretical synthesis in the thesis that this started to 'make sense' – I knew exactly where I stood, drawing upon critical realism to create a space where both Foucauldian and Marxist interpretations could exist together.

In the media analysis, I found that the theoretical framework worked well in terms of what is 'being done' to people. Admittedly, I did have some reservations about how well this might work in the focus groups, where the subject was more active. I do not think I had originally fully anticipated just how dogmatic late-stage capitalism is, until it occurred so profoundly in participant accounts.

When I organised the focus groups, I made the decision not to ask participants about their experiences – the thesis is not an experiential piece of work, but a discursive one. Nonetheless, I made the decision not to stop participants from speaking about their experiences of the benefits system. Given that the data produced in the focus groups was engaging, thought-provoking and cathartic, I had some concerns about how I would be able to preserve these accounts when writing-up the thesis. I was somewhat worried that a theory-driven methodology might overpower their narratives, going beyond these in a way that would no longer be meaningful to participants.

When analysing these, I prioritised maintaining and preserving voice – a moral obligation I felt I had to participants. I believe that the theoretical framework worked well here because it has issues of social justice at its core, considering issues of exploitation,

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oppression and injustice within economic and power relations which were produced in accounts in 9.1.

On reflection, I believe the methodology helps to embolden the argument that qualitative methods should not be prescriptive, particularly in the case of discourse analysis. I acknowledge that whilst the method is not without imperfections, it was very much an active, open and flexible process. In chapter nine, where I began undertaking what was a very much unexpected analysis, I was able to draw upon further theory, such as posthumanism, at ease within an existing framework.

Given that the methodological framework allowed for such interpretation and application in an open and flexible way, this allowed me to tease out the unexpected existential positionings and tensions around being human that participants drew upon, exploring these unanticipated discussions and dilemmas in terms of power relationships, systems and institutions in terms of Foucault, and in relation to consumerism and capitalism with regard to Marx in 9.2.

In terms of the present, I have enjoyed having the freedom to experiment with theoretical ideas that are new to me, such as Marxism and posthumanism. It has further gauged my interest by introducing me to new theories and areas of study, broadening my scope of interest for the future.

The production and application of the theoretical and methodological framework was useful in terms of analysing the notion of failure and therefore shame, whether that be failure to be 'human', to be productive, or visibly ill. I have magnified these ideas of failure because they are deeply problematic when it comes to dictating the inclusion and exclusion of people to dominant, normative and 'right', ways of being. This is why, in 10.9.2 I offer that this failure should be subverted and disentangled from dogmatic ideas

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of shame. I argue here that this may be done by celebrating failure from the margins of normativity. My reason for this is that failure and the ability to fail is what makes us uniquely human.

However, as a precursor for the discussions around failure to come, I acknowledge that what I propose is not without tension. Throughout the thesis I have argued for an approach that emphasises the importance of materialism, there is a risk of beginning to neglect it. I wrote the thesis, not with my examiners in mind, but to be read by someone who may very well share the lived experiences explored in this work. Therefore, it is important to ask whether the idea of celebrating shame is meaningful to people who are experiencing distress within and because of the benefits system; does it improve the current system, does it pay the bills, does it emancipate people 'on the ground'?

What this tension does reflect, at least on a reflexive note, is the tension of trying to be an academic, from a working-class background and a person with a disability all at once. It's the difficulty of not quite fitting in in academia, but not quite fitting in at home anymore either. When I first met the service-users in the focus groups, it wasn't my academic background that helped me to sell myself and my research, but my own background and personal experiences. However, listening back to my own voice in the recordings from the focus group discussions, I found that I had lost my accent to an extent.

Nonetheless, I believe such tensions are important in the context of research because they can teach you as much about yourself as they do about other people. Research should be a constant, iterative process of subjective reflection, particularly of your own reflexive position in the work and the lessons that can be learnt from it, as well as those you can learn about yourself as the researcher, even if the questions it raises do not always have tangible answers or solutions.

10.8 A Personal Reflection

Anyone who looks at the focus group transcripts in full may notice that I say very little in them. If I am honest, it was difficult to get a word in – I had always envisioned running focus groups to be an onerous task, where the facilitator has to persuade participants to talk, working in a dry, formal, structured, and at times, awkward way. However, the level of engagement with the focus groups, I believe, speaks volumes to the position that people with mental health difficulties who claim benefits have in society; they want to be heard and want to share their experiences because it is cathartic – in a way it is productive. Though, as I discussed in the media analysis, voice was not only given, but it could be taken away just as quickly too. I offered little guidance to the focus groups in practice, other than ensuring that less vocal participants had the opportunity to speak. I went into the second empirical study intending to reduce the power relationship as much as possible – of course, it would be naïve not to, given that I drew on the work of Foucault.

I have often struggled to engage my family with my work, and I have found myself disheartened at times because I couldn't change their minds about people who claim benefits. There is a saying that goes along the lines of '*if you are in an argument and you're trying to change someone's mind, you've lost the argument*'. Nonetheless, the idea of the thesis is ultimately about breaking down and deconstructing naturalised assumptions, and to some extent, a change in opinion does go towards this. If anyone reads the thesis and cannot find hope, I at least hope that the effects of inequality on people can be recognised, because this represents a move past complacency. Compassion is a relatively good place from which change can come about.

Once I had transcribed and fully anonymised the focus group transcripts, I asked my Mum to read them. It is the only time she has read anything I have 'written', and she read it in full. She does not read. After reading them, she realised what I had been trying to argue for, finally believing it and understanding it. I realised that voice is not something I can simply try to give but is something that must instead be heard to give the argument justice.

Throughout writing this thesis, I had a sinking feeling that I may produce a piece of work which whilst engaging with the very serious issues at hand, would come off as negative. Inevitably, large portions of the benefits system are, given that people are experiencing distress because of it. Nonetheless, I like to think there are some points of hope in the work produced, though my own experience was hard to move away from. Unlike the focus groups, which I enjoyed undertaking at every stage (even ethical permissions at some points), I found the media analysis upsetting at times and had to take a break from it. I was struck by how at least two of the articles constructed suicide as 'deserved', which I found particularly callous.

Whilst I was analysing the media articles and struggling with the amount of distressing reporting about suicide and the psychological implications of the benefits system, I was working in an Intensive Care Unit and had to learn to manage the trauma of watching my academic life collide with my life outside of it. I watched families grieve over the suicides of young men and women far younger than myself. I think it is all well and good reading negative stories about the benefits system, but I think this made writing the thesis feel more 'real' and certainly taught me a lot about the value of talking about my mental health.

From the point at which I began writing, the political landscape of the UK has changed around the thesis and has become increasingly hostile. I imagined I might emerge from

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the PhD hopeful about the future for vulnerable people who experience distress under the current benefits system, but now, I am not so sure. However, I feel as angry and frustrated as I did when I began, if not more so, and have tried to use this as a source of motivation, finding hope where I can.

10.9 Future Recommendations

The following section explores future recommendations going forward. In 10.9.1, I begin by considering the potential for future research based on the findings of the thesis, centring this discussion around alienation. I then move on to draw on popular culture to move towards recommendations for bringing about social change. In 10.9.2 I consider the notion of subjugated knowledges and their role in subverting failure. Alienation and consumerism are explored in 10.9.3, where the dilemmas they present are considered through an analysis of *The Lego Movie* (Lord and Miller, 2014). A final reflection is offered in 10.10, where I consider points of hope going forward.

10.9.1 Alienation

Future research may focus on the contribution that discursive analyses can offer when unpicking alienation. Alienation was somewhat of a difficult concept to pin down because it is affective and political, though despite being accounted for in terms of embodiment and affect, may not be traditionally articulated in such terms. Similarly, alienation is intrinsically underpinned by late-stage capitalism. Though alienation was not articulated in such terms, there is a suggestion that it is having very real, material implications *'on the ground'*, so to speak, in 9.2. Nonetheless, alienation was accounted for with regard to selfhood and therefore plays an important role in navigating neoliberal society. If

alienation is to be disrupted and challenged, considering why it produces dilemmas in the self, then discursive psychology is well placed to do just that.

Future work might take a refined focus on the production of shamed subjectivities in the media, particularly where marginalised and vulnerable groups are concerned. In the future, I would like to consider alienation with greater consideration for the work of theorists such as Debord (1992) and Heidegger (1962), but sadly, the word count could not accommodate it this time around and could be better placed in an article on the matter.

