“Poverty is a Lifestyle Choice”
And Other Neo-Liberal Discursive Tactics

by

Kari Wolanski
B.A., Trent University, 1999

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines how neo-liberal discourse asserts its significant influence over welfare policy. It is premised on a Foucauldian understanding of power as a productive force that operates through discourse. Using the example of British Columbia’s 2002 welfare reforms, I analyse discursive conflict between two policy ‘frames,’ one emphasizing personal responsibility and the other social responsibility for addressing poverty. I focus on strategies and tactics employed in this conflict such as the depoliticization of poverty through the language of individual choice.

This thesis makes two contributions. First, it presents an argument about how broad public policy discourses shift over time, namely, through a succession of policy conflicts in which policy frames compete in the constantly shifting landscape of public dialogue for discursive influence to shape specific policy outcomes. Second, it offers a framework (discursive conflict analysis) to both analyse and intervene in discursive conflicts, with an emphasis on strategies for resistance to neo-liberalism.
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Introduction – “IF THEY WANTED TO, THEY WOULD JUST GET JOBS.”

For five years, between 1999 and 2005, I worked at a transition house supporting women leaving or living in abusive relationships. Women and their children would stay in the shelter for up to 30 days, sometimes more than once over the years. In my work, I accompanied women to welfare eligibility assessments, child protection meetings, emergency rooms, Legal Aid intakes, court hearings, and landlord/tenant arbitrations. Supporting hundreds of women in crisis allowed me to observe patterns in the experience of accessing British Columbia’s social safety net. I also witnessed firsthand the erosion of this net through substantial provincial cutbacks made by the BC Liberal government between 2001 and 2005.

I have been disturbed, in particular, by the impact of cuts to income assistance. Each policy change, such as the ‘independence test’ and the ‘three-week waiting period’ has faces and stories attached to it. I was present when women were found ineligible for assistance because they had not earned sufficient income over two consecutive years. I have been party to women planning their lives in reaction to these policies; wondering if they should move back in with an abusive ex because they cannot find affordable housing, or if they should buy a tent with their shelter allowance and camp up near the power lines. I have been the last contact with a woman before her alternatives run out and she moves onto the streets.

I began my studies intending to explore how participatory action research could bring welfare claimants into advocating for policy change. I was taken aback, however, by the surprising number who voiced support for neo-liberal policies which appear to run
counter to their own immediate interests. The key ingredient seemed to be a perception that penalties would apply to people less virtuous than themselves who were exploiting the system. After years of hearing how welfare cheats are making their own lives harder, for example, some claimants might support steeper penalties.

According to Madigan, "We are constantly in conversation with ourselves in the language of the dominant culture."1 Our dominant culture tends to locate people in hierarchies, often in terms of their economic identities. Unemployed people, particularly if their unemployment is persistent, are likely in this reading to internalize judgments of themselves as failing against cultural ideals. This sense of individual failure masks systemic patterns. Access to employment and education corresponds closely to class background, gender, race, immigration status, and age. "Yet," points out Cruikshank, "thousands of people now define their lack of power and control in the world as attributable to their lack of self-esteem."2 Discourses of blame and shame can recruit even people negatively impacted by punitive welfare policies into those supporting those same policies.

Rather than pursuing policy change through participatory processes, then, I decided instead to engage through my research directly with the dominant discourses that inform welfare policy. Just as I was crystallizing these ideas, I witnessed a conversation that amazed me at a bus stop in downtown Vancouver. The bus was late. Conversation began with some random commentary between strangers; particularly, that the design of the new bus shelters was intended to prevent people from sleeping on the benches. Then,

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a Greek woman (she told us later in the conversation) said that someone needed to “clean up after Campbell.” She had been in Canada for 30 years and she saw how things were changing for the worse. “It shouldn’t be rich and poor, it should be even.”

A middle-aged white man nearby said, “The people who live on the streets choose to live on the streets.” A second woman joined in with, “yeah, if they wanted to, they would just get jobs.”

“How?” asked the Greek woman. “With no shoes?”

Somewhat condescendingly, the second woman reassured her that, “There’s food all around here. They can get help with that kind of thing.”

The first woman responded that she knows about poverty, and “the reason people have needles in their arms is because they are so poor, it makes you crazy.”

Everyone around the bus stop began to get a bit agitated, and the general consensus was “You should go into politics,” and “Relax, you are carrying the weight of the world on your shoulders.” This was accompanied by comments which made it clear that this line of conversation was over such as, “Wow, talking politics so early in the morning,” and “This bus is so late, I should file a complaint.”

The episode fascinated me. My interest is in the currency of ideas about welfare policy and poverty. Statements such as, “they want to be on the streets,” “they could just get jobs,” and “there’s help out them for them if they want it,” construct homelessness and poverty as a choice and by extension justify punitive policy-making. I see the neo-liberal focus on individual choice as a foundation block for sustaining and even enhancing inequality by dismantling social programs. I also found it interesting that the
conversation seemed to stall completely once these familiar lines were uttered. It is such phrases that I wish to denaturalize in my research.

My thesis is an attempt to better understand how certain discourses prevail in shaping policy and through it, our day to day lives. I am working to develop my vocabulary to ‘talk back’ to the catch phrases of neo-liberalism. My analysis is grounded in Foucault’s conception of power as it operates not in the hands of the few who control the many, but rather through discourses which bring into being our reality as we know it. As he puts it, “We must cease once and for all to describe the effects of power in negative terms; it ‘excludes,’ it ‘represses,’ it ‘censors,’ it ‘abstracts,’ it ‘masks,’ it ‘conceals.’ In fact power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth.”

Larner explains discourse in the broad sense that Foucault is using it here.

In poststructuralist literatures, discourse is understood not simply as a form of rhetoric disseminated by hegemonic economic and political groups, nor as the framework within which people represent their lived experience, but rather as a system of meaning that constitutes institutions, practices and identities in contradictory and disjunctive ways.

Policy, by extension, is one of the means by which discourse constitutes reality. The discourses that legitimize policy regimes are constantly in flux, shifting dramatically over long periods of time. In BC, as I explore in my first chapter, the influence of a Keynesian discourse that positions welfare as an economic stabilizer has been superseded by that of a neo-liberal discourse treating welfare as a distortion of free market principles.

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Morgan defines policy as simply "what governments choose to do or not to do." Where a choice is made, options are presumed. There is no need for a policy which is unanimously supported and self-evident. Conflict is therefore at the root of the policy-making process. Schön and Rein suggest "that the parties to policy controversies see issues, policies, and policy situations in different and conflicting ways that embody different systems of belief and related prescriptions for action." They call these different interpretations of policy issues 'public policy frames.' Welfare policy frames might range, for example, from a 'charity' frame advocating that the welfare system should be dismantled and replaced with a charity-based system to an 'entitlement' frame which positions a guaranteed annual income as a human right.

Policy-making can be understood as a form of dispute resolution that mediates differences between competing interests and competing frames. Policy frames, I further argue from a poststructuralist perspective, are derived from broader discourses. My research treats public policy as a site of discursive conflict in which policy frames compete to assert their influence. I am interested in the mechanics of how certain discourses consistently 'win' public policy debates and what causes these 'winning' discourses to shift over time. Particularly, how has neo-liberalism come to be so influential in framing welfare policy in the current day and age? The research question that guides my inquiry in this thesis is twofold:

1) which policy frames were competing most prominently in BC to influence welfare policies during the period of reform in 2002-2004? and,

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2) what types of relationships and power dynamics existed between these frames?

Studying welfare is a route to understanding neo-liberalism because the project of neo-liberalism is precisely to undermine the welfare state. Social assistance policy is a critical site of contestation, bringing in larger issues such as the impact of globalization on the Canadian social landscape, changing relationships between business and government, and a shift in the primary audience of public policy from citizen to taxpayer.

This thesis investigates the mechanics of discursive policy shift at a micro-scale within the debate over a specific policy change. Necessarily, I explore qualitative differences between welfare policy discourses over time in BC and between policy frames that existed concurrently during the period of recent welfare reforms. I position myself normatively in opposition to neo-liberal reforms, assessing some social impacts of reforms and offering theoretical critiques from feminism, critical theory and poststructuralism. I analyse the conflict surrounding the 2002 reforms in BC through a discourse analysis of press releases from key institutions and media coverage of the reforms. Finally, I identify discursive tactics used by neo-liberalism to assert its hegemony over welfare policy, and suggest tactics that might be employed to ‘talk back.’
Chapter 1 – DISCURSIVE SHIFT: FROM WELFARE STATE TO FREE MARKETS

In 2002 the Liberal government under the direction of Premier Gordon Campbell introduced significant changes to welfare policy in the province of British Columbia. Bill 26, the Employment and Assistance Act, radically altered the ideological framework for income assistance in the province for people considered employable with an explicit goal to reduce caseloads. Reaction to these changes was sharply divided along ideological lines. The neo-liberal Fraser Institute praised the new package for “ending the entitlement to welfare.”\(^7\) Meanwhile, the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA) and the Social Planning and Research Council of BC (SPARC BC) called the new regulations, “harmful, mean-spirited and unjustified.”\(^8\) A group of organizations including the BC Coalition of Women's Centres (BCCWC) took their concerns about the welfare cuts and surrounding policy changes to the United Nations Committee on Social, Economic and Cultural Rights, which in response “urge[d] the government of British Columbia to analyse its recent legal and other measures as to their negative impact on women and to amend the measures, where necessary.”\(^9\)

The central thrust of the changes to welfare policy in BC is one of disentitlement. There are two policies that most exemplify this change. First, British Columbians can now be found ineligible for welfare not because of too much income, but because of too little, through the two-year independence test which requires past income above a given...

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threshold. Second, applicants with a clear need can be disqualified entirely from welfare, the payer of last resort, with no recourse whatsoever. For the first time since Canada introduced national welfare legislation in 1965, it is possible for citizens to be ineligible for any form of income assistance in British Columbia, regardless of demonstrated need.

The welfare cuts were part of a larger program of restructuring to reduce the provincial budget deficit, a deficit created by tax cuts the Liberals had made upon arrival in office the preceding year. The Campbell administration implemented wide-spread public sector lay-offs, loosened employment standards, cancelled and weakened collective agreements, and cut social services. This series of policy changes (tax cuts, restricted eligibility for income assistance, relaxed labour standards, and cuts to social services) is widely referred to as neo-liberalism, a discourse of hyper-individualism and privatization derived from the liberal tradition of individual rights and responsibilities. Its hallmarks are a commitment to non-market intervention and a minimal social role for the state. Neo-liberal discourse has shaped policy reforms in almost every country in the world.

Welfare is a pivotal equality-seeking policy. It is the namesake for a style of governance bespeaking a social contract with a commitment to mutual support. It transfers funds to Canadians when they are most in need. By extension, it injects money into communities as they hit hard times. The 2002 welfare reforms and the surrounding changes with a parallel neo-liberal flavour are part of a political program that undermines equality. The new welfare policy direction speaks volumes about the changes to the Canadian state in the context of economic globalization.
BC's welfare policy reforms are a microcosm of a dramatic discursive shift in policy landscapes. Keynesian policies in which government spending mitigates against economic recessions are giving way to the policies of market rule advocated by Hayek. I examine the controversy surrounding the reforms to illuminate the influence of neoliberalism and the dynamics of discursive policy conflict. This chapter offers a brief history of welfare policy in BC, demonstrating the discursive shift in policy directions.