10.9.2 Subverting Failure

By acknowledging that failure, rather than a source of shame, is an intrinsic part of the human condition, people can be repositioned into other subjectivities, whilst the individualised dogma of late-stage capitalism is demanded to shift itself to adapt in the face of resistance. This can be brought about through unveiling knowledges that are otherwise subjugated in a neoliberal context, where failure is naturalised as being part of the human condition, and in turn, can produce alternative knowledges.

Given that subjects who were positioned towards shame were often constructed as being nothing beyond objects in the wider relations of capitalism, an alternative framework is necessary. Critical disability studies, along with queer theory, offer useful ways through which to begin disrupting the boundaries of normalcy from its parameters. As I note throughout the analysis, being outside of the boundaries of normalcy, or being positioned as 'deviant' is ultimately informed by discourses of failure. Whether it is failure to perform mental illness adequately (7.1), to be productive (7.1.3), to be tasteful (7.2.2), to find fulfilment in capitalism (7.1.3), or perceived moral or bodily failure (9.1), they are all offered as signifiers of deviance – as outside of normality.

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Goodley, Runswick-Cole and Liddiard (2016) draw upon a 'dis/human' position, recognising that there are times where it is necessary or desired to embrace normalcy. They argue that this reach for normalcy is not problematic, but that it is the very notion of this normality that needs to be troubled, and that disability can be used to disrupt these norms. The construction of failure is particularly important to trouble, given that failure was constructed in various ways in the analysis, all of which were construed as shameful.

As I go on to argue in reference to the work of Halberstam (2011), queer theory is well placed to challenge the boundaries of normativity regarding shame. Munt (2008) also lends thought to what queer theory can offer an analysis of shame, referring to its productive potential as '...*a change agent for the self*' (8). Nonetheless, I lean on the work of Halberstam (2011) in this discussion, in the belief that people do not need to necessarily reclaim shame in an individualised way because this sounds somewhat similar to the way the benefits system encourages people to 'activate' themselves. It is the way shame is constituted in society that needs to be challenged, rather than people themselves. Nonetheless, like the work of Munt (2008), that does not mean that joy cannot be found in shame.

Halberstam (2011) refers to '*knowledge from below*' (11), highlighting the disruptive capacity found when rethinking failure. To do so, Halberstam (2011) uses examples of popular culture at length to understand participation in the production and circulation of subjugated knowledges. Subjugated knowledges are not simply lost or forgotten truths, but have been disqualified, rendered nonsensical, buried, and masked. Halberstam unveils alternative, otherwise subjugated knowledges by taking an Avant-Garde turn towards the unusual. This turn opens up spaces to explore, deconstruct, and disrupt mundane knowledges in society that are sheltered away in otherwise unusual spaces, where they are hidden from the threat of subjugation and veiled in allegory:

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> *We might consider the utility of getting lost over finding our way, and so we should conjure a Benjaminian stroll or a situationist dérive, an ambulatory journey through the unplanned, the unexpected, the improvised and the surprising (Halberstam, 2011:16).*

Dory, from Pixar's *Finding Nemo* (Stanton, 2003), is invoked by Halberstam to consider how these reconfigured knowledges and positions can be made available. Dory is central to the happy ending in the story, brought about by her 'flaws' which might, within dominant norms in Western society, be flaws or failures, but are instrumental to the overarching narrative. Halberstam discusses how Dory, though portrayed in regard to stupidity and poor memory, finds new and different ways of relating to others and the world around her. Dory may not know, in the normative sense, but her alternative form of knowledge in 'unknowing' means she relates to others in a non-normative way that is equally, if not more useful. In the meantime, though lost, Nemo is by no means a tragic character - leading a fish revolution against fishermen.

Halberstam draws on the work of Hall to propose 'low theory', which invokes counter-hegemony, opening up new narratives in what appear to be relatively mundane places. This may come in the form of the class struggle, revolution, production, reproduction, and exploitation that takes place during *Chicken Run* (Park and Lord, 2000):

> *The chickens are organised!*
> *The chickens are revolting!*

Chicken Run bears notable similarities to Orwell's (2000[1945]) *Animal Farm*. It is loaded with Marxist allegory, with the addition of an image of a utopian alternative where, unlike Animal Farm, where revolutions must always go full circle, real, genuine change may be possible.

Another example suggested by Halberstam is the version of female failure offered in

Little Miss Sunshine (Dayton and Farris, 2006):

> *In Little Miss Sunshine…Olive Hoover…a young girl with her sights set on winning a Little Miss Sunshine beauty pageant. The road trip that takes her and her dysfunctional family from southern California to Albuquerque makes…a…eloquent statement about success and failure… a cheerleading squad made up of a gay suicidal uncle, a Nietzsche-reading mute brother, an aspiring but flailing motivational speaker father, and an exasperated stay-at-home mom, Olive is destined to fail, and to fail spectacularly…and while it does deliver precisely this, it also leads to a kind of ecstatic exposure of the contradictions of a society obsessed with meaningless competition. By implication it also reveals the models of success by which American families live and die. Michael Ardent, who won an Oscar as the scriptwriter for the film said that he was inspired to write the script after hearing the governor of California declare, "If there is one thing in this world that I despise, it's losers!"*
> *(4-5)*

For Olive, the real victory in *Little Miss Sunshine* is her humility and wholehearted belief in herself. In her failure, is a success; not by self-comparison or per naturalised beauty standards, but in finding her own version of success within loss and failure. Olive disrupts the sexualised undertones of beauty pageantry by being provocative, to the horror of the watching audience. This does not position Olive as any better than the other pageants, or condemn them, but instead evokes difference. Olive learns how to fail (and yet succeed) differently. Her success may not be in the traditional, capitalist sense of someone losing at the expense of her success, but it is still success. For Olive, success means staying true to herself, despite the pressures of society. *Little Miss Sunshine* is a story of finding success outside of traditional ideas about winners and losers, and most importantly, it suggests the necessity of rethinking and reimagining failure. Future work could specifically explore how people who are marginalised conceptualise, construct, make sense of and disrupt accounts of failure as well as considering further the dilemmas and reflexive concerns that are presented in narratives on celebrating failure, such as those discussed in 10.7.4.

10.9.3 Alienation and Consumerism

I further offer that consumerism is a point of contention for the thesis given that focus group accounts offered that it is inseparable from their construction of alienation and identity. For example, participants offered that the world is very rapidly changing and that this has implications for how they make sense of themselves and the world around them. One key example was the discussion of how self-service checkouts represents the neoliberal reification of the self. This represents one of many points made about the implications which consumerism has for identity, tensions around what it means to be human, and the implications of falling outside of this.

It is also notable that participants were very politically engaged in the sense of actively engaging with, acknowledging and even resisting what were very political struggles. For example, whilst participants acknowledged systemic issues around work and the benefits system, they did not resist the idea or notion of take-up of work – in the analysis such ideas were noted as making a claim to the 'reasonable mainstream'. Indeed, this was quite the opposite of outright resistance; participants positioned themselves as the taxpayer, as having worked, as wanting to return to work; reclaiming their rightful place within the wider remit of consumerism.

For the remainder of this section, my focus is upon the tensions produced by consumerism, namely because for participants, their place within consumerism was profoundly important to them, functioning to construct their value as people, their take-up of the idea of human and ideas about work. Whilst participants strongly resisted some of the more damaging implications of capitalism, such as ideas of 'less than human' that are produced as a by-product, they nonetheless expressed the desire to be a part of the system whilst simultaneously unpicking and resisting the tensions that can be produced by being both within and outside of its confines.

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I have structured the following discussion as a means to unpick the ideas of alienation and consumerism, given that whilst participants very much adhered to the idea of being an active consumer, they also negotiated it, questioning normative participation within it, such as what valuable work looks like and how consumerism is interrelated with understandings of the human condition. The following discussions aim to explore these negotiations, considering issues from the focus group discussions such as compliance, social control, adherence with the status quo and failure through allegory. It highlights the potential for a kinder consumerism that participants constructed through their critiques as well as a growing call for real, meaningful relationships with one and another; constructing a new market rationality that one can gain entry to, where the value of human life has not been decentred.

Many of the sources drawn upon by Halberstam (2011) are targetted at children. It could appear naive to read so much into these narratives because as Halberstam notes, such sources have been constructed by multi-million-pound organisations. However, it is their subtle and implicit way of resisting and offering alternative narratives that make such a reading available. If ideological and political allegory were presented more explicitly, targetted specifically at an adult audience, then the same possibilities for resistance or identification of how narratives can be troubled may not be opened up. That is not to say there are not examples that are more overt where knowledge is subjugated. *The Lego Movie* (Lord and Miller, 2014) is one example of this. I draw on The *Lego Movie* to provide my own analysis of alienation and consumerism that is inspired by the work of Halberstam (2011).

The Lego Movie directly challenges capitalism, exposing and unveiling it as a system that fosters compliance, assisted by consumerism which convinces the masses that life is good – even when it is not. The film represents how consumerism assimilates the

individual into the working masses; it is about following instructions - a tongue-in-cheek reference to the Lego Company's self-awareness.

There are three key messages for happiness – work infinitely, follow instructions and conform. It is the creation of a docile, subdued, passive population who exist in a sea of sameness produced by consumer culture which has sold these messages like commodities, as the route to happiness.

Emmett, the film's protagonist, appears to live a relatively unfulfilling life, his neighbours do not know his name and neither do his work colleagues. Despite his commitment to productivity and conformity, the only 'meaningful' interactions he has are with his plant, 'Planty'.

As with Chapter Nine, a lack of meaningful human connections is constructed with regard to a discourse of a lost, or empty self. To alleviate this, Emmett follows state-sponsored instructions on how to fit in, be liked and be happy.

Figure 5: Instructions on 'How to fit in, have everyone like you and always be happy': The Lego Movie

The instructions dictate everything from private to public life, incorporating how consumerism must be practised, centred around conformity and social desirability. Though consumer capitalism is hidden behind an illusion of freedom, happiness, and fulfilment, the conformity it produces is veiled with a more direct, ominous threat of the implications of subverting the status quo, as demonstrated in one scene:

> **President Business**: Hi I'm President Business, president of the Octan corporation (and the world). Let's take extra care to follow the instructions (or you'll be put to sleep) AND DON'T FORGET TACO TUESDAY is coming next week that's the day every rule-following citizen gets a free taco AND MY LOVE. Have a great day too everyday.

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President Business is a purposely-undisguised characterisation of late stage-capitalism, alongside its capacity for social control and its potential to distract the masses from injustice and oppression with consumerism. Although *The Lego Movie's* audience might not otherwise appreciate the violence of late-stage capitalism, within the first minutes of the film they will certainly recognise that something is amiss. Nonetheless, consumerism stands ready to distract from the insidious side of consumer capitalism. Though Emmet recognises the not-so-subtly disguised threat in President Business' speech, he is soon distracted by what appears to be the only other television programme, an inane sitcom called 'Where Are My Pants?'. The programme begins immediately after the speech and Emmet becomes distracted:

> **Emmett:** *You have a great day too, President Business. Man, he's such a cool guy I always wanna hear of what- wait did he say put to sleep?! What was I just thinking?*

As discussed in the context of surveillance in Chapter Nine, capitalism does not stop at the more neoliberal elements of deploying consumerism and nudging towards desired behaviours but deploys a more forceful form of surveillance simultaneously. Admittedly, in *The Lego Movie,* these discourses are not subtly hidden – they are meant to be seen, maybe not on first viewing, but certainly by a second.

Figure 6*: Subjugated knowledges in The Lego Movie: Surveillance*

Figure 7: Subjugated knowledges in The Lego Movie: Conformity

In relating the above discussion to the loss of self, which was discussed in Chapter 9, an explanation emerges regarding the sense of existential crisis that was constructed in participant accounts. Whilst neoliberalism offers itself as the route to happiness, freedom and a fulfilled self, commodities do not satisfy such needs but distract from them. Neoliberalism is ultimately an ideology which makes use of disciplinary practices, such as shame (Chapter Eight) and the search for a sane self in an insane society and self-

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comparison (Chapter Nine), to transform people into docile, productive consumption units. People are rendered docile within power relationships where neoliberalism encourages normalcy and punishes deviancy with shame. For example, in Chapter Seven, I consider how discourses of shame intersect with class, where the production of powerlessness constitutes subjects who are more malleable to the confines of the capitalist political economy due to an expectation for self-governance.

Neoliberalism is not concerned with freedom unless it pertains to the economic market, yet it knows all too well that the pursuit of freedom, happiness, and a satisfied self are existential matters that have always been relevant to the human condition. It is not that neoliberalism can assure happiness, freedom or even equality, but that these are abstract commodities that will always be sought and are infinitely in demand. It is the commodification of the human condition.

I discussed the commodification of the human condition in Chapter Nine with regard to the changing role of technology, which enacts a separation of the 'person' and the 'human', producing alienation. Drawing on participant accounts, I concluded that if there is any chance of resisting the alienating effects of consumerism and individualism, then a return to collectivism, humility, compassion, and empathy for others is necessary, which the benefits system is constructed as being devoid of.

In *The Lego Movie*, Emmett is referred to as 'The Special' because he is the prophesied 'Master Builder' who will bring down Lord Business' regime. At first, Emmet fails, largely because the prophecy was misread, but also because he is so used to following instructions. By abandoning his constant bid to find fulfilment in conformity, Emmett rediscovers the child-like creativity that the Lego Company represents, centred on discovery, creation and doing things differently. The message of *The Lego Movie* is

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ultimately that nobody is special, and it is this that truly makes people special, like Emmet, who though constructed as an otherwise obedient, 'normal' protagonist, is capable of great feats by questioning the 'normal' that has been given to him.

10.10 A Final Reflection

Neoliberal society stands ready to project its contradictions, inadequacies, and failures onto individuals. Whilst seemingly hegemonic and difficult to challenge, a renegotiation of how society invokes shame and failure as practices of domination is necessary to rethink shame and failure, reconstituting these as part of the human condition, rather than signifiers of deviancy. To find some semblance of hope in what appears to be a relatively bleak future, there is a need for revolutionary acts of calmness and contentment:

> *The world is increasingly designed to depress us. Happiness isn't very good for the economy. If we were happy with what we had, why would we need more? How do you sell an anti-ageing moisturiser? You make someone worry about ageing. How do you get people to vote for a political party? You make them worry about immigration. How do you get them to buy insurance? By making them worry about everything. How do you get them to have plastic surgery? By highlighting their physical flaws. How do you get them to watch a TV show? By making them worry about missing out. How do you get them to buy a new smartphone? By making them feel like they are being left behind. To be calm becomes a revolutionary act. To be happy with your own non-upgraded existence. To be comfortable with our messy, human selves, would not be good for business (Haig, 2015: 189).*

Such acts need not mean a grand upheaval of power or superhuman feats, but quite the opposite; acts of resistance can be found in the everyday, rediscovering the resources we already have, though have been distracted from as late-stage capitalism has expanded. We need to be calm if we are to subvert alienation, by recognising that capitalism profits from the misery it produces – whilst everything else stagnated during the recession, misery certainly did not; in an insane society, misery sells. Humans, by

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design, are hopeful creatures and will continuously seek out happiness, or at least what looks like happiness. But we have looked towards capitalism for the answers for far too long, only leaving ourselves emptier, punishing others and ourselves when the only answers offered are further alienation, unhappiness, oppression, and frustration.

The representation of people with mental health difficulties who claim benefits in newspapers illuminates this punishment for falling outside of the ever-changing parameters of normalcy and considers the power relationships, institutions and systems that produce ideals of normality. It asks who sets the parameters and the interests normality serves, but most importantly, recognises that this normality is unachievable. Whilst the idea of the ideal neoliberal citizen was regularly offered, a material, tangible example of such a position never materialised. Focus group participants strongly expressed the psychological implications of this unreachable ideal and the alienation such a position produces. But we are nonetheless told that we must continually search for a 'normal' that cannot exist within narrow confines:

> *…being human is being a young child on Christmas Day who receives an absolutely magnificent castle. And there is a perfect photograph of this castle on the box and you want more than anything to play with the castle and the knights and the princesses because it looks like such a perfectly human world, but the only problem is that the castle isn't built. It's in tiny intricate pieces, and although there's a book of instructions you don't understand it. And nor can your parents or Aunt Sylvie. So you are just left, crying at the ideal castle on the box which no one would ever be able to build (Haig, 2015:221).*

If the self can be fulfilled by no longer engaging with a bid to seek fulfilment, then the more psychologically damaging aspects of late-stage capitalism can be subverted, because the comfortable, calm self, is not alienated, nor does it feel shame or frustration, eliminating the desire to police, compete and compare itself with others. It subverts the illusion that if the dominant system is not working for you, then it must be

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working for someone else – it is the fact that it isn't, that we have in common, and this makes us remarkably similar.