From Keynes to Hayek

Canadian federalism assigns responsibility for social assistance programs to the provinces, but the federal government can attach conditions to provincial administration if it provides federal funding. High unemployment in the mid-1950s and public pressure led to the 1956 Unemployment Assistance Act (UAA), the first permanent federal funding for welfare in Canada. The Canada Assistance Plan (CAP) replaced the UAA ten years later. CAP was a conditional cost-sharing agreement in which the federal government required provinces and territories to provide assistance to anyone in need. Its preamble contained an explicit commitment to "the prevention and removal of the causes of poverty and dependence on public assistance." Moscovitch suggests that CAP's success was only partial; "the reality is that no one receiving social assistance [was] anything other than very poor." Nonetheless, by enshrining the legal entitlement

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12 CAP in Moscovitch, p. 6.
13 Ibid, p. 4.
14 Moscovitch, pp. 21, 22.
of all Canadians to welfare based on need, CAP offered far better protection from poverty than many of the policies developed since its demise.

Canada's welfare system was designed around principles from the influential work of economist John Maynard Keynes. During the Great Depression of the 1930s, a dramatic economic downturn led to massive unemployment levels. Keynes,

put forward a simple explanation, and a correspondingly simply set of prescriptions: lack of sufficient aggregate demand explained economic downturns; government policies could help stimulate aggregate demand. In cases where monetary policy is ineffective, governments could rely on fiscal policies, either by increasing expenditures or cutting taxes.\(^{15}\)

In other words, he hypothesized that the way to get a sluggish economy moving again was for governments to spend more or else stimulate spending by decreasing taxes and leaving taxpayers more money to spend themselves.

Welfare and employment insurance programs increase government transfers to individuals precisely as unemployment increases, acting as an 'automatic stabilizer.'

Welfare is designed to moderate the peaks and valleys that characterize the business cycle: when times are good and jobs are plentiful, welfare rolls and costs decrease automatically. But when the economy slows and unemployment increases, the welfare and EI systems should kick-in automatically, concentrating income in the pockets of those hardest hit and in the communities hardest hit. These systems are elegant in their simplicity. When facing an economic downturn, no new bureaucratic programs are needed, no federal-provincial negotiations are required—these systems kick-in automatically to mitigate the harmful effects of economic slowdown and job loss.\(^{16}\)

These days in Canada, deficit-financed government spending during economic slowdowns has given way to stimulating the economy through tax cuts. In BC, tax cuts were combined with significantly decreased government spending. This shift has deep


\(^{16}\) Klein and Long, p. 40.
ramifications. Welfare transfers money to the people affected by economic slowdowns, easing their financial distress. Nearly all of it is reinvested in the local economy. By contrast, the degree to which people benefit from tax cuts is usually proportional to their incomes. The Liberals’ regressive tax cuts and user fees are particularly beneficial to the wealthiest, reflecting a belief that an economy more conducive to the interests of investors will stimulate growth and ultimately generate employment. By simultaneously relaxing labour standards, however, the BC government has given a signal about what type of employment it has in mind.

This new prescription for economic growth is grounded in a political philosophy known (primarily by its critics) as ‘neo-liberalism.’ Liberal political thought centers on two paired concepts; that of the individual and that of freedom. Liberalism “is commonly understood as a political doctrine or ideology concerned with the maximization of individual liberty and, in particular, with the defence of that liberty against the State.”17 Neo-liberalism takes the doctrine of individual liberty to an extreme. According to Hayek, a key architect of neo-liberalism:

The only moral principle which has ever made the growth of an advanced civilization possible was the principle of individual freedom . . . No principle of collective conduct which binds the individual can exist in a society of free men. What we have achieved we owe to securing to the individuals the chance of creating for themselves a protected domain . . . within which they can use their abilities for their own purposes.18

Central to Hayek’s philosophy is the belief that, “the chief evil is unlimited government.”19 Markets, not governments, should determine the course of events; “the

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18 Hayek in Rose, pp. 63, 64.
self-regulating forces of the market will somehow bring about the required adjustments to new conditions, although no one can foretell how they will do this in a particular instance.\textsuperscript{20}

A group of economists known as the Ordoliberalen were also instrumental in theorizing neo-liberalism. By comparison, they recommended a more activist role for the state, in which a new course of action should leave behind the old ideology of laissez faire. The market was not a quasi-natural reality to be freed; rather it was ‘incumbent on government to conduct a policy towards society such that it is possible for a market to exist and function’. The market economy had become degenerate, penetrated by monopolies, subsidies and government regulations brought about by the interventionist, protectionist and monopoly-fostering measures of the state. A framework of institutional and legal forms had to be assembled to free the market from these public and private distortions.\textsuperscript{21}

Indeed, the pursuit of neo-liberal objectives has been extremely interventionist, not laissez-faire as the rhetoric suggests. Deliberate reforms on a massive international scale have radically reconstituted economies and transformed relations between them.

According to Larner, “the term ‘neo-liberalism’ denotes new forms of political-economic governance premised on the extension of market relationships.”\textsuperscript{22} She argues that understanding neo-liberalism as merely a policy framework or a deliberate, coherent agenda is an underestimation. Instead, it should be understood as “both a political discourse about the nature of rule and a set of practices that facilitate the governing of individuals at a distance.”\textsuperscript{23} She identifies an interesting contradiction that centres on the nature of choice: “While on the one hand neo-liberalism problematizes the state and is

\textsuperscript{20} Ibid, p. 400.
\textsuperscript{22} Larner, p. 5.
\textsuperscript{23} Ibid, p. 6.
concerned to specify its limits through the invocation of individual choice, on the other hand, it involves forms of governance that encourage both institutions and individuals to conform to the norms of the market."\(^{24}\)

The international application of neo-liberal reforms began in the 1980s. "Fiscal austerity, privatization, and market liberalization were the three pillars of Washington Consensus advice throughout the 1980s and 1990s,"\(^ {25}\) developed in response to Latin America’s hyper-inflation and high foreign debt. Increasingly these policies were extrapolated to other developing nations in debt crises. International Monetary Fund (IMF) debt relief packages became conditional on structural adjustment: cuts to social spending and restructuring markets in the interest of international capital.\(^ {26}\)

IMF pressure for reforms has also affected industrialized economies. Stiglitz suggests that annual IMF consultations have metamorphosed into "the IMF’s grading of the nation’s economy."\(^ {27}\) Neo-liberalism has become the standard by which government budgets as well as social and economic policies are deemed sound. In Canada, governments have restructured according to market principles. Social programs, especially those related to employment, have been a key target of this restructuring.

Stiglitz calls this neo-liberal trend ‘market fundamentalism.’

Because under market fundamentalism—in which, by assumption, markets work perfectly and demand must equal supply for labor as for every other good or factor—there cannot be unemployment, the problem cannot lie with the markets. It must lie elsewhere—with greedy unions and politicians interfering with the workings of free markets, by demanding—and getting—excessively high wages. There is an obvious policy implication—if there is unemployment, wages should be reduced.\(^ {28}\)

\(^{24}\) Ibid, p. 12.
\(^{25}\) Stiglitz, p. 53.
\(^{26}\) Ibid, p. 36.
\(^{27}\) Ibid, p. 48.
\(^{28}\) Ibid, p. 35.
In other words, in this model involuntary unemployment is considered impossible; unemployment occurs because workers are unwilling to accept wages determined by the laws of demand and supply. The solution for unemployment is reduced labour costs. Marginal Canadian workers are increasingly competing with workers in developing countries. According to free market advocates, who often represent transnational corporations, Canadian workers must adapt to the devaluing of their labour. Welfare, by this logic, interferes with ‘natural’ market forces by offering workers an alternative to working in worsening conditions for less pay.

Herein lies its strategic importance in resisting the ‘race to the bottom.’ Improving welfare programs for people who are unemployed is critical to reversing wealth polarization. Welfare enables a range of meaningful choices regarding our livelihoods, choices which are elemental to freedom. It allows people to choose not to work where conditions are unsafe or intolerable. It provides an alternative to abusive relationships where a spouse controls the finances. Welfare also puts upward pressure on all of our wages by preventing pockets of desperate unemployed people likely to break strikes, work for next to nothing, accept dangerous work, or engage in criminal activity to survive. Neo-liberal welfare reform undermines our collective economic security.

**Deficit Reduction: Downloading Canada’s Social Programs**

Keynesianism began to show signs of strain in the last quarter of the 20th century. Improvements in communications and transportation technology made formerly remote countries more accessible to Western capitalists. Corporate lobbying effectively advocated for trade regulations favouring capital mobility and reduced intervention by
government in the form of labour and environmental standards. Transnational corporations began moving production to export processing zones in developing nations, undermining the bargaining power of Canadian unions.

Canadians saw significant declines in their real wages for the first time since the Great Depression. Unemployment increased. Working conditions declined. A higher proportion of jobs became deskill ed, part-time, and offered lower pay. “This period of increasing disparity and impoverishment placed growing and conflicting demands upon the state and its welfare programs.”29 In 1973/74 the number of Canadians receiving welfare was at its lowest since the beginning of the CAP. By 1984/85, 1.9 million people or 7.3% of the population were on welfare.30

In 1984, Mulroney’s Conservative government came into power in Ottawa. The reversal of the tide for Canada’s social programs began during the Mulroney years. Hillyard Little argues that beginning in the 1980s the federal government launched “a gradualist … underfunding [of] mainstream welfare programs,” which “did not dismantle the welfare state; rather, in a process known as ‘social policy by stealth’, it slowly but steadily eroded the foundation upon which several of the programs were built.”31

Meanwhile, the Canadian labour context was being radically redefined in international trade negotiations.

In Canada it is widely recognized that the turning point in consolidating neoliberalism was the imposition of North American free trade, a ‘policy Trojan horse’ intended to oblige the state to conform to strict market principles (Bradford, 2000:67). … The terrain of public policy shifted as market-oriented approaches to ‘rationalizing’ social programs, taxation rates, and regulations gained credibility. The reality of free trade, in

30 Moscovitch, p. 18.
31 Hillyard Little, p. 150.
conjunction with energetic campaigns by new right forces such as the Reform Party of Canada, the National Citizens Coalition, and the Canadian Taxpayers Foundation, helped to make neoliberalism the political currency of the day, so that by the 1990s even policy groups that had participated in the Keynesian consensus in the 1960s were exponents of the new liberalism.\textsuperscript{32}

By the mid-1990s, federal politics in Canada was dominated by concern about the national debt. In 1995 the Canada Health and Social Transfer (CHST) capped federal spending on social services and health care. The three major transfer payments from federal to provincial governments (one of which was CAP) were consolidated into a block transfer. Provinces received increased powers to allocate funding and generate tax revenue, but the dollar amount of federal transfers decreased by nearly a third between 1994-95 and 1996-97.\textsuperscript{33} This move “allowed the federal government to shift the blame to the provinces for cutbacks in social services.”\textsuperscript{34}

The CHST also set the stage for welfare cuts by eliminating CAP conditions, such as the criteria that welfare be available to all in need. Several provinces made welfare cuts at this time, notably Ontario and Alberta. Teghtsoonian refers to ‘neo-liberal continuities’ that have transcended the stated politics of the governing party, pointing out that it was the left-of-centre New Democratic Party (NDP) that instigated neo-liberal welfare reform in BC through the 1996 \textit{BC Benefits Act}.\textsuperscript{35} BC Benefits was intended ‘to make work a better deal than welfare and to make sure people can get the skills they need to succeed.’ The provincial government became the ‘payer of last resort’ to which a person could come when he or she was between


\textsuperscript{34} Baker, p. 13.

jobs or temporarily unable to retain paid employment, but only after exhausting all other sources of income.36

Another federal deficit reduction strategy tightened eligibility for Employment Insurance (EI). Reforms in 1996, including the new name, constituted “an important ideological shift with greater emphasis on the personal characteristics affecting ‘employability’ and with less emphasis on structural unemployment and job creation.”37 The result was a dramatic drop in the proportion of unemployed people who qualified. Where 74% of unemployed people in BC were eligible for UI in 1992, only 35% qualified for EI in July 2003.38 Costs were indirectly downloaded to the provinces through increasing numbers of applicants for social assistance.39 The combination of decreased federal transfers and increased applications for welfare due to EI cuts placed enormous strain on provincial welfare programs in the mid-1990s.