In the analysis, there are glimpses of a recognition that capitalism is not working; it does not bring the happiness or freedom it promises. In these glimpses are possibilities for change, resistance, and hope. If we are to combat the systems that sew division amongst us, we must reclaim that which we have in common. A focus on emotional capital as the highest signifier of human value is necessary; a postmodern turn that recognises value between people, rather than within them. Realigning how we relate to one and another is fundamental; we may not be able to agree on who should have power over us but transforming how we live within this power must mean emphasising compassion over competition, empathy over anger and kindness over complacency.

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Appendices

Appendix A – Extended Account of 'Foucault with Marx'

<u>Reading Marx after Foucault</u>

- The basic idea here is that there has been a lot of controversy about an apparent 'incompatibility' between Marx and Foucault that has little basis but has occurred because of a militant defence of advocates of each theorist.

- 'Marxism', 'Marxist', 'Foucauldians' and 'Foucauldian' are qualitatively different ideas than 'Marx' and 'Foucault'. The former refers to ideas attributed to the authors; they are social constructs. They are always in flux and can be interpreted in a variety of ways, depending on where a person positions themselves within each set of ideas. Distinguishing between these terms is important because they have served to create an impasse between the work of Marx and Foucault, creating arguments that suggest they are incompatible, largely based on personal and political tensions between Marx, Foucault and their respective followers.

- In the thesis, I have made efforts to move away from more militant readings which have created such tensions and suggested their theories are incompatible. As much as is possible, I try to draw specifically on what Marx or Foucault have stated in their own works, rather than interpretations of such.

<u>Producing Discourse: The Role of Power and Economy</u>

The basic idea here is that Marx and Foucault's ideas about power were not always neatly compatible. This does not mean that they cannot be used in unison. When brought together in an applied manner, Marx and Foucault may complement each other, whilst also producing something new. Here, I focus on how power can be framed as a struggle over truth, drawing on capitalist vocabulary to understand

truth in reference to its 'monopolisation' and how the discursive functions and practices and functions that occur when truth is competed over.

Marx and Foucault did have different ideas about the function of power. However, it is their mutual interest in the function of power that has potential for the study of discourse.

This means, rather than taking a specific stance, Foucault and Marx can transform one and another. Each author is certainly not without criticisms in each of their theories. However, by borrowing from one and another, an overarching theory of power and discourse can be created.

Marx gives Foucault a focus on the economy. Until much of his later work, Foucault did not focus on this. Nonetheless, Foucault's earlier works are particularly important for looking at discourse on mental health in regard to power. By introducing ideas about capitalism and consumerism Marx helps bring Foucault's ideas up to date with the complex context of late-stage capitalism.

Basically, Marx situates the work of Foucault.

On the other hand, Foucault offers Marx the ideas of truth, discourse and valued knowledges. Marx can readily accept these because he too takes concern with truth and history. What Foucault does, however, is transform how Marx conceptualises power. Essentially, Marx and Foucault can offer each other something here.

By framing truth in the context of capitalism, it is in turn framed as a struggle. This concedes with Marx that indeed, the elite does have a vested interest in what truth is produced but transforms how power is understood by offering that there

is not simply one elite, for example, the government alone, but that it is more capillary than this. This means many elites compete over which account of truth is constructed, for many different reasons. For example, the government might have a vested interest in certain truths on benefits because they want to reduce the budget deficit. Whereas, the media might produce certain truths based on perceived public demand, but also to sell their own newspapers.

Sometimes these seemingly work in unison, producing the same truths, and this is why it appears there is one elite group. The media played a very different role in the context of both authors and is far more dynamic, multifaceted and accessible now, which means their theories must transform one and another to fully understand the stake the power systems, like the media, have in discourse.

Marx asks how this struggle over truth in terms of it being a monopoly happens. Foucault wants to know why. To create a full picture of what is happening in contemporary capitalism in terms of discourse **both** of these questions need to be answered. This is why I have transformed the theories so that questions of the function of power can be situated in economic concerns.

Situating and Deconstructing 'Work'

The basic idea here is that when we talk about work and productivity, subject positioning is always happening. This means the idea of work needs to be deconstructed and rebuilt to produce resistance.

This sub-section serves to critique the role of work in contemporary capitalist political economies.

Here, I introduce the suggestion that contemporary life is no longer a matter of being a member of the labour force because the current benefits system fetishises hard labour and the individual, always imagining the individual as being in employment, urging the individual to place themselves ever closer to work and distance themselves from unproductivity.

Because this happens, I offer that subject positioning is taking place in when discourse on productivity and the benefits system come together, and this is something which Marx would benefit from in his theories on work and productivity in contemporary capitalist societies.

It further acknowledges that these subject positions are wrapped up in economic concerns, which as mentioned in the previous section, is something Foucault could make further room to account for.

This sub-section also deconstructs the very idea of work, stripping it back to basics. I make a distinction between work and labour because there is a strong suggestion that it is labour that government policy on benefits appears to aim to accrue, rather than meaningful work.

This distinction is, of course, a discursive one, but also one that is equally related to the function of capitalist political economies and in turn, how discourse functions in capitalist political economies, specifically, in the benefits system.

Ultimately, this sub-section asks the question of why productivity is so important to the contemporary context of benefits provision, drawing on Marx's ideas about capitalism to understand how productivity has been constructed as an individual, moral responsibility in the contemporary era. Essentially, this captures how

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discourse functions to construct such truths in capitalist political economies and how they draw on discourse to maintain hegemony and construct truth.

Critical Psychology & The Subject

The basic idea here is that Foucault and Marx need to be united within a critical psychological framework. Doing this amplifies the voice of subjects and the role of subjectivity as well as the potential to bring about change and resistance. Also, liminality is introduced to Marx and Foucault to produce something new.

Here, I return to the 'struggle over truth' to explore what it means for the subject and subjectivity.

I offer that both Marx and Foucault did argue that truth becomes naturalised and that this truth needs to be detached from hegemony to bring about resistance.

I offer that these share similarities with the ethos of using a critical psychological framework, where there is a need for scrutiny and a critical eye over the allegiances that naturalised truths have and in turn, how they may exploit, oppress and uphold the hegemony and the status quo.

Whilst both Marx and Foucault's works are inherently critical, given that they are political analyses of history, at times they can be at odds with mainstream psychology.

Whilst Foucault took issue with how science proclaimed man as infinite and knowable, Marx took issue when important phenomena are divorced from situated contexts in psychology, for example, a disregard for the role of the social world.

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Such concerns are shared by critical psychologists. I, therefore, argue that an alternative psychology is necessary in order to alleviate what has been a tense relationship between the two theorists and psychology, particularly in the case of Marx.

Critical psychology is also the stepping-stone towards a greater emphasis on voice, the subject and subjectivity.

By emphasising the subject, this also introduces the importance of liminality. This means that Foucault can set up the important building blocks of discourse and Marx can extend this by asking how and why discourse fluctuates over time, offering that discourse is dynamic, rather than fixed.

It is then, not that different discourses emerge in different periods for Marx, but instead a matter of exploring what is happening in between.

The premise of my thinking for this is that if liminal periods are periods of change, then this change can be redirected or transformed towards resistance.

By bringing together Foucault's notion of discourse and Marx's key eye for historical analyses, the role of the subject is amplified, becoming an active user of discourse, rather than a passive recipient.

My argument is that by bringing the two theorists together, subjects can be conceived as active participants in discourse and the social world, rather than spectators. Theorising in such a way emphasises the potential for social change where people are not objects, but social actors.

The basic argument here is that history shapes what is happening now. This predicates the need situated analyses which acknowledge both the historical and contemporary to understand the governance of subjects.

Marx allows more room for subjectivity than those who describe him as a positivist of objectivist have allowed him. In each foreword of Capital in each edition, in each country published, Marx acknowledges the situated context of the book's publication, whether that be the industrial revolution in the UK or growing resistance amongst the German working-classes. What's more, Marx was well aware that capitalism would transform over time.

I introduce Foucault's ideas about biopower to Marx's ideas on capitalism to understand the creation of a compliant, productive labour force.

Thus highlights how biopower and governance function in contemporary political economies and how neoliberal discourse functions to maintain such conditions, to the benefits of capitalism.

Foucault and Marx – Additional Reflections

Deconstructing Disability

When drawing on Marx's (1990[1867]) critique of capitalist political economies, disability can be understood as a metaphor for the effects of capitalism, because capitalism renders those who are deemed to be unproductive as 'disabled'. This suggests that

disability is not an essentialist, natural state of being, but is a product of capitalist political economies which exclude people who cannot take up socially necessary labour.

This interpretation facilitates a move beyond the concept of 'stigma', by addressing the complex intricacies and knowledges that are situated in language and produced by power within economic relations. This means exploring capitalism as an ableist system which produces unaccommodating subject positions through neoliberal discourse, which consumers are expected to take up, and when failing to do so, are marginalised and excluded.

This reading suggests that capitalism not only effects the able-bodied, waged worker, who is exploited by capitalism, but also the 'disabled' – a discursive construct ascribed to people who do not participate fully in capitalism and are rendered 'disabled' by it. Thus, disability is a product of social and economic relations where the idea of disability is hinged on notions of productivity. Yet, disability is also inseparably economic. Entry into this social relation is driven by the means of production, based on an assumption of what good consumerism should look like.

A discursive approach which draws upon the work of Marx presents an alternative lens through which to begin deconstructing notions of unemployment and disability. Whilst Foucault offers the role of power, discursive practices, and historically contingent, naturalised assumptions in examining the subject positions which people with disabilities are expected to take up, Marx and Engels (1965[1848]) offer a society which will liberate people from the very oppression that disables them. This means critiquing the capitalist political economy by deconstructing its exploitative potential. The theoretical framework is informed by the idea that economic relations have material effects on society, and that these material effects produce subject positions which shape discourse.

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The method draws on the assertion that economic relations play an important role in shaping discourse.

I began Marxist theory as I was inspired by the implications that the work of Marx had for deconstructing disability as well as the fetishisation of work. I recall reading about how people with disabilities are often institutionalised, which reduces the cost of providing care, at the risk of removing opportunities to live independently (Brown, 2017). Whilst Foucault could consider this in terms of biopower, where disabled people are rendered docile bodies, there was a need to consider the economic undercurrents. This domination, shaped by economic drivers, appeared not to be an imagined, or psychologically felt way of being governed, but was governance in a material sense. This then implies that when people with disabilities are not productive, they are transformed into commodities when institutionalised, decreasing the cost of their care whilst also generating capital and creating jobs for others. It would be difficult not to conceive this as people with disabilities being subject to power.

This caused me to reflect on how Marx (1990[1867]) had described capitalism as a metaphor for disability and the material implications that decisions about the economy, such as austerity, may have on the lives of 'disabled' people. I argue that this Marxist interpretation, combined with a Foucauldian lens on how people with disability have been positioned over time, is useful for understanding how people with mental health difficulties are being constructed and positioned in regard to claiming benefits. This meant considering that how people are positioned in relation to the benefits system might not be as simple as being in or out of work, but about being productive and being a consumer; ideas which are wrapped up in discourse.

Appendix B – Account of My Journey Through NHS Ethics

At times in the thesis, I mention that I had an extended period that I made use of in order to build rapport with the participants in my focus groups. When I began to prepare to go out into the field, there was some uncertainty around how I might seek ethical approvals. Undoubtedly, I knew I would need to seek ethical approvals from The University of Huddersfield. However, discussions in supervision meetings around this resulted in more questions than answers as some potential ethical dilemmas arose.

There was a lot of uncertainty around this. I spoke to the ethics committee at Huddersfield, who were uncertain as to whether I would require additional approvals. The reason I suspected I may well have done is due to the funding status of the organisation where the focus groups were to take place, not to mention that the participants I planned to recruit could be at risk of not having the capacity to consent or losing the capacity to consent.

As a means to resolve my concerns, I contacted staff at the university who were knowledgeable concerning ethics, though they were uncertain too. I contacted the local Research and Development Department who advised I check NHS guidelines on the matter. It is here that I realised my ethical dilemmas was also somewhat of a grey area.

The guidance did not list qualitative work as research, which struck me as odd for two reasons. Firstly, qualitative work surely has the potential to be intrusive, particularly for people who are vulnerable. Secondly, I am aware that qualitative work often has to fight for its right to be heard but to be devalued to the extent that it does not constitute research was disheartening. My first reflection on the process was that there is a desperate need for reformation in the NHS ethics process; it not only needs to be

reformed to consider the nuanced goals of qualitative research but needs to acknowledge that qualitative research does happen.

Moving beyond my frustration, I began completing the extensive paperwork in my IRAS application. There was an expectation that this should be written in layman's terms. I found the balance between giving an accurate snapshot of what I intended to do and articulating this in simple terms particularly difficult in the case of my methodology. On the other hand, many of the questions were not relevant to my research.

Eventually, I completed the forms and submitted my application for proportionate review. Although I am still not fully clear as to whether the application was warranted, I am nonetheless glad I went through the practice, despite the time it took to negotiate the relevant systems. Gaining ethical approvals this way was useful for my reflexive position, particularly in terms of making sure my participants were properly protected.

Although I have worked in the NHS for nearly 7 years in many contexts including mental health, I do not believe I had fully anticipated just how vulnerable my participants could have been. The ethical application prepared me well for this, encouraging me to think about the risk of exploitation, particularly that which is inadvertently done. I put some of these lessons I learnt into practice during the focus groups, thinking carefully about how I placed myself in the room. Following a minor amendment to my ethical application, I gained approval to reimburse my participants for any costs. This had not been a part of my plan originally. On the advice of the gatekeeper to the organisation where the research took place, we agreed that given the research was about the benefits system and many of my participants had been sanctioned, they should not be out of hand. Because the ethics process had got me thinking about the role of power and my role within that, I thought about the reimbursement process in more detail than I might have before. Of course, my participants were not coerced at any point and attended because

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of their passion and experience. However, I started to think about how physically handing money over to my participants could certainly risk looking that way, similarly, it might well look like payment. I made the decision to remove myself from this process, liaising instead with administrative staff to organise payment.

The final lesson I learnt from the IRAS application was attention to detail. Because I had a long period to get to know my participants, I knew what would and would not work, for example, based on discussions I chose not to include examples of media articles in the focus groups as I became aware they would be distressing, preventing this happening before it occurred.

Ultimately, I look back on the ethics journey as a practice in integrity. It encouraged me to think hard about how I would protect my participants in every conceivable scenario and prove I would be able to act accordingly and professionally. I believe university-level ethics applications would benefit from some elements of the process, where ethics should be something that is not simply a form that grants the researcher access to a participant, but something that gets researchers thinking about how they shape the research, particularly in terms of the power relationship between themselves and participants.

Appendix C – Participant Flyer

Researcher Details

Becky Louise Scott

PhD student

University of Huddersfield

Becky.Scott@hud.ac.uk

University of
HUDDERSFIELD

Version 1 – 19/06/2018

DISCUSSION GROUP PARTICIPANTS NEEDED FOR RESEARCH STUDY!

My name is Becky, and I am currently doing a PhD at The University of Huddersfield. The study aims to explore how service users feel about media reporting around claiming benefits, how this has impacted them and how they believe the public view the topic. I am looking for people who might be interested in taking part in a focus group.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the research is to explore how service users make sense of the media reporting and views in society around welfare provision. My recent research explored how the newspaper media represented people with mental health difficulties who claim benefits. I would like to heavily feature the voice of service users by exploring how service users collectively engage with, make sense of, and resist such stereotypes and assumptions.

WHAT WILL I NEED TO DO?

You will be asked to take part in a focus group which will explore areas of interest such as mental health, government policy, welfare reform and the media. Focus groups typically involve discussions around a set of pre-established topics and questions, typically facilitated by the researcher, where all group members are invited to contribute and share their ideas with one and another. The reason for using this format is to allow the group to explore and share ideas concerning the outlined areas of interest together in an informal, conversational and comfortable environment. You will also be provided with newspaper articles on the topic for discussion. The focus group will also be audio recorded to allow for transcription of the data.

If you do wish to take part, you will receive all content for the focus groups prior to them taking place and if you no longer feel comfortable taking part, you are under no obligation to do so. The focus group is not intended to be distressing and at now point will you be expected to discuss personal experiences. However, if you find the discussion or subject nature troubling, you are welcome to leave at any point.

I WANT TO TAKE PART, WHAT DO I DO?

Please email me at Becky.Scott@hud.ac.uk and I will be in contact via email to send you the participant information sheet and focus group schedule. I will then work with you to arrange a short telephone conversation where we will discuss the research and I will ask you some basic details about yourself and we will arrange a suitable time for the focus group.

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Appendix D – Participant Information Sheet

Researcher Details
Becky Louise Scott
PhD student
University of Huddersfield
Becky.Scott@hud.ac.uk

University of HUDDERSFIELD
Inspiring tomorrow's professionals
Version 1 – 19/06/2018

Service user views of media reporting on welfare provision and mental health

You are being invited to take part in a focus group exploring what service users think of media reporting about people with mental health difficulties who claim benefits. The group will also discuss what the views of the general public might be on this topic. Before you consent to taking part in this research it is important that you fully read this information sheet and understand the nature of the research and what it will involve. Please read the following information sheet which will inform you of the areas of interest and methods which will be used within the study. Do not hesitate to ask me any questions if anything is unclear or you would like more information.