After a decade of fiscal restraint, even maintaining government spending at current levels was becoming politically untenable. NDP programs in BC that used spending as a means to deal with recession were ridiculed. The Fast Ferries, particularly, became a scapegoat for a discourse concerned with government waste. Intended as a public works project to stimulate the economy, cost-overruns and problems with the new boats were lampooned, becoming a sort of public symbol for the triumph of neoliberalism over Keynesianism. In 2001, the right-of-centre Liberal party was elected by the widest margin in BC history on a platform promising to cut taxes yet maintain

37 Baker, p. 9.
funding for health and education. The NDP lost all but two seats and were denied even official opposition status in the legislature. The ‘new era’ had begun.

“Strategic Shifts – From BC Benefits to BC Employment and Assistance”  

Unlike the welfare cuts in Ontario and Alberta, BC’s 2002 cuts were not part of the Liberal’s election campaign. During the campaign, Premier Campbell stated, “We have no intention of reducing welfare rates.” The 2002 cuts were imposed on a welfare system that had already been scaled back. There were 29% fewer people receiving welfare in 2001 than in 1995. The government predicted that welfare caseloads would decrease by a further quarter as a result of the welfare cuts in spite of predicted increases to unemployment, due in part to a trade dispute with the US over softwood lumber. The cuts to MHR were projected to be $581 million over three years, or 30% of its budget. They accounted for nearly a third of the total cuts made to BC’s provincial budget. While these were not the first cuts to welfare, even in BC, these cuts went even deeper. The two-year time limit on the receipt of welfare particularly was unprecedented in Canada since the advent of the welfare state.

A far cry from the old language of ‘guaranteed income according to need,’ welfare for applicants considered employable has been re-classified as ‘temporary assistance.’ Single parents with young children, people with short-term medical barriers, or clients caring for family members “may be temporarily excused from seeking employment.”

43 Goldberg and Long, p. 3.
44 MHR, p. 1.
As Fuller and Stephens point out, references to “the larger employment or childcare context” from the *BC Benefits Act* have been deleted along with a preamble asserting “the province’s obligation to preserve ‘a social safety net that is responsive to changing social and economic circumstances.’” The new MHR mandate is:

> to assist people into employment, to provide job placement and job training programs, and to provide income assistance to those truly in need. *Employable* applicants will be expected to look for work before they receive assistance, and employment plans will be required. *Temporary* income assistance will be available to *eligible* clients who are looking for work or require skills upgrading. [emphasis mine]

Specific changes included a new three-week waiting period for new applicants and a number of other front-end welfare eligibility restrictions which the Fraser Institute refers to as ‘diversion.’ Perhaps the most problematic diversion tactic is the ‘two-year independence test’ requiring applicants to have worked for 840 hours and earned at least $7000 for two consecutive years before qualifying for welfare. This hours threshold is *higher* than the threshold to qualify for EI even where unemployment is lowest.

All MHR clients are now required to create ‘employment plans’ aimed at moving clients into jobs as quickly as possible. One financial aid worker calls this a system of “quick referrals to McJobs,” and another, “the shortest route to any job.” As the Fraser Institute explains, “Employment focused back-to-work programs are designed to move welfare recipients into employment quickly, and as a result, place less emphasis on education and training.” The focus on immediate employment combined with

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46 MHR, p. 1.


49 Schafer and Clemens, p. 19.
eligibility restrictions and disentitlement rhetoric is intended to create ‘incentives to work,’ even if the jobs offer low pay and poor working conditions.

The most controversial change of all was the ‘two year time limit’ which limited assistance to 24 months in any five year period. After that time, employable adults would be cut off, and families with children would receive rate reductions. My analysis chapter centres on the conflict over this policy, which was so unpopular that the government added a series of exemptions. The 25th exemption, introduced just as the first 24 months elapsed, reversed the policy so that persons deemed ‘employable’ will not be cut off as long as they “are doing everything in their power to find work.”50

In fact, there was no need for a financial aid worker to wait two years to cut someone off discretionarily. “Failure to Accept Suitable Employment,” “Voluntarily Left Employment without Just Cause, or Dismissed for Just Cause,” “Failure to Demonstrate Reasonable Work Search,” and “Failure to comply with an employment plan” all carry the same consequence: “Ineligibility for singles and couples, $100 rate reduction per adult sanctioned for family units with dependent children.”51

Another way people can now be excluded from the welfare system is through a conviction for welfare fraud. First and second convictions result in disqualification periods while a third results in life-long ineligibility.52 Critics suspect that the increased rhetorical emphasis on fraud by welfare reformers serves largely to build popular support

52 Klein and Long, p. 33.
for the overall harsh reform package, as opposed to addressing a genuine problem in the welfare system.

The utility of dedicating more resources to the vigorous pursuit of ‘welfare fraud’ is questionable at best given that Canadian and international research has repeatedly documented overpayment and fraud in fewer than 5 per cent of cases, and often for amounts less than $100. In fact, studies suggest that investigators are more likely to uncover evidence of benefit underpayment than cheating on the part of recipients.53

While all these significant changes have been taking place, the space available to challenge them has been severely constrained. The previous multi-level appeal process has been replaced by a single body, the Employment and Assistance Appeals Tribunal, charged only with determining if the rules were applied correctly.54 This excludes substantive questions about whether the rules themselves are problematic.

It is important to note that many changes to the welfare system affected the same individuals and families all at once. Additional changes included support and shelter rate reductions, reductions to allowable asset levels, elimination of earnings exemptions for clients considered to be employable, elimination of exemptions for child support payments and cuts to child care subsidies. The detailed changes are too numerous to list in their entirety. I have discussed those I believe to have the broadest impact, and certainly enough of them to establish patterns. The changes consistently restrict eligibility at the ‘front-end,’ create a number of ways to disentitle people entirely, circumscribe the behaviour of recipients to encourage seeking and maintaining any employment whatsoever, and reduce the amount of benefits received by employable clients.

53 Ibid, p. 34.
54 Goldberg and Long, pp. 7, 8.
Social Consequences of Neo-Liberal Reforms

All in all, the result of the welfare cuts has been a decline in the incomes (or complete elimination of incomes in some cases) of people living on income assistance in BC. The total income of a single employable person on welfare in 2004 was $6120 per year. A single parent with one child received $13,778. "In a very concrete way, we are witnessing a transfer of income from the poorest among us (those who need social assistance) to the wealthiest among us (who received the lion’s share of BC’s recent tax cuts)."

Soon after the 2002 cuts, Goldberg and Long published a report that establishes a minimum cost of living in BC and compares this to assistance rates for five hypothetical households. They conclude that, "income assistance meets only 44% of the costs incurred by a single adult, 48% of a childless couple’s expenses, 60% of the minimum expenses for a single parent with a three year old, and 59% of the living costs of a single parent with a teenager and a couple with two children." Welfare rates in BC have declined consistently since peaking in 1994. In 2003 rates had decreased by 29.8% since 1994 for a single person, 41.3% for a parent with one child, and 49.3% for a couple with two children. Goldberg and Long also assess the extent to which shelter allowances allow access to rental housing finding that, "Even those whose shelter needs are best met...—childless adult couples—are able to access only 45 out of every 1,000 one bedroom apartments (4.5%) in Greater Vancouver." Vancouver’s 2005 Homeless

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56 Goldberg and Long, p. ii.
58 NCW, Welfare Incomes 2003, p. 46.
59 Goldberg and Long, pp. 17, 18.
Action Plan found that the number of shelterless people per night doubled from 300-600 in 2001 to 500-1200 in 2004.\textsuperscript{60} There has been a shocking five-fold increase in the proportion of shelterless people who are not receiving welfare: from 15\% in 2001 to 75\% in 2004.\textsuperscript{61}

Living in poverty makes people vulnerable to a wide variety of risks by limiting access to safe housing, adequate nutrition, healthy lifestyles, and support networks. There are correlations between poverty and ill health, low literacy levels, and addiction. In a 2002 paper, the Dieticians of Canada and the Community Nutritionists Council of BC warned that people living on social assistance already lacked sufficient income to purchase a healthy diet before the cuts, and “undernourished children … are unable to perform at school as well as their nourished peers.”\textsuperscript{62} In the long-term, this increases the likelihood they will also live in poverty as adults. A person in Canada with low literacy skills is five times as likely to collect social assistance compared to the national average.\textsuperscript{63} Alden argues that “illiteracy does not cause inequality; rather it reflects it, and to some degree helps to reinforce it.”\textsuperscript{64}

Current research about the social determinants of health attributes “23\% of all the premature years of life lost to Canadians” to income polarization and poverty.\textsuperscript{65} Poverty often builds isolation, which can lead to declining mental

\textsuperscript{60} City of Vancouver, p. 1.
\textsuperscript{61} Ibid, pp. 6, 7.
\textsuperscript{62} Klein and Long, p. 20.
health.66 “Without adequate income, the likelihood of social exclusion increases as more and more Canadians are unable to participate in commonly assumed economic, social, cultural, and political activities.”67 Alexander argues that the resulting dislocation is at the root of addiction. “People who can find no better way of achieving psychosocial integration cling to their substitute lifestyles with a tenacity that is properly called addiction.”68 Dislocation, addiction, and income disparity increase the risk of crime. A 2002 study by Fajnzylber, Lederman, and Loayza of homicide and robbery rates in more than 30 countries concludes “that an increase in income inequality has a significant and robust effect of raising crime rates.”69

Income levels in Canada are becoming increasingly polarized, marking a problematic shift toward inequality. Lee’s analysis of changes in income distribution over the 1990s found using income tax data that,

Average market income of the bottom quintile [5% of the population] was 30.6% lower in 2000 than in 1992, and average after-tax income was 41.7% lower. The second and third quintiles had after-tax income drops of 15.7% and 10.4% respectively. At the top end, average market income of the top quintile in 2000 was 14.2% higher than in 1992, and average after-tax income was 11.5% higher.70

Lee found that income levels declined for the lower half of income-earners in Canada between 1992 and 2000. His data also demonstrate that neo-liberal reforms have reduced the extent to which our taxation system seeks equality through income transfers. “For the

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66 NCW, The Cost of Poverty.
67 Raphael, p. 19.
bottom five vingtiles (25% of the population), the absolute decline in income (not shown) was greater after taxes and transfers than it was for market income.”

If the evidence of increasing disparity is clear in income differentials, it becomes exponentially more apparent in analyzing differences in wealth. According to the most recent measure of assets and debt published by Statistics Canada in 2001, the net worth of the least wealthy half of Canadians was a mere 6% of the total net worth of Canadians, while the wealthiest 10% controlled 53% of the total net worth. The polarization of wealth in Canada increased dramatically between 1984 and 1999. The net worth of the least wealthy quintile decreased by a negligible margin. The second lowest quintile increased its net worth by 2% between 1984 and 1999. In the same time period, the wealthiest quintile increased its median net worth by an astounding 39%, and the second wealthiest by 27%. In 1984, the scaling back of equality-seeking programs had just begun, while in 1999 (three years after the CHST) it was in full swing. Neo-liberal social policies, taxation schemes, and international trade regimes are profoundly anti-equality.

Summary

This chapter describes a discursive policy shift in Canada generally and in BC’s welfare policies more specifically. Where post-war Keynesian policies sought to redress economic downturns through government transfers, neo-liberal policies seek economic prosperity through mechanisms that enhance profit margins for capitalists. In BC’s welfare system, the move toward disentitlement of persons deemed ‘employable’ is clear.