What is the study about?
The purpose of the study is to explore and understand how service users make sense of, and are impacted by media reporting

I am particularly interested in how people understand mental health and distress and what they think of current views across society about those with mental health issues who claim benefits. I would encourage participants to take part if they have any thoughts, feelings or ideas about this, which they would be happy to contribute. You might find it useful to reflect on your own experience in order to do this, however you are not obliged to do so.

Do I have to take part?
It is up to you whether you want to take part in the discussion group. Once you have provided informed consent by signing the following form, you will still maintain the right to completely withdraw from the study up to two weeks after the discussion group date.

If you have had any recent experience of severe mental illness, or feel that any of the topics in this study would be triggering, I would advise that you do not take part in this study, if you feel it would cause any distress, unless you are comfortable in doing so. Alternatively, you do not have to provide answers to specific questions if you are not comfortable with the question at hand, without giving a reason for doing so. Staff from Support 2 Recovery or Touchstone (depending on the location of your focus group) will be available at the discussion group to provide any additional support you may require.

What will I be required to do?
You will be asked to take part in a focus group which will explore areas of interest such as mental health, government policy, welfare reform and the media. The reason for using this format is to allow the group to explore and share ideas concerning the outlined areas of interest together in an informal, conversational and comfortable environment. You will also be provided with newspaper articles on the topic for discussion. The focus group will also be audio recorded to allow for transcription of the data. Once you have contacted me with your expression of interest, I will send you an information sheet, some newspaper articles to be discussed at the focus group, as well as the topics that will be discussed and we will arrange a time to have a short telephone conversation where we I will collect some brief information about yourself and organise the date for you to come along to the focus group.

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Will my identity be disclosed?
The data which you will provide will not be accessed by anyone other than the researcher, although subsequent transcripts may potentially be discussed with my supervisory team. Any quotations which are used in consequent publications will also be fully anonymised. You will also be protected under the Data Protection Act (2018), therefore your data will be handled fairly and safely under law.

If you disclose information during the study, which suggests that the welfare of yourself, or another person is at serious risk, any concerns will be discussed with Touchstone in the first instance. All data will be handled appropriately and in line with policies at The University of Huddersfield and The British Psychological Society.

What will happen to the information?
Transcribed data will be kept on the university system, which is password protected.

It is anticipated that the research may be later published as well as stored in the University of Huddersfield Repository. In this case, your anonymity and confidentiality will be maintained, and this will not be linked back to you.

Anonymised quotations from transcripts may feature in any consequent publications or be discussed with my supervisory team during analysis and write-up.

You can withdraw all of your information up until 2 weeks following the date of the focus group. Your withdrawal from the study will not affect you, your relationship with Touchstone and receipt of services - you will not be required to provide any reason for this.

Who can I contact for further information?
If you have any further questions or concerns about the research you can contact myself Becky.Scott@hud.ac.uk, or my main supervisor, Alex Bridger at A.J.Bridger@hud.ac.uk. If you would like a short summary of the findings, do not hesitate to contact me via email.

Complaints
In the event of any complaints about the study it is advised that you contact an independent complaints person such as PALS (Patient Advice and Liaison Service). You can ask your local GP surgery, hospital or phone NHS 111 for details of your nearest PALS. Further information about PALS can also be found on the NHS.uk website.

Appendix E – Focus Group Schedule

Researcher Details

Becky Louise Scott

PhD student

University of Huddersfield

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University of HUDDERSFIELD
Inspiring tomorrow's professionals

Version 1 – 19/06/2018

After the telephone conversation, the focus group schedule below and information sheet will be provided two weeks in advance of the focus group to those who express an interest in participating.

Focus group Guide

General Introductions

Before the session begins, I would like to begin with introductions as well as any motivations we may have for wanting to take part in the research

Government Policy

In the first section of the focus group, we will focus upon the role that government policy has in welfare form
1) Think about the relationship government policy has with service users
2) Consider the how impact of unemployment/out-of-work benefits like Employment and Support Allowance impact service users
3) What do people expect of the welfare system and what does the welfare system expect of people

Disability

In this section we will consider the role of disability.

1) Consider the use of 'disability' as a term to describe people with mental health difficulties.
2) Discussion of current assessment of eligibility for Employment and Support Allowance

Media
In this part, the questions will relate to how the media represents claiming benefits

1) What current understanding or views of benefit claiming do you think there are in the media?
2) Could you give me an example of the type of headline you'd expect to see when newspapers cover benefits?

<u>**Society**</u>
In this section we will discuss views in society around claiming benefits

1) What sorts of things is society saying about people who claim benefits at the moment?
Prompt – what can be done to change this/how can this be improved?

2) Are there any barriers to support?

<u>*Articles*</u>

For this part of the focus group we will discuss the two newspaper articles you have received
    1)   Consider the way in which the article is reporting, reflect on your feelings about this
    2)   Consider what sort of narrative the article has and how this may impact readers of these articles

Thankyou for taking part in the research, I appreciate your time. I would just like to ask if anyone has any questions, comments or important topics that they think are important, but haven't been mentioned so far.

Appendix F – Newspaper Articles

Caught living it up in India: Pounds 134k benefit cheat 'too ill' to Goa out...

A BENEFITS cheat who claimed Pounds 134,000 because she was too scared to leave her house spent half the year in an exotic Indian resort living a lavish lifestyle.
Karen Trant pocketed disability handouts for 13 years telling officials she was agoraphobic, terrified of unfamiliar places and could not even go out on her own.
But the scheming 51-year-old regularly flew to the party resort of Goa where she had bought a Pounds 14,000 holiday apartment - that she failed to tell the authorities about.
Trant spent up to five months a year there and had a string of cosmetic procedures including a tummy tuck, liposuction, teeth whitening and work on her "bingo wings".
Her cynical raid of taxpayers' cash was finally unearthed after photos emerged of her posing on a sun-kissed beach, riding a horse and preparing for plastic surgery.
And last night the conwoman was behind bars after being jailed for 27 months by Judge Paul Darlow. He told her yesterday: "You chose to describe your behaviour as stupid. I choose to describe it as fraudulent."

DEPRESSION
A court heard Trant split from her husband in 1999 and applied for income support a month later, failing to disclose the large sums she received from their divorce settlement.
She went on the first of numerous trips to Goa in 2001 but then made more claims for housing and council tax support. A year later Trant submitted a further plea for disability living allowance, telling officials she was suffering from anxiety, depression and mood swings.
Prosecutor Sarah Vince told the court that later that year the fraudster was issued with a six month tourist visa for India and bought her holiday home. Despite her frequent visits to Goa, Trant renewed her claim for disability living allowance two years later - keeping up her pretence of being agoraphobic.
In 2006 she made inquiries to plastic surgeons in India asking about tummy tucks, liposuction and something which "would make her face wrinkle free".
Ms Vince said: "Prior to having bought the apartment, she would go to Goa for two to three weeks at a time. Having bought the apartment, her trips extended to five months. "The defendant cited the reasons for her claims were that she was suffering from anxiety, depression, mood swings and temper fits. She never declared any further income that had come from her former husband whilst out in Goa." Bathsheba Cassel, defending, said her client had suffered mental health issues for 30 years which had an impact on her decision making.

She said Trant had self harmed in the past and had made several attempt to take her own life. Since her arrest, Trant, of Dartmouth, Devon, has been living with her daughter on around Pounds 50 a week, the lawyer added.
The swindler admitted unlawful representation for obtaining benefits. She looked upset and glanced up at her daughter in the public gallery of Plymouth crown court as she was led away to the cells. CPS Fraud Division lawyer Claire Busby said after the case: "The Karen Trant seen confidently riding a horse in the photographs seems a world away from the highlydependent and anxiety-ridden individual she purported to be to justify her welfare benefits claims.

"This facade was undermined by her extravagant lifestyle. The benefits system exists to support the most vulnerable in our society and Karen Trant had no entitlement to these benefits."

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A TaxPayers' Alliance spokesman added: "Hard-working taxpayers will be appalled by this case.

"Benefit fraudsters are the exception, not the rule, but those who treat fellow Brits as a cash cow to be milked must be brought to justice. Fraud is not just stealing from the taxpayer, but taking money away from those who really need the safety net."

South West fraud manager at the Department for Works and Pensions Allan McColgan said: "We are determined to crack down on people who play the system, so that benefits only go to those who really need this sort of help.