71 Ibid.
in the policy changes themselves as well as in public statements made by government officials. At the same time as these changes increase ‘incentives to work,’ the working conditions and pay levels in the least skilled job categories are being scaled back through a weakened labour code.

Neo-liberal policy changes have contributed to escalating economic disparity in Canada. Neo-liberal welfare cuts in BC have deepened poverty in our province. Consequences include increased housing and food insecurity which will in all likelihood contribute to decreasing population health and literacy levels. During the period that these policies have been applied, homelessness in Vancouver has increased, and so has the percentage of homeless people who are not receiving any form of income assistance. Deepening poverty can lead to addiction, mental health crises, and increased crime levels. Research on the social determinants of health points out that even the health of the wealthiest declines where there is increased income polarization.\textsuperscript{74} According to the National Council on Welfare’s report \textit{The Cost of Poverty}, “current health and social policy research has made direct links between inadequate incomes, poor health outcomes and increased health and economic costs.” These consequences have an impact on all Canadians. One policy implication of these costs is that “reducing and preventing poverty in the first place is more cost-effective than paying for its consequence.”\textsuperscript{75}

\textsuperscript{74} Raphael, p. 1.
\textsuperscript{75} NCW. \textit{The Cost of Poverty}. pp. 88, 89.
Chapter 2 – THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES ON EXCLUSIONARY ECONOMIC POLICY

This thesis is informed by three theoretical streams; feminism, critical theory, and poststructuralism. Each treats themes that are important to understanding welfare policy regimes and contemporary restructuring programs. Feminism provides the motivation for this thesis; a deep concern about neo-liberal discourse as a means of legitimating policies that retrench inequality. Feminist theory has gained substantial depth by using tools from both critical theory and poststructuralism. With respect to welfare policy, I find critical theory essential to understanding its political economy; including the connections between restructuring and globalization. Welfare policy is positioned at the intersection of social and economic policy, and it has an immediate, material impact on the lives of marginalized people. Meanwhile, I find in poststructuralism tools to analyse the mechanisms by which welfare works to differentiate and reform unemployed people, providing insight into the subtext behind the welfare debates. I also find it essential to an analysis of how neo-liberal discourse has come to take such a predominant place in defining social policy options. An analysis of welfare policy is a meeting place of both critical theory and poststructuralism, locating the productive powers of discourse within their socio-economic context.

Rationale: Welfare Policy as a Site of Discursive Conflict

The preceding chapter outlined a clear change in policy directions for welfare in British Columbia. The CAP purpose statement about "the prevention and removal of the
causes of poverty” stands in stark contrast to the new language of fiscal accountability to taxpayers (who are implicitly understood not to be the same people as welfare recipients). Responses to the policy changes have varied widely. In a very real sense, there is an ideological conflict at work over the direction of social policy in BC. The conflict between neo-liberalism and its critics is the site of conflict I have chosen to analyse in this thesis. I am particularly interested in discursive elements of the conflict. “From a poststructural perspective, the content of the dispute is constructed through discourse processes, and in turn, these processes are a function of the content of the dispute.”

Larner makes the point that analyses of neo-liberalism have tended to privilege “official discourses, as read through policy documents,” and that “remarkably few of these analyses draw from the discourses of oppositional groups as well as those of hegemonic groups.” The advantage of an analysis of the debates, rather than simply the policies themselves is that, “Social movements become visible in these analyses, not simply as victims, but as active agents in the process of political-economic change.”

This is clearly not a conflict which I am describing as a neutral bystander. Traditionally mediators and researchers have attempted to work from a stance detached from the content. Parallel critiques of this ‘objective’ stance of both mediator and researcher centre on the question of ‘neutrality.’

The discourse of neutrality, born from objectivism, is fundamentally a Newtonian concept—reflective of a universe in which it is possible to stand outside (narrative) time and (social) space, separate and autonomous from interpretative frames, relational patterns, and communicative processes. This separation between discourse and the world makes neutrality theoretically and epistemologically possible but also makes it impossible to

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78 Ibid, p. 17.
address the role of discourse in mediation practice; in theory, neutrality requires the continued separation between discourse and the world, while in practice, the interdependent relationship between discourse and the world is ever more apparent in mediation.\textsuperscript{79}

The concern, particularly, is that what passes for ‘neutral’ are those ideas which are so deeply embedded in constructing our reality that questioning them is rare. “People who are encultured within a given social system often consider the prevailing norms, however unfair, to be ‘objective.’”\textsuperscript{80} Social change, then, requires unearthing these ‘prevailing norms’ and dispensing with a stance of objectivity to take a normative stance vis-à-vis the direction of change.

In this thesis I actively engage in conflict with the ideas I am writing about. My focus is strategic. I have chosen a specific site, welfare policy, to engage with the dominant politics of our times, a politics which has become the common sense of policy decisions made across the globe with regard to contemporary infrastructures of governance and international relations. Brodie calls the shift toward neo-liberalism “a historic alteration in state form which enacts simultaneous changes in cultural assumptions, political identities and the very terrain of political struggle.”\textsuperscript{81} I want to understand how neo-liberalism is so effective at influencing public policy. Welfare policy is a site where it is extraordinarily effective. In spite of important differences particularly with respect to the role of human agency, critical theory and poststructuralism intersect in their emphasis on the importance of a governing set of ideas in regulating policy change on the scale achieved by neo-liberalism.

\textsuperscript{79} Cobb, p. 189.
\textsuperscript{81} Ibid, p. 11.
A central concern of critical theory is the relationship between capital and labour. Critiques of restructuring and globalization from critical theory focus on the decreased leverage of labour and trade unions in the context of increased capital mobility. They frequently also focus on government's sympathy for the interests of international capital. Carroll and Shaw treat the rise of "neoliberalism as a political and cultural accomplishment—a hegemonic project"^82 achieved in part through cohesive lobbying efforts by organs such as the Fraser Institute. In the Gramscian tradition, they refer to a hegemonic ideology which legitimates elite rule. Said explains Gramsci's understanding of hegemony in the following passage:

Culture, of course, is to be found operating within civil society, where the influence of ideas, of institutions, and of other persons works not through domination but by what Gramsci calls consent. In any society not totalitarian, then, certain cultural forms predominate over others, just as certain ideas are more influential than others; the form of this cultural leadership is what Gramsci has identified as hegemony, an indispensable concept for any understanding of cultural life in the industrial West.\(^{83}\)

Rather than focusing on the agency of key actors or institutions, poststructuralism focuses on discourse itself and how it functions to constitute the known world. Discourses, according to Foucault, "are not, as one might expect, a mere intersection of things and words....a slender surface of contact, or confrontation, between a reality and a language." Instead, he sees them "as practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak."\(^{84}\) Neo-liberal discourse has had a defining influence on the lives of contemporary Canadians. It could be described as a hegemonic ideology by critical theory, or a dominant discourse by poststructuralism.

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^82 Carroll and Shaw, p. 155.
My intent is to develop my own vocabulary to ‘talk back’ to neo-liberalism. I set out with this thesis to enter into conflict with the dominant political discourse of our time and expose discursive mechanics by which it asserts its hegemony. Drawing on poststructural themes, I hope to contribute to conceptualizing how the discourses that legitimate policy regimes shift over time. I offer as a suggestion that these broad policy discourses are constantly being renegotiated through an ongoing series of public conflicts about specific policy issues. Divergent actors and interest groups arguing from within conflicting policy frames compete for discursive influence over the public’s perception of these issues. This understanding of the policy process offers space for continual intervention in framing and reframing issues. My intent is to identify strategies that oppositional groups can use to help destabilize the hold of neo-liberal discourse over welfare policy.

Feminist analyses of welfare policy

Welfare is a women’s issue because poverty is a women’s issue. In every age category, and household grouping in Canada, women are poorer than their male counterparts. 85 “No matter how you define earnings (e.g. annual income vs. hourly wages, mean vs. median), a gap between women and men’s wages persists, even among men and women in the same occupations, and with the same educational credentials.” 86 Further, the distribution of wealth corresponds to other markers of historical inequality,
and "women's experience of poverty is intensified for those who are marginalized by race, class, sexuality, disability, and age."\textsuperscript{87}

Because women are more likely to experience poverty and have lower incomes relative to men, scaling back equality-seeking mechanisms such as progressive taxation and income supplements has a disproportionate impact on women, and in particular women from racialized and working class backgrounds as well as women with disabilities. Though not often stated in the debates surrounding restructuring, welfare serves primarily women and their children. A third of BC households that are receiving welfare transfers are sole parent families, and 88\% of those sole parents are women.\textsuperscript{88} Welfare cuts therefore affect primarily women and children, and an awareness of this fact leads to a different reading of the policy debates. For example, language about reserving welfare only for those who are "truly eligible" has a different ring to it when it becomes clear how many of the people no longer eligible are children.

Feminism is a theoretical lens used to examine the gendered impacts of historical processes and contemporary conditions. It engages with and denaturalizes the social construction of gender. Its focus is also prescriptive and emancipatory. This thesis explores the politics of neo-liberalism, and a feminism that incorporates an understanding of racialization, class dynamics, and colonization is the foundation for my analysis. Accounting for the history behind current inequities is critical to an understanding of why some are more affected than others by contemporary changes that scale back equality-


seeking policies, putting into perspective the language of individual failure employed within neo-liberal discourse.

A key ingredient in neo-liberalism’s success has been its ability to make claims in the language of equality. However, language such as ‘fair,’ and ‘gender neutral’ is often marshalled by neo-liberalism specifically in reaction to policies that redress historical inequity. Based on the deeply flawed presumption that the status quo is a state of equality, such claims serve to recreate and even exacerbate the contemporary disparate distribution of wealth, status, and opportunity.

The concepts of ‘choice,’ and the ‘individual’ at the centre of neo-liberalism are considered deeply problematic by feminists. Feminists such as Johnson critique the notion of ‘choice’ on the grounds that low socio-economic status and gendered caregiving responsibilities place significant constraints on the range of available choices. Meanwhile, a feminist critique of the concept of the ‘individual’ at the basis of liberal capitalist order centres on the division between spheres in society, a division developed in accordance with patriarchal valuations of societal roles prevalent at the time.

Early modern states defined an economic arena and the corresponding role of an economic person capable of entering into contracts. More or less at the same time, they codified the ‘private sphere’ of the household and the role of head of the household. Somewhat later, governments were led to secure a sphere of political participation and the corresponding role of citizen with (limited) political rights. In each of these cases, the original and paradigmatic subject of the newly codified social role was male. Only secondarily, and much later, was it conceded that women, too, could occupy these subject-positions, without, however, entirely dispelling the association with masculinity.90

Capitalist political economy dovetails with liberal democratic political thought in its focus on the individual as the unit of participation in the public sphere. Historically, this individual has been an adult male head of household. Women's economic participation was often relegated to the unpaid caretaking and reproductive labour that made it possible for their husbands and sons to participate in the moneyed economy.91

This is far from the contemporary reality of life in BC, where in fact this type of family made up only 9.8% of families in 2002.92 Nonetheless, the separation between two tracks of social insurance, EI and welfare, is tied to this nuclear family structure. Fraser refers to "an unmistakable gender subtext" behind the similar separation between tracks evident in the US:

One set of programs is oriented to individuals and tied to participation in the paid work force.... This set of programs is designed to supplement and compensate for the primary market in paid labor power. A second set of programs is oriented to households and tied to combined household income.... This set of programs is designed to compensate for what are considered to be family failures, in particular the absence of a male breadwinner.93

Unlike EI, applicants do not qualify for social assistance if they live with a partner who has an income, even if the partnership is very recent. This can have serious consequences. "A number of welfare requirements force dependency upon women, and when there is abuse increase the risk of violence."94 Welfare is, at the same time, an essential escape route from unsafe relationships. Estimates of the number of women

92 Fuller and Stephens, p. 10.
93 Fraser, p. 149.
94 Women and Welfare Project, p. 28.
claiming social assistance in Ontario that have experienced violence in relationships range as high as 50% to 80%, according to Mosher.\textsuperscript{95}

Women’s poverty is at least in part the result of a patriarchal history in which women and children were considered under the law to be possessions of a male head of household, and largely excluded from property ownership and participation in wage labour. The resulting division between the value of work in the home and work in the economy remains a reality in contemporary Canada. Capitalism validates work that has been traditionally men’s and devalues (or renders invisible) work that has traditionally been women’s. Remuneration flows accordingly. Women are less likely to have full-time, year-round employment, less likely to have benefits, and less likely to be eligible for EI.\textsuperscript{96} Some implications of these inequities in the labour market are that more women than men receive social assistance, and those who do tend to have children and rely on social assistance for longer periods.\textsuperscript{97}

Poverty is also intimately associated with a history of colonization which has impoverished aboriginal peoples in colonized territories while enriching imperialist nations. The resulting distribution of wealth is reproduced through a system of global capitalism which, by its very nature, rewards those with capital and disenfranchises those without. As a result, poverty in Canada is experienced most acutely by First Nations people and immigrants from post-colonial nations.

\textsuperscript{95} Mosher, p. 33.
\textsuperscript{96} Cranford and Vosko in Fuller and Stephens, p. 12.
\textsuperscript{97} Mosher, p. 32.
Public policy in the Keynesian era aimed explicitly to enhance equality.\textsuperscript{98} Neoliberalism has succeeded in scaling back some of the political gains made by social movements in the latter half of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century. Policy changes as a result of neoliberalism have consistently undermined working standards and pay in the sectors of most marginal employment. Meanwhile, cuts to the public service have targeted areas of primarily women’s employment, particularly health, education, early childhood education, and social services. In BC, according to Fuller and Stephens, nearly three-quarters of the public sector jobs lost due to Liberal government policy changes such as budget cuts and privatization were lost by women.\textsuperscript{99} The same cuts have consistently off-loaded the caring work once performed by these services to ‘the community.’ Upon closer inspection, the ‘community’ means work done in the home to care for children, convalescents, and seniors, the burden of which falls disproportionately to women.\textsuperscript{100}

Fuller and Stephens point out that “while recent policy changes are outwardly gender-neutral, their effects are not.”\textsuperscript{101} Restructuring is affecting women in a variety of negative ways, yet as Tegotsoonian argues, “the gendered impacts of key features of the neoliberal program are erased within neoliberal discourse. As Janine Brodie has argued, the elements of neoliberalism ‘act simultaneously to intensify gender inequality and to erode the political relevance of gender.’\textsuperscript{102}

\textsuperscript{99} Fuller and Stephens, p. 5.
\textsuperscript{101} Fuller and Stephens, p. 5.
\textsuperscript{102} Tegotsoonian, p. 30.
Feminist thinkers have been deeply influenced by, and at times divided between critical theory and poststructuralism. In *Critique of Violence*, Hanssen undertakes an intellectual mediation between the two theoretical streams. Both critical theory and poststructuralism are important theoretical tools that grapple with the issues raised by changes in state welfare policy. Critical theory is especially useful in understanding relations of domination between classes, genders and races as manifest in economic conditions and in social policy. Poststructuralism offers tools to analyse the mechanisms or technologies by which repression takes shape.

**Critical theory and welfare policy**

Fraser writes that, “To my mind, no one has yet improved on Marx’s 1843 definition of critical theory as ‘the self-clarification of the struggles and wishes of the age.’” Horkheimer’s 1937 “Traditional and Critical Theory,” assembled the principles behind critical theory inspired particularly by Hegel and Marx. He wrote that “in a historical period like the present true theory is more critical than affirmative” and has “society itself for its object” which, according to Hanssen, “it investigates via the dialectical critique of political economy.” Critical theory incorporates the work of Marxists and neo-Marxists as well as the ‘Frankfurt School;’ including Habermas and Adorno, among others. It also includes work by feminists and other social movements that, while not explicitly Marxist, addresses themes such as hegemony and emancipation.

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103 Fraser, p. 113.
105 Hanssen, p. 6.
As Fraser argues, "politics requires a genre of critical theorizing that blends normative argument and empirical sociocultural analysis in a ‘diagnosis of the times.’"\(^{106}\)

Building on Hegel’s theory that social change occurs through conflict when the thesis of an ‘age’ is counteracted by an antithesis, driving toward a new synthesis, Marx introduced new ways to theorize relationships between classes as well as a program for political change. Marx created a framework for analysis, political economy, that is still relevant to understanding contemporary capitalism, for example, how it has “centralized the means of production, and has concentrated property in a few hands.”\(^{107}\)

Neo-Marxists often view Keynesianism as an attempt to reconcile the interests of the working classes and capitalists motivated largely by a fear of communism on the part of elites in capitalist liberal democracies during the Cold War. This theory is given weight, in my view, by the coincidence between the rejection of communism in the former Soviet block and the rise of restructuring in industrialized capitalist economies. The end of the Cold War was seen by many as proof that capitalism was the only possible economic system, launching an era of capitalist extremism. In this new light, according to Gordon, “mechanisms designed to keep capital’s tendency to overaccumulation from expressing itself... were now seen as barriers to the restoration of profitability.”\(^{108}\)

Neo-Marxists argue that globalization has wrought significant changes upon class relations in North America. The ability of workers to advocate for improved working

\(^{106}\) Fraser, p. 6.
conditions is threatened by increased capital mobility.\textsuperscript{109} Neo-liberalism can be understood as an expression of the conditions most favourable to capitalists in the current economic context. Scaling back the welfare state has been a re-assertion of the power of capitalists, undermining of the power of the working classes. Gordon argues that, “At the heart of the neoliberal state form is the clear attempt to re-impose the wage relation (i.e. the market) on people by clamping down on alternatives to wage labour while intensifying wage labour itself at workplace.” This has been achieved by “dramatically diminishing alternatives to the wage for subsistence” through “the destruction of any sense of entitlement built up through the period of the broad welfare state.”\textsuperscript{110}

Many feminists have located themselves within critical theory. Most, however, have found Marxist thought limited with respect to its lack of understanding of women’s particular relationship with labour. As de Beauvoir challenged, “woman cannot in good faith be regarded simply as a worker; for her reproductive function is as important as her productive capacity, no less in the social economy than in individual life.”\textsuperscript{111} Instead, critical feminists re-worked this class-based analysis as a relationship of domination by men over women. However, challenges to this simpler understanding of power dynamics arise from many directions. “Feminist theories that men have power over women are undermined by claims from many categories of women that they are marginalized, constituted as silent, absent or ‘other’ in relation to women who exercise power over them through such agencies as class, domestic service, racism and sexual orientation.”\textsuperscript{112}

\textsuperscript{110} Gordon, pp. 40, 41.
\textsuperscript{111} De Beauvoir, Simone. 1949. The Second Sex. France: Librairie Gallimard, p. 58.
Marxism is extremely useful to the analysis of changing economic conditions. It only begins, however, to offer insight into understanding how these conditions are imposed in liberal democracies even though they apparently have negative consequences for broad sectors of society, perhaps even the majority of the population. As Gordon points out, "the ability of employers to implement lean production methods ... hinged on the mobilization of neoliberal state power in support of it."¹¹³

As discussed in the previous chapter, Carroll and Shaw use neo-Marxist critical theory to analyse the success of Canada's business elite in consciously shifting Canadian political discourse from a focus on Keynesian welfare politics to a market-driven approach characterized by the dismantling of social programs and regressive tax reforms. In the Gramscian tradition, they write of a hegemonic ideology which serves to legitimate elite rule. "An important sign that hegemony has been achieved is the ability to control the agenda by delimiting the spectrum of feasible policies—the common-sense of state politics."¹¹⁴ To some extent, this concept bridges critical theory with the discursive understanding power that is central to post-structuralism.

**Poststructuralism and welfare policy**

Where historical materialism, liberal Enlightenment philosophy, scientific reason, and most other philosophical traditions have sought grand patterns in the process of history, poststructuralism is founded on the belief instead that the only grand pattern is that philosophies over the course of history have jostled to position themselves as knowing 'the truth.' Instead, in Nietzsche's words, "There is only a perspective seeing,

¹¹³ Gordon, p. 41.
¹¹⁴ Carroll and Shaw, p. 170.
only a perspective ‘knowing’ and the more affects we allow to speak about one thing, the
more eyes, different eyes, we can use to observe one thing, the more complete will our
‘concept’ of this thing, our ‘objectivity,’ be.”

In this section, I present some useful poststructural analyses of welfare. I later continue on to link these back to a more
detailed discussion of Foucault’s theories about productive power, disciplinary power as
a means by which institutions normalize behaviour, and bio-power as a means by which
governments act upon populations.

Moffatt’s analysis of welfare draws on poststructural themes of surveillance and
governance. He analyses practice in the social assistance office, focusing on techniques
of disciplinary power such as the examination, the individuation of clients, and their
reconstitution as ‘the case.’ He emphasizes the construction of the welfare cheat as a
means to legitimate surveillance, and the surveillance practices themselves which
normalize and regulate client behaviour. The primary function of social workers is to
determine eligibility; “to distinguish the deserving from the non-deserving poor.”

Ultimately, he argues, “Eligible clients are self-governing people who act out the
internalized consciousness of their visibility.”

Cruikshank’s analysis establishes empowerment as a technology of citizenship,
derived as “discourses, programs, and other tactics aimed at making individuals
politically active and capable of self-government.”

Exploring how citizens are
constituted in democratic regimes, Cruikshank identifies that the subject is

115 Nietzsche in Hanssen, p. 52.
Social Work. Edited by Adrienne S. Chambon, Allan Irving, Laura Epstein. New York: Columbia
University Press. 219-245. p. 231.
118 Cruikshank, Barbara. 1999. The Will to Empower: Democratic Citizens and Other Subjects. Ithaca:
simultaneously an autonomous actor and subject to authority. The extent to which this authority is exerted over an individual depends on the extent to which he or she complies with the expectations of citizenship required by the state. "It is in those cases where individuals do not act in their own self-interest or appear indifferent to their own development as full-fledged citizens that the limit of the liberal state at the threshold of individual rights, liberty, and pursuits must be crossed." By this argument, people who apply for welfare are legitimately subject to coercive practices because they are failing to 'act in their own self-interest' by not being employed in the waged economy. This justifies practices of reform, often in the form of retraining and counseling programs.

Drawing on Foucault's 'bio-power,' Cruikshank problematizes the statistical construction of categories of eligibility and through them ways of being. "Bio-power, through the administration and regulation of life and its needs, enacts the good of all society upon the antisocial bodies of the poor, deviant, and unhealthy." According to Cruikshank, the technicization of bureaucracy through the language of performance measurement, efficiency and accountability serves to remove relations of power from a visibly political realm to an administrative one. "Government by numbers, then, indicates an extension of the reach of power rather than its concealment."

Rose's discussion of governance explores its capillary operation through "chains of enrolment, 'responsibilization' and 'empowerment' to sectors and agencies distant from the centre, yet tied to it through a complex array of alignments and translations." As

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120 Ibid, p. 4.
121 Ibid, p. 40.
122 Ibid, p. 117.
Hindess explains, a discourse of personal autonomy is instrumental in harmonizing the behaviour of individual subjects within this ‘array of alignments.’