"Our fraud investigators have powers to track benefit cheats around the world and bring them before the courts.

"In addition to any sentence imposed by the court, fraudsters must pay back all the money they falsely obtained and face a criminal record for life."

Trant is not the first benefits cheat to claim cash for having agoraphobia. In April, Tracy Johnson, 52, was jailed for a year after being caught working as a tour guide in South America.

The ex-model of, Frome, Somerset, had claimed she was a "prisoner in her own home". But she swindled Pounds 48,000 to live a "champagne lifestyle" and was jailed for a year. adam.aspinall@mirror.co.uk

AGORAPHOBIA

AGORAPHOBIA is commonly described as a crippling fear of open space or leaving the house.

However, NHS chiefs define it as a fear of being in situations where escape might be difficult or help wouldn't be available if things went wrong.

Experts say as well as not wanting to leave home, a sufferer is likely to avoid using public transport or visiting busy areas like shopping centres. Some people become completely housebound by the condition while others manage to function normally in the world - but with great difficulty.

Famous sufferers include Kim Basinger, Donny Osmond and Woody Allen - plus the father of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud.

Basinger confined herself to her home for long periods while Allen also suffers claustrophobia and has spent years in therapy.

This is taking cash from those who really need the safety net TAXPAYERS' ALLIANCE on trant's swindle

The Daily Mirror, 2014

DISABILITY CASH PAID TO JUNKIES

MORE than Pounds 435million of "mobility" benefits for the disabled are going to junkies, alcoholics, asthmatics and people with bad backs.

The handouts of up to Pounds 49.85 a week are meant for people with "severe" walking difficulties.

Many get it simply by filling out a form, without any checks by a doctor.

Ministers fear the rules are so lax that cash is being handed to the wrong people. Official figures show 19,400 people with drug or booze problems get the help, along with 30,900 asthmatics and 128,300 with "unspecified" back problems.

The cash is part of the Disability Living Allowance designed to help those with a serious disability.

It comes in two parts -- a care component of up to Pounds 71.40 and the Pounds 49.85 mobility payment.

To qualify for the mobility element, claimants should be "unable or virtually unable" to walk, or have no feet or legs.

It can also be claimed by blind, deaf and mentally ill people who need help to walk. A total of 3.2 million people now claim the benefit at a cost of Pounds 12BILLION a year -- the same as Britain's entire transport budget.

The Government plans to replace the benefit with a new Personal Independence Payment. Crucially, this would involve claimants being assessed by doctors, ensuring the cash goes to the right people.

A Whitehall source said: "At the moment someone with back pain could get Pounds 50 a week DLA mobility by simply filling out a paper-based assessment.

"The new face-to-face assessment will help to make sure the support goes where it is needed the most and that the benefit remains accurate."

The Sun, 2011

Hundreds of mental health experts issue rallying call against austerity

400 counsellors, psychotherapists and others sign letter saying 'society thrown completely off balance' by 'emotional toxicity of neoliberal thinking'

Austerity cuts are having a "profoundly disturbing" impact on people's psychological wellbeing and the emotional state of the nation, hundreds of counsellors, psychotherapists and mental health experts have said in a letter to the Guardian.

They said an "intimidatory disciplinary regime" facing benefits claimants would be made worse by further "unacceptable" proposals outlined in the budget.

These amounted to state "get to work" therapy and were both damaging and professionally unethical, they said.

Increasing inequality and poverty, families being moved out of their homes and new systems determining benefit levels were part of "a wider reality of a society thrown completely off balance by the emotional toxicity of neoliberal thinking", according to more than 400 signatories to the letter. The consequences were "most visible in the therapist's consulting room".

The letter's writers said it "sounds the starting bell for a broadly based campaign of organisations and professionals against the damage that neoliberalism is doing to the nation's mental health".

Labour first introduced work capability assessments but the coalition introduced a much more stringent regime.

The 2015 budget included plans to provide online cognitive behavioural therapy to 40,000 claimants and people on the Fit for Work programme, as well as putting therapists in more than 350 job centres.

The letter was being organised before the Conservative party manifesto was published earlier this week. This said that those with long-term but treatable conditions, including drug or alcohol addiction and obesity, might lose benefits if they refused recommended treatments. The response from main political parties was muted, each stressing only their commitment to improving mental health rather than addressing the call for professionals to wake up to "malign developments" in social policy.

We certainly don't want mental health treatments that violate all of our notions of ... consent Susie Orbach

The letter's supporters included psychotherapist and writer Susie Orbach. She called "beyond shocking" the Conservative manifesto proposal.

"It undermines the fundamental principles of one's right to physical and mental care -- that you have to be able to consent and that the people you go to have to be highly trained and have your best interests and aren't meeting targets."

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She added: "And we certainly don't want claimants' and job-seekers' aspirations and paltry money dependent on whether they take up treatment options, which bounce them into mental health treatments which may not suit them, and which violate all of our notions of what constitutes a minimum standard for productive engagement in therapy: in short, consent." Andrew Samuels, an Essex University professor, and immediate past chair of the UK Council for Psychotherapy, insisted the letter was not pro-Labour but was aimed at getting a review of measures taken and proposed over the past five years

"If Labour decides afterwards all this is in order, it will go on. But I don't think it will. I don't see how it can," he said.

Samuels believed there was "a bit of a public school ethos" behind the work-capability regime introduced under the Conservative-Lib Dem coalition and new Conservative plans. Characterising the government attitude as "Pull yourself together man, for heaven's sake," Samuels added: "It is wholly inappropriate. It symbolises a society that has lost all moral compass."

Richard House of the Alliance for Counselling and Psychotherapy, the letter's main organiser, said there had been a mounting groundswell of concern. "When one hears story after story of dramatic negative health impacts, psychological and physical, after people are subjected to these back-to-work practices, the time has surely come for an 'emotional audit' of the impact of what, to many, appear to be heartless, un-thought-through policies that are merely penalising and punishing the already disadvantaged still further."

A Conservative spokesman said: "Under this government inequality has fallen, child poverty is down and there are now 1.9 million more people in jobs than there were at the last election. We have legislated to ensure mental health is treated equally to physical health, and are introducing new waiting time standards."

The party spokesman added: "Overall spending on mental health has increased, including over [pound]400m to make a choice of psychological therapies available for everyone who needs them.

"We will continue to invest in mental health and are committed to spending an additional [pound]1.25bn over the course of the next parliament. All of this is only possible because our plans are backed by a strong economy."

Luciana Berger, Labour's shadow health minister, said: "Mental health is the biggest unaddressed health challenge of our age and it is essential that we give it the priority it deserves.

Labour would create a new right to talking therapies in the NHS constitution, working towards a standard of 28 days waiting time, said Berger.

"We will end the scandal of the neglect of child mental health, too, by increasing the proportion of the budget spent on these services."

Norman Lamb, Lib Dem minister in the Department of Health, said: "The Liberal Democrats are on a mission to end the discrimination against mental health in our society. That's why in government we introduced the first ever waiting time standards. It's also why we are pledging at least [pound]3.5bn extra funding over the next parliament to provide better mental healthcare."

"The economic shock that this country faced five years ago has of course had an impact on mental health, and that's why we were determined to build a stronger economy and why we fought to exempt disability benefits from cuts.

"We want to make sure people with mental health problems get the right help to stay in, or get into, work that can help their recovery. We will block the [pound]12bn welfare cuts that the Tories propose."

The Guardian, 2015

Rollover time on the benefit lottery

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THERE'S an old story about a man who wins a million quid on the football pools. A friend asks him what he's going to do about the begging letters. 'Oh, I'll keep on sending them,' he says.

It's supposed to be a joke, not a blueprint for anyone lucky enough to come into a small fortune.

But no one seems to have told Michael O'Shea, from Nottingham. Seven years after trousering a Pounds 10.2 million jackpot, he's still claiming Pounds 500 a month in disability benefit.

Back in 2005, Mr O'Shea and his wife Jean scooped the top prize in the EuroMillions Lottery. At the time, they promised: 'We'll never be any different, no matter how much money we have.'

They weren't kidding. Since then, he has pocketed Pounds 31,500 in state handouts. Oh, and every three years they get a free car courtesy of the Motability racket.

Mr O'Shea, a 73-year-old retired builder, isn't in the least bit ashamed. 'I worked for 40 years and I'm entitled to it. I've got osteoarthritis in my legs and rheumatoid arthritis in my hands.

We really only use the car to go to the shops.'

With Pounds 10 million in the bank, they could afford to hire a full-time chauffeur to run them to Morrisons in a stretch limo. So why do they expect the British taxpayer to keep on subsidising them?