The form of government appropriate to an existing community would then be seen as one that acts on its subjects from a distance in so far as they could reasonably be regarded as already autonomous, and acts on them more directly in so far as their autonomy is seen as something that has yet to be realized. Reference to personal autonomy then plays a part, first, in the definition of behavioural norms, both for the subject population and for government agencies, and, secondly, in the construction of programmes for the normalization of those in the subject population whose behaviour fails to conform.124 [emphasis mine]

Rose takes up the relationship between ‘reforming,’ ‘normalizing,’ and ‘freedom’ with respect to Foucault’s study of disciplinary power. “From this point on, the norm would be that which is socially worthy, statistically average, scientifically healthy and personally desirable.”125 The role of disciplinary institutions, such as the social assistance apparatus, would be to construct “norms of conduct,” and ‘reform’ individuals after “their lapses from citizenship.” Centrally, these institutions would be the bridge between the good of the individual who had deviated from the norm and the good of all. By delimiting the boundaries of the norm and creating punishments for straying from this norm, “the social objective of the good citizen would be fused with the personal aspirations for a civilized life: this would be the state called freedom.”126

Power

Foucault’s work has had a profound influence on political thought because he radically re-theorized the operation of power, the central preoccupation of politics.

125 Rose, p. 76.
126 Ibid, p. 78.
Where previous analyses of power had focused on “distinguish[ing] between the legitimate and illegitimate exercise of power,” Foucault “concentrates instead upon the actual ways in which power operates.”

In this thesis I am particularly interested in the Foucauldian concepts of power as a productive force that brings reality into being through discourse, as well as disciplinary power and bio-power. In *Society Must Be Defended*, Foucault establishes the latter two ‘powers’ as parallel processes of subjugation. Disciplinary power administers individuals and normalizes their behaviour through institutions while bio-power masses populations through statistical aggregates and thereby claims power to regulate human life. Social assistance is an institution which, as Moffatt explores, exercises disciplinary power over applicants. Meanwhile, as Cruikshank identifies, the extensive use of statistics in welfare administration points to a role for the concept of bio-power in illuminating the techniques of power at work within that institution. In this section, I explore in more detail Foucault’s theories behind the operation of power.

My analysis in this thesis is grounded in Foucault’s conception of power as it operates productively. As I have previously mentioned, Foucault rejected what he called a ‘commodity metaphor’ for power, arguing instead that, “power produces; it produces reality.” Power, in this new light, came to be seen not as merely a force that limits freedom, but as a force that constructs our known reality through the operation of discourses that claim authority over truth and knowledge. “We should admit rather that

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127 Fraser, p. 18.
power produces knowledge (and not simply by encouraging it because it serves power or by applying it because it is useful).”\textsuperscript{129}

Pre-modern power, he argued, was exercised by a sovereign over bodies as “a manifestation of force.”\textsuperscript{130} Modern power, in Foucault’s view, is essentially “a sort of general recipe for the exercise of power over men: the ‘mind’ as a surface of inscription for power, with semiology as its tool; the submission of bodies through the control of ideas.”\textsuperscript{131} Foucault illuminated mechanisms by which power is at work in schools, asylums, prisons, and other institutions through discourses distinguishing between health and pathology, sanity and insanity, sexual morality and depravity, and so on. In this way, he completely reframed the nature of the political, examining “…the infinitely small of political power.”\textsuperscript{132}

In revealing the capillary character of modern power and thereby ruling out crude ideology critique, statism, and other economism, Foucault can be understood as in effect ruling in what is often called a ‘politics of everyday life.’ For if power is instantiated in mundane social practices and relations, then efforts to dismantle or transform the regime must address those practices and relations.\textsuperscript{133}

Foucault also introduced the idea of ‘disciplinary power,’ as a technology by which institutions exercise a “surplus' power that is always fixed on the same side.”\textsuperscript{134} In \textit{Discipline and Punish}, Foucault argues that prisons and other disciplinary institutions serve to “form[] obedient individuals.”\textsuperscript{135} The Panopticon, a prison design which features a central observation tower and individual cells dispersed in a circular fashion around it, is the organizing metaphor around which he constructs his explanation of disciplinary

\textsuperscript{129} Ibid, p. 27.
\textsuperscript{130} Ibid, p. 50.
\textsuperscript{131} Ibid, p. 102.
\textsuperscript{132} Ibid, p. 214.
\textsuperscript{133} Fraser, p. 26.
\textsuperscript{134} Foucault, \textit{Discipline and Punish}, pp. 222, 223.
\textsuperscript{135} Ibid, p. 129.
power. A critical aspect of the Panopticon's design was that prisoners would always have to assume they were being monitored, even when in fact they were not. Ultimately, through the mechanisms of disciplinary power, a prisoner would 'internalize the gaze' of the authority figures and govern him or herself accordingly. "The pupil will have to have learnt the code of the signals and respond automatically to them."\textsuperscript{136} Foucault contended that these power relations "must be understood as a generalizable model of functioning; a way of defining power relations in terms of the everyday life of men."\textsuperscript{137}

In the \textit{History of Sexuality}, Foucault examined "the way in which sex is 'put into discourse.'"\textsuperscript{138} He argued that a series of mechanisms, including the confession, served to make illicit certain forms of sexuality and through their deviance, normalize heterosexual monogamy.\textsuperscript{139} This re-aligning of sexual mores gave insight into the capillary nature of modern power.

It seems to me that power must be understood in the first instance as the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization; as the process which, through ceaseless struggles and confrontations, transforms, strengthens, or reverses them; as the support which these force relations find in one another, thus forming a chain or a system, or on the contrary, the disjunctions and contradictions which isolate them from one another; and lastly, as the strategies in which they take effect, whose general design or institutional crystallization is embodied in the state apparatus, in the formulation of the law, in the various social hegemonies.\textsuperscript{140}

\textsuperscript{136} Ibid, p. 166.
\textsuperscript{137} Ibid, p. 205.
\textsuperscript{139} Ibid, p. 38.
\textsuperscript{140} Ibid, p. 93.
Modern power, according to Foucault, entailed a shift from “sovereignty over death” to “the regularization of life.” He named ‘bio-power’ the power that operates through “the administration of bodies and the calculated management of life.”

Uniquely, bio-power acts at the level of populations. Statistics generate both norms and deviation, marking ‘deviants’ as targets for intervention by disciplinary power. Biopower “has to qualify, measure, appraise, and hierarchize, rather than display itself in its murderous splendour; it does not have to draw the line that separate the enemies of the sovereign from his obedient subjects; it effects distributions around the norm.”

Biopower, then, uses statistics to distinguish and set apart sub-sections of the population in the process of normalization.

Foucault’s conceptualization of the multi-faceted nature of power suggests an understanding neo-liberalism as a form of knowledge/power that discursively produces a constellation of social relationships. Institutions such as the welfare apparatus act to reinforce conformity to societal norms, such as employment-seeking behaviours. In distancing himself from the ‘commodity’ metaphor, Foucault argued that critical theory was limited in its understanding of power. Rose addresses this critique to the limitations of critical theory as well as liberal political philosophy:

Such styles of thinking about political power also embodied particular ideas about the human beings who were the subjects of power. These were structured by the image of the individualized, autonomous and self-possessed political subject of right, will and agency. Political conceptions of human collectivities also tended to see themselves as singularities with

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142 *Foucault The History of Sexuality* p. 140.
143 Ibid, p. 144.
identities which provided the basis for political interests and political actions: classes, races, orders, interest groups.¹⁴⁴

Critical theorists have retaliated by accusing that destabilizing these ‘collectivities’ removes the potential for solidarity that is necessary to emancipatory social movements. Foucault’s thought does open up limited space for resistance at the individual level (which he calls “the art of not being governed so much.”¹⁴⁵) More importantly, his vision of power/knowledge as a deeply unstable apparatus in constant flux leaves it open to continual recreation. This suggests that deliberate intervention in the process of framing social policy has political potential for resistance to neo-liberalism. It is this aspect of his conceptualization of power that I rely upon in my analysis.

**Alterity**

*Alterity,* “the state of being other or different,”¹⁴⁶ has been a central preoccupation of each of the theoretical streams that inform my thesis, but is especially central to work by the Frankfurt School. To construct someone as ‘object’ against your own subjectivity enables violence to be done. It is in and of itself *epistemic violence,* a violation of the alter at the level of consciousness. “To be sure, much of the twentieth-century philosophy and liberation politics can be seen as an attempt to undo epistemic and ontological regimes of the self that violate the alterity of the other.”¹⁴⁷

If alterity is normatively positioned as pathological, I position *intersubjectivity,* “the state of existing between conscious minds,”¹⁴⁸ as an antidote to alterity. Intersubjectivity

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¹⁴⁴ Rose, p. 1
¹⁴⁵ Foucault in Hanssen, p. 58.
¹⁴⁷ Hanssen, p. 187.
¹⁴⁸ *The Compact Oxford English Dictionary.*
is a relationship of mutual recognition between subjects. According to McNay, intersubjectivity is key to Habermas’ work, and the foundation of its political potential. Indeed, she concludes that by comparison with Habermas, Foucault’s ethics of the self fails to “form the basis of a contemporary politics based on the recognition of difference,” precisely because it lacks “an element of intersubjectivity which could form the basis of a politics of solidarity.”

Pivotal in this thesis is the argument that discursively constructing people who are claiming welfare as ‘other’ is crucial in enabling the shift to an increasingly punitive welfare system. Essentially, I treat these policies as a form of structural violence, which is defined by Brand-Jacobsen as,

violence built into the very social, political and economic systems that govern societies, states and the world. It is the different (and obviously violating) allocation of goods, resources, opportunities, between different groups, classes, genders, nationalities, etc., because of the structure governing their relationship.

In this last section, I explore alterity first in terms of gender and race, and then specifically in the construction of welfare recipients as ‘other’ through stereotyping and statistics.

De Beauvoir’s Second Sex examines the construction of women by men as ‘other’ through a number of lenses in science and culture. It is her thesis, essentially, that “the Other is posed as such by the One in defining himself as the One.” Women are constructed as immanent, the background to male subjectivity and agency. She quotes Hegel as an example of this construction: “Thus man, in consequence of that

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151 De Beauvoir, p. xxiv.
differentiation, is the active principle while woman is the passive principle because she remains undeveloped in her unity.”

Central to all human experience, argues feminist author Benjamin, is our need for recognition by others. In the course of human development, “Assertion and recognition constitute the poles of a delicate balance.” In order to know our selves, she argues, we need recognition from others. This recognition enables our own agency, but it can only be given by “an other whom we, in turn, recognize as a person in his or her own right. ... The inability to sustain paradox in that interaction can, and often does, convert the exchange of recognition into domination and submission.” At a collective scale, failure to relate intersubjectively to one another has profound implications:

As we have repeatedly seen, domination ultimately deprives both subjugator and subjugated of recognition. Gender polarity deprives women of their subjectivity and men of an other to recognize them. But the loss of recognition between men and women as equal subjects is only one consequence of gender domination. The ascendancy of male rationality results finally in the loss and distortion of recognition in society as a whole. It not only eliminates the maternal aspects of recognition (nurturance and empathy) from our collective values, actions, and institutions. It also restricts the exercise of assertion, making social authorship and agency a matter of performance, control, and impersonality—and thus vitiates subjectivity itself. In creating an increasingly objectified world, it deprives us of the intersubjective context in which assertion receives a recognizing response. We must face the enormity of this loss if we are ever to find our way back through the maze of domination to the heart of recognition.