Look, I don't begrudge the O'Sheas their good fortune and I can understand why they have decided to stay in the ex-council house they bought for Pounds 5,000 in 1977.

There are endless examples of Lottery winners who have turned their backs on their old neighbourhoods, only to descend into lonely, mink-lined misery.

They've also built a five-bedroom mansion in County Kerry, Ireland, where Mr O'Shea grew up. But if they move there permanently, he'd lose his benefits because welfare payments in Ireland are means-tested, unlike in Britain.

Surely, though, the couple's new-found wealth brings with it a responsibility to pay their own way. There's no justification for continuing to claim disability allowance and a free car. It's not as if they're short of a shilling. The six grand a year he claims in disability payments doesn't even add up to the equivalent of a week's interest on the winnings.

FOR instance, the Birmingham Midshires is offering a five-year fixed rate of 4.65 per cent on deposits of up to Pounds 10million. That would give the O'Sheas an income of Pounds 465,000 a year before tax.

The welfare system was designed to help those who have fallen on hard times through no fault of their own, not subsidise the lifestyles of multi-millionaires.

Mr O'Shea claims the maximum disability living allowance, which is meant for people who have severe difficulty moving. But that doesn't seem to have stopped him getting out and about.

In the past few years, the couple have taken holidays in Alaska, Canada and Australia. This case illustrates the madness of Britain's universal, no-questions-asked welfare system, which the Government is finally attempting to bring under control.

I don't doubt that Mr O'Shea is genuinely suffering from arthritis. Or that he is legally entitled to the benefits he claims, even though if he had a shred of conscience he wouldn't take the money.

There are, however, hundreds of thousands of people living on assorted benefits who for years have been taking the rest of us for a ride.

Last year, the Government introduced new tests to discover how many people claiming either disability or incapacity benefits were fit for work. The results only confirmed what most of us suspected.

As many as eight out of ten have been judged capable of working, either immediately or in the forseeable future, given the right level of support.

In Glasgow, so many people either failed to turn up for the tests or underwent miraculous 'cures' that the local DSS office has become known as 'Lourdes'.

All the evidence points to the fact that the benefits system is broken and is beggaring Britain.

Yet attempts to reform it are encountering fierce resistance.

I wrote last Friday about the unholy alliance of bolshie bishops and Labour politicians attempting to prevent the Government capping benefits at Pounds 26,000 a year -- equivalent to the average annual household income.

Opponents of reform are now resorting to cynical emotional blackmail. We've already had wheelchair protesters chaining themselves together in London's Oxford Circus -- even though there are no plans whatsoever to target the genuinely disabled.

Now it is claimed -- in The Guardian, naturally -- that 'two-thirds' of disabled people have been subjected to abuse and threats of violence because of the Government's plans.

Do you believe that? No, me neither.

The mental health charity, Mencap, even squealed hilariously that moves to rein in the welfare budget 'could lead to an increase in resentment against disabled people and even an increase in hate crimes'.

Oh, for heaven's sake.

The purpose of the welfare reforms is to make sure that no one is better off living on benefits than they would be working and that incapacity and disability allowances are paid only to those genuinely unfit for work.

And that shouldn't include multimillionaire Lottery winners such as Michael O'Shea, who sadly epitomises Britain's grotesque entitlement culture.

The Daily Mail, 2012

Appendix G – Consent Form

Researcher Details
Becky Louise Scott
PhD student
University of Huddersfield
Becky.Scott@hud.ac.uk

University of HUDDERSFIELD
Inspiring tomorrow's professionals

Version 1 – 19/06/2018

Media Rhetoric, Welfare Provision and Service User Narratives

I confirm that I have read the information sheet (Version 1, dated 19/06/2018), and fully understand the nature of the research and its aims	*Yes* ☐	*No* ☐
I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the study at any time	*Yes* ☐	*No* ☐
I consent to taking part in the focus group and understand that my participation is voluntary.	*Yes* ☐	*No* ☐
I consent to the focus group being audio recorded and transcribed	*Yes* ☐	*No* ☐
I understand that my responses may be used in a written report and that my identity will be protected by a pseudonym. No information will be included that can identify me in any way.	*Yes* ☐	*No* ☐
I understand that the focus group discussion will be confidential. Participants will be asked not to discuss the content outside of the group and any identifying information (e.g. use of names) will be replaced with pseudonyms within the transcript.	*Yes* ☐	*No* ☐
I understand that the information collected will be kept in secure conditions for a period of ten years at the University of Huddersfield	*Yes* ☐	*No* ☐
I understand that my transcript will be kept securely, but may be discussed with the researcher's supervisory team	*Yes* ☐	*No* ☐
I understand that I have the right to withdraw from the research at any time until the transcription of data without giving any reason	*Yes* ☐	*No* ☐
I understand that I have the right to omit responses or refuse to take part in activities at any time.	*Yes* ☐	*No* ☐

Appendix H – REC Wales 6 Favourable Approval

Ymchwil Iechyd a Gofal Cymru
Health and Care Research Wales

Gwasanaeth Moeseg Ymchwil
Research Ethics Service

Ariennir gan
Lywodraeth Cymru
Funded by
Welsh Government

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17 September 2018

Miss Becky Scott
The Elena Piscopia Suite
Ramsden Building
Huddersfield
HD1 3DH

Dear Miss Scott

Study title:	**Media Rhetoric, Welfare Provision and Service User Narratives**
REC reference:	18/WA/0300
IRAS project ID:	244218

Thank you for your email of letter of 14/09/2018. I can confirm the REC has received the documents listed below and that these comply with the approval conditions detailed in our letter dated 03 September 2018

Documents received

The documents received were as follows:

Approved documents

The final list of approved documentation for the study is therefore as follows:

Document	Version	Date
Copies of advertisement materials for research participants [Advertising Materials]	1	19 June 2018
Covering letter on headed paper [Covering Letter]	1.2	17 September 2018
Evidence of Sponsor insurance or indemnity (non NHS Sponsors only) [Public Indemnity- UoH]	1	10 April 2018
Interview schedules or topic guides for participants [Focus Group Schedule]	1	19 June 2018
Other [School Research Ethics Panel Ethical Approval]	1	04 June 2018
Participant consent form [Participant Consent Form]	1	19 June 2018
Participant information sheet (PIS) [Participant Information Sheet]	1	19 June 2018
REC Application Form [REC_Form_15082018]		15 August 2018
Referee's report or other scientific critique report [Progression Monitoring]	1	10 April 2018
Research protocol or project proposal [Research Protocol]	1.1	07 September 2018
Response to Additional Conditions Met		14 September 2018
Summary CV for Chief Investigator (CI) [Summary CV for Chief Investigator]	1	19 June 2018

Appendix I – SREP Favourable Approval

SREP Application - Becky Scott (PhD) - APPROVED - Media Rhetoric, Welfare Provision and Service User Narratives (SREP/2018/043)

SHUM Research Ethics <hhs_srep@hud.ac.uk>

Mon 04/06/2018 16:26

To: Becky Scott (Researcher) <Becky.Scott@hud.ac.uk>
Cc: Dawn Leeming <D.Leeming@hud.ac.uk>; Alexander Bridger <A.J.Bridger@hud.ac.uk>; Shaun McDaid <S.McDaid@hud.ac.uk>

▌ 1 attachments (129 KB)
srep S2R focus groups edits.docx

Dear Becky,

The reviewers of your SREP Application as detailed above have confirmed that you have addressed most of the requested amendments and your Application has now been **approved outright.**

However please see <u>suggested amendments</u> below (note though that these are not a condition of ethical approval):

- The flyer and PIS still read too technical. Please see highlighted areas on the attached. NHS REC will seek a lay persons view of the participant documents and may comment on the language used. However it may help to seek service user involvement re wording of PIS / flyer and this could be stated in the IRAS form (A14.1)
- Storing contact details (personal data) the **consent form states – "I wish to receive a summary of the research findings". PIS states- "If you would like a short summary of the findings, do not hesitate to contact me via email"** This is confusing. If I consent to being sent a summary I expect it to be sent to me, therefore my personal details will be stored until after the analysis? Please amend A36, A40 and A43, PIS or consent form accordingly.
- Suggest further refining your main aim – currently reads as "The aim of the research is to explore how mental health service users position themselves <u>in regard to relation</u> to newspaper media representations of mental health difficulties in regard to claiming benefits.

With best wishes for the success of your research project.

Regards,

Kirsty
(on behalf of SREP)

Kirsty Thomson
Research Administrator

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🖥 : www.hud.ac.uk

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