Benjamin traces the developmental process of infants, centering relationships with male and female parents in the identity-building process. The gender-influenced process of separation-individuation, becoming aware of one’s agency, informs Benjamin’s analysis of the ‘individual.’ Dissolution of the intersubjective balance of mutual

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152 Hegel in De Beauvoir, p. 9.
recognition results in a “one-sided ideal of autonomous individuality, the masculine ideal,” and “a denial of dependency.” As a result, “the devaluation of the need for the other becomes a touchstone of adult masculinity.”155

The contempt and loathing for ‘dependency’ that imbues welfare discourses is deeply misogynist, in this reading. It is based on a devaluation of societal interconnectedness that stems from liberal assumptions about a community of autonomous individuals. Fraser and Gordon identify a number of other similarly gendered binary concepts that are reproduced in the discourse of welfare dependency.

The opposition between the independent personality and the dependent personality maps onto a whole series of hierarchical oppositions and dichotomies that are central in modern capitalist culture: masculine/feminine, public/private, work/care, success/love, individual/community, economy/family, and competitive/self-sacrificing.156

Thus the seemingly neutral assumptions that underlie BC’s welfare policy shifts about what independence means, who should work, and what constitutes work are fraught with gendered implications.

Said uses poststructuralism to understand alterity between civilizations, infused by racialized distinctions. His work examines the systematic construction of the ‘Orient’ by the West, which he calls Orientalism. “Orientalism was ultimately a political vision of reality whose structure promoted the difference between the familiar (Europe, the West, ‘us’) and the strange (the Orient, the East, ‘them’). This vision in a sense created and then served the two worlds thus conceived.”157 Western discourses of Orientalism

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155 Ibid, p. 171.
157 Said, pp. 43, 44.
come from a self-positioned place of assumed superiority. This is how power functions, according to Said.

It is formed, irradiated, disseminated; it is instrumental, it is persuasive; it has status, it establishes canons of taste and value; it is virtually indistinguishable from certain ideas it dignifies as true, and from traditions, perceptions, and judgments it forms, transmits, reproduces.\(^ {158}\)

Perhaps the most insidious effect of persistent discourses of alterity is their success at persuading the very people subjugated through these discourses to construct their own identities through the eyes of their subjugators. According to Freire, “Self-deprecation is another characteristic of the oppressed, which derives from their internalization of the opinion the oppressors hold of them.”\(^ {159}\) Fraser finds a similar phenomenon specifically in the context of economically marginalized people which fits within Gramsci’s analysis of a hegemonic ideology. “Since both domestic and official economic system institutions support relations of dominance and subordination, the specific interpretations they naturalize usually tend, on the whole, to advantage dominant groups and individuals and to disadvantage their subordinates.” The result, according to Fraser is internalized oppression. “As a result of these processes, members of subordinated groups commonly internalize need interpretations that work to their own disadvantage.”\(^ {160}\)

Rose and Cruikshank argue that the focus on ‘self-esteem’ in welfare discourses accomplishes a harmonization between the interests of the state and the welfare recipient by positioning him or her as deficient and needing training and confidence-building in order to better accomplish the goals of the state. So the ‘technologies of citizenship’

\(^ {158}\) ibid, pp. 20, 21.


\(^ {160}\) Fraser, pp. 168, 169.
aimed at people claiming welfare support the internalization of identities defined with respect to dominant discourses, in which claimants are positioned as deficient due to their failure (even temporarily) to take on the prescribed role of ‘worker.’

The line between subjectivity and subjection is crossed when I subject my self, when I align my personal goals with those set out by reformers – both expert and activist – according to some notion of the social good. The norm of self-esteem links subjectivity to power; in the words of Nikolas Rose, it ‘binds subjects to a subjection that is the more profound because it appears to emanate from our autonomous quest for ourselves, it appears as a matter of our freedom.’

The Generalized and Concrete Other

Benhabib’s analysis of alterity draws a distinction between recognizing the “generalized” and the “concrete” other. The generalized other eclipses a myriad of experiences, importantly, experiences of oppression and difference, behind an archetypal other, who upon closer inspection exhibits particular aspects of the experience of an autonomous, wealthy, educated, white, abled, adult male. “The standpoint of the concrete other, by contrast, requires us to view each and every rational being as an individual with a concrete history, identity and affective-emotional constitution.”

While official welfare policy addresses a ‘generalized other,’ in concrete terms the typical welfare recipient is in many ways the precise opposite of the liberal subject. If the archetypal liberal subject in advanced capitalism is an autonomous, white, male worker, the archetypal object of welfare policy is a woman of colour intertwined in relationships (such as with her children) who is not engaged in paid work.

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161 Rose in Cruikshank, p. 92.
According to Hindess, the “regulative ideal of personal autonomy” which defines our political institutions is marked by “a persistent slippage between the idea of the person as adult individual and the idea of the person as (male) head of household.”\(^{163}\) Neo-liberal policy discourses centre around this ‘regulative ideal,’ creating harsh penalties for those who fail to live up to it. Yet, upon closer inspection of the ‘concrete’ circumstances of people who apply for welfare, it becomes apparent that the reasons they lack incomes are deeply systemic. A discourse centred around the autonomy of the individual not only erases but also denigrates experiences of nurturing and caring where they impede an individual’s autonomy. Ultimately, according to Benjamin,

The unbreachable line between public and private values rests on the tacit assumption that women will continue to preserve and protect personal life, the task to which they have been assigned. In this way the political morality can sustain the fiction of the wholly independent individual, whose main concern is a system of rights that protects him from other individuals like himself... The public sphere, an arrangement of atomized selves, cannot serve as the space between self and other, as an intersubjective space; in order to protect the autonomy of the individual, social life forfeits the recognition between self and other.\(^{164}\)

**Constructing the welfare cheat**

I have worked so far to establish alterity as instrumental to the subjugation of ‘others.’ It is a lack mutual recognition, I believe, that enables the punitive scaling back of welfare entitlements in spite of significant human costs. In this section, I argue that this block in mutual recognition is accomplished rhetorically through construction of the much-loathed scapegoat of welfare policy reforms; the welfare cheat.

According to White, “welfare fraud’ has long been one of the dominant themes expressing the ambivalence, indeed aversion, within modern political culture, to welfare.”

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\(^{163}\) Hindess, p. 65.

\(^{164}\) Benjamin, p. 197.
Fraud both promotes negative stereotype of people claiming welfare and "justifies an elaborate regime for monitoring eligibility determinations and restricting the welfare rolls." The welfare cheat as scapegoat has served (sometimes unsuccessfully) to block compassion for people marginalized by the restructuring of the Canadian economy through globalization processes in ways that are profitable to transnational corporations and consistent with international shifts toward the polarization of wealth.

Mosher identifies three rhetorical strategies which have been employed to 'manage' the process of disentitlement.

Two of these—the invocation of an idealized, hegemonic family and the glorification of the market—are not specific to welfare reform and have been ... integral to the state's retreat and the market's ascension. ... The third strategy, while not unique to welfare reform, is absolutely central to the management of women's disentitlement to welfare. This strategy entails the active construction of a deeply negative stereotype of welfare recipients in general and of single mothers in receipt of welfare in particular.

Rhetoric that scapegoats people on welfare by suggesting that they are misusing their welfare cheques or not entitled to them in the first place has frequently accompanied welfare restructuring. In Ontario "Premier Harris, for example, when asked why the pregnancy benefit (additional funds payable when pregnant) was being terminated, invoked a negative stereotype of mothers on welfare by his response: 'what we're making sure is that those dollars don't go to beer; don't go to something else.' Evans and Swift point out that "Discourses that configure single mothers as irresponsible adults and ineffective parents also construct them as undeserving of public sympathy and help.

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165 White in Cruikshank, p. 105.
166 Mosher, p. 31.
167 Mosher, pp. 46, 47.
to legitimize and entrench shrinking public provision and retrenching the welfare state.”

Foucault and Cruikshank explore the massing of humanity through statistics as a form of alterity, by which populations are constituted as an object of policy and thus as an object of power/knowledge. The ‘welfare rolls’ have been central to the move for welfare reform in BC, which sets as its key objective reducing the numbers of people in receipt of welfare cheques. Welfare fraud administration, then, frames decisions about eligibility as a technical, not a political issue.

Establishing norms (by means of statistics) sets the stage for a normalizing society in which individuals are induced to more closely inscribe their behaviours and identities with reference to these societal norms. Again, biopower “does not have to draw the line that separate the enemies of the sovereign from his obedient subjects; it effects distributions around the norm.” Bio-power is state action upon populations to bring deviance into alignment with norms. In so doing, it constructs ‘deviants’ as exterior to and in enmity to the whole.

Collectively, those living in poverty are often treated as suspect in contemporary discourse. Rose writes that,

Those who were on the social were not fellow citizens entitled to support to enable them to cope with temporary difficulties brought about by the ups and downs of a life-cycle, or by unexpected ill health or accident. They were spoken about as if they were somehow different, demeaned, dependent: the potentially dangerous inhabitants of marginal territory, the source of fiscal, economic and moral problems, to be feared and condemned or pitied and reformed. Fiscally, they appeared to represent a drain on taxes, recipients of public funds who make no return... Economically, in addition to their tax cost, they appeared to represent a sector without either the skills or the will to enhance competitiveness...Morally, they were demeaned not

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168 Evans and Swift, p. 73.
169 Foucault, History of Sexuality, p. 144.
merely because of their despair or depravity, but because of their apparent
dependence – financial and psychological – upon a system of state hand-
outs.¹⁷⁰

According to Rose, marking welfare claimants as distinct from societal norms
brings into being the possibility that they can be made “legitimate targets of such
negative practices of control.” Coercive tactics are justified on the grounds “that limited
coercion is necessary to shape or reform pathological individuals so that they are willing
and able to accept the rights and responsibilities of freedom.”¹⁷¹ Moreover, the people
who are objects of coercive tactics are themselves made instrumental in the process of
their own coercion through the mechanism of shame.

In all these topographical technologies of citizenship, persons were to be
governed not through imposing duties, but by throwing a web of visibilities,
of public codes and private embarrassments over personal conduct: we
might term this government through the calculated administration of
shame.¹⁷²

Swift and Birmingham found in their research with women on welfare that
“Canadian women are well versed in the ‘proper’ amount of shame to be felt because
they are on welfare.”¹⁷³ Rose’s assertion about administration by shame through a ‘web
of visibilities’ is corroborated by Hillyard Little’s interviews with women in Ontario,
who “disclose[d] that neighbours, teachers, store owners, and other recipients continue to
scrutinize the daily lives of single mothers.”¹⁷⁴ Hillyard Little writes that she “was
appalled by how they even self-censored their days and nights, all in an attempt to
guarantee the continuance of the monthly OMA cheque.”¹⁷⁵

¹⁷⁰ Rose, pp. 99, 100.
¹⁷¹ Ibid, p. 10.
¹⁷² Ibid, p. 73.
¹⁷³ Swift and Birmingham, p. 109.
¹⁷⁴ Hillyard Little, p. 164
¹⁷⁵ Ibid, p. xi.
While the basis for judgement shifts with time, people on welfare have consistently been subjected to scrutiny and derision. "In the early 1990s the moral terrain had shifted from a broad range of moral questions to focus more exclusively on issues of sexuality and cohabitation. But by the mid-1990s, the moral discourse had altered once again to reintroduce concerns about cheating and laziness."\textsuperscript{176} The intensive administration of the lives of people living in poverty encourages them to 'internalize the gaze' of authority figures, to feel shame and 'reform' their behaviour accordingly.

Within neo-liberal discourse, the primary audience for government policy is not the 'citizen' but the 'taxpayer.' The citizen speaks to a commitment to democracy and equality: one citizen, one vote. The new audience of government policy, however, is heavily influenced by the notion of the 'shareholder' borrowed from corporate governance. Rather than equality, the implication of shifting accountability to taxpayers is that government is accountable in differential degrees that correspond to the amount of taxes paid. In other words, government should be more accountable to the wealthy than the poor, a distinction with clearly classed, gendered, and racialized implications.

By deepening the negative stereotype of the 'welfare recipient' (presented as a homogeneous category), the 'welfare recipient is distanced from the 'taxpayer'. This distance is also created by the common government trope when implementing and justifying these reforms that the welfare system is being made accountable to 'taxpayers' and benefits are paid only to the 'truly needy'. This creates the impression that welfare recipients are taking advantage of taxpayers (because they are not genuinely in need, or are otherwise not deserving of benefits) and that welfare recipients are not themselves taxpayers. Welfare recipients and taxpayers are constructed as adversaries. The distancing of the taxpayer from the welfare recipient (including, of course, economically secure women from poor women) is important since the less they have in common, the greater the support for cutbacks. In perpetuating this discourse to support its welfare reforms, the state, rather than working to promote equality, plays a significant role in

\textsuperscript{176} Ibid, p. 165.
perpetuating the negative stereotype that is at the core of discrimination against welfare recipients generally and poor women in particular.177

**Economic Identities**

Discursive power as it regards alterity deeply affects the nature of the society we engage in creating and recreating through our everyday interactions. I argue with Benjamin that exclusionary discursive processes and by extension exclusionary economic processes are harmful even to those whose status is elevated by a relationship of domination because they diminish our collective capacity for mutual recognition. At its core, the conflict over welfare reform centres on whether we, as a society, address the ‘other’ from a position of interiority or exteriority.

Analyses of alterity in both critical theory and poststructuralism offer theoretical entry points into understanding specific mechanisms by which ‘the welfare recipient’ and particularly ‘the welfare cheat’ is constructed as an object of discourse and targeted for ‘reform.’ These discursive practices are equally importantly to the construction of broader social identities. Fraser writes that “social-welfare programs provide more than material aid: they also provide clients, and the public at large, with a tacit but powerful interpretive map of normative, differentially valued gender roles and gendered needs.”178 Stigmatizing welfare recipients can serve to build consensus around increasingly coercive and punitive welfare policies. But it can also serve to normalize the behaviour of people who are not receiving welfare. Particularly, neo-liberal policy discourses reposition the norms surrounding economic identities.

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177 Mosher, p. 47.
178 Fraser, pp. 9,10.
Restrictive eligibility requirements, in this argument affect not only those who become ineligible. They also contribute to constructing norms for all of our participation in the economy. Denying welfare to those who leave jobs willingly, for example, even if the working circumstances are intolerable, helps to instill in all of us the value that any job is better than none at all, deflecting pressure from employers to improve working conditions, especially in the sectors of most marginal employment.

Foucault quotes early pedagogic materials in *Discipline and Punish*. "The 'shameful' class existed only to disappear: 'In order to judge the kind of conversion undergone by pupils of the shameful class who behave well', they were reintroduced into the other classes." In other words, marking deviance serves to reinforce the norm while simultaneously normalizing the behaviour of the 'deviant'. In modern power, subjects' minds are the surface of intervention. "In the new modes of regulating health, individuals are addressed on the assumption that they want to be healthy, and enjoined to freely seek out the ways of living most likely to promote their own health." As Larner points out with respect to the New Zealand experience of restructuring:

Understanding neo-liberalism through these lenses also encourages investigation of the reformulation of identities.... This would help us understand the processes by which the subjectivities of New Zealanders have become more closely aligned with the individualistic assumptions that underpin neoliberalism, and how economic identities have come to be posited as a new basis for political life, usurping those associated with social citizenship.

Here I am arguing that the neo-liberal policy discourse surrounding welfare reform has as much to do with reforming the identities and behaviour of people who may never

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179 Archives National in Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p. 182.
180 Rose, pp. 86, 87.
181 Larner, p. 19.
apply for welfare as it does those who receive it. It is an assertion of a new form of social order which requires new identities and relations in order to function effectively. To challenge this assertion and reclaim more holistic subject positions, then, it is critical to enjoin conversations about welfare reform from an intersubjective stance, disturbing the dichotomy between taxpayer and welfare recipient and replacing it with an approach that explores our collective stake in an inclusive and just society.
My analysis deals primarily with two key events in the welfare reform process as they are discussed in selected texts. The first is the passing of Bill 26 – BC Employment and Assistance Act. The second is the enactment and adaptation of one of the reforms introduced in the act; the ‘two-year time limit.’ I focus on texts surrounding these events, not the legislation or policy manual themselves. Instead I am concerned with how these events were presented to the public by the government, debated in the legislature, analysed by policy lobby groups, and covered as news items. In short, I am interested in how the reforms were variously interpreted in the public realm, and how these interpretations conflict with one another.

There are two consecutive steps in my methodology. In the first step, I use critical discourse analysis to identify divergent interpretations of the reforms in the texts I reviewed. This step corresponds to my first research question, “Which policy frames were competing most prominently in BC to influence social assistance policies during the period of reform in 2002-2004?” In the second step, I examine the relationships between these policy frames, focusing particularly on discursive tactics employed by parties to the conflict. The second step corresponds to my second research question, “What relationships and power dynamics exist between these frames?”

Each of the texts I review references the introduction of new welfare policies in 2002.\footnote{All texts used my analysis are listed in Appendix 1. They are organized in textual chains according to theme, and in chronological order within each theme.} Although discursive contestation began far before the policies were written and the relationship continues to be iterative, this event is symbolically represented here as
having instigated the conflict. At its simplest, my methodology can be viewed as a case study of a conflict over welfare policy reforms in BC. The parties engaged in the conflict are ‘policy frames,” one of which stems from a hegemonic discourse of neo-liberalism, and the other from an oppositional discourse of resistance to neo-liberalism.

It is a founding assumption of this thesis that discourse is the site at which our interpretations of reality are constructed. “Without discourse, there is no social reality, and without understanding discourse, we cannot understand our reality, our experiences, or ourselves.”

Discourse analysis, argue Phillips and Hardy, “explore[s] the relationship between discourse and reality.” As a methodological choice, then, it allows an analysis of reality as it is constructed suggesting in turn a means of intervening in the reproduction of social reality.

Critical Discourse Analysis

While some strategies for discourse analysis focus specifically on talk and/or text, critical discourse analysis (CDA) is more concerned with the context from which talk and text arise. Critical discourse analyst van Dijk “sees discourse quite generally as text in context.” She argues that, “discourse should also be understood as action,” in that it acts to bring a reality into being. Discourse can manufacture and legitimate injustice but also articulate critique. CDA uses themes identified in critical theory to analyse texts, talk, and context in pursuit of emancipatory goals.

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184 Ibid, p. 3.
Though in different terms, and from different points of view, most of us deal with power, dominance, hegemony, inequality, and the discursive processes of their enactment, concealments, legitimation and reproduction. And many of us are interested in the subtle means by which text and talk manage the mind and manufacture consent, on the one hand, and articulate and sustain resistance and challenge, on the other.\(^{186}\)

Discourse refers in one sense to text or talk itself, but in another sense to a broad, shared meaning system that grounds a coherent series of texts and conversations which in turn instantiate everything from institutions to forms of social relationships. According to Foucault, as one example of this larger definition, “If, in a particular period in the history of our society, the delinquent was psychologized and pathologized ... this was because a group of particular relations was adopted for use in psychiatric discourse.”\(^{187}\) Further, he elaborates the intimate relationship between expert discourses and the operation of hierarchical power, referring to “discourses that were interlocking, hierarchized, and all highly articulated around a cluster of power relations.”\(^{188}\) To avoid confusion between these two definitions of discourse, I use ‘policy discourse’ to refer to this broader meaning that describes the larger knowledge systems such as neo-liberalism that inform (and produce) social policy.

Fairclough’s analytical framework for CDA draws relationships between “the concepts of interdiscursivity (that is, the combination of genres and discourses in a text) and hegemony (the predominance in and dominance of political, ideological and cultural domains of a society.)”\(^{189}\) CDA examines how discourse produces and reproduces relations of power and domination in society, the central concern of this thesis. I use CDA in what I call my ‘comparative analysis’ to identify ‘public policy frames’ within

\(^{186}\) Ibid, p. 147.
\(^{187}\) Foucault, The Archaeology of Knowledge, p. 48.
\(^{188}\) Foucault, History of Sexuality, p. 30.
\(^{189}\) Tischer et al, p. 150.
the debates surrounding welfare reform and to characterize hegemonic and oppositional policy discourses that inform these frames.

**Discursive Conflict Analysis**

While the first stage of my methodology addresses selected texts and the broad policy discourses that inform them, the second stage goes on to examine relationships between conflicting policy frames. I call this methodology ‘discursive conflict analysis.’ It is informed both by narrative mediation, a form of dispute resolution practice developed by Winslade and Monk.

Narrative mediation uses discourse analysis to examine differing perceptions of parties in conflict, deconstructing the influence of broad societal discourses in shaping these perceptions. Winslade and Monk argue that, “As discourses shift and change, so the discursive positions of legitimacy and marginalization ebb and flow.”\(^{190}\) A deeper understanding of conflict is gained by examining the discourses that inform parties’ perceptions within the conflict and how these shape the conflict itself over time. I apply this same understanding of conflict as a research strategy rather than as a mediation tool.

According to Phillips and Hardy it is “sites where there [is] obvious discursive struggle … that discursive activity [is] clearly evident.”\(^{191}\) I address the discursive contestation over this policy change as a disjuncture and site of ‘dialogical struggle.’ I use discursive conflict analysis for what I call my ‘relational analysis’ to develop a clear understanding of how this conflict shifts discursively over time.

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\(^{191}\) Phillips and Hardy, p. 67.
Methods

My methodology has two steps: a comparative analysis of policy frames and a relational analysis between these frames. For my comparative analysis, I reviewed all archived press releases and editorials related to welfare policy published by four institutions that actively engaged in debating the reforms between 2002 (when the welfare legislation was passed) and 2004 (when certain parts of it were altered in response to public pressure). The four institutions are the Ministry of Human Resources (MHR), the Fraser Institute (FI), the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA), and the BC Coalition of Women’s Associations (BCCWA). The MHR administered the changes and the FI was largely supportive of the reforms. The CCPA and BCCWA were vocal in protesting the changes.

I chose press releases because they are texts through which institutions deliberately engage with public debate. They are a form of strategic communication, crafted with specific objectives. While these press releases are not numerous, they are relevant to identifying policy frames because they exist specifically to publicize the organization’s position vis-à-vis the topic of the release.

For my relational analysis, I sought out additional texts to illuminate the relationships between these institutions: corresponding news content, editorial content, and letters to the editor that respond either directly to these press releases or else to the same two events. I examined in chronological sequence all archived material from the *Vancouver Sun* and *The Province* related to welfare policy printed just before and after the two key events: 1) February 1 – April 30, 2002, the period just before and after welfare reform, and 2) February 1 – April 30, 2004, the period just before and after April
1, 2004, the date the first clients exhausted their 24 eligible months under the new two-year limit. Next, I created textual ‘chains’ in which the texts (including press releases) referred to either the same specific event, or else directly to one another. I then obtained any additional texts referred to in the chain. This included Hansard transcripts of debates in the provincial legislature as well as articles published outside the initial time periods.

I am interested primarily in the relative impact of contesting policy discourses within the terrain of public meaning, and how that impact translates into policy. Therefore I am interested primarily in the mainstream discourse and chose to review only content from the *Vancouver Sun* and *The Province*. These two publications circulate throughout the province and address province-wide themes. While the fact that they are published by the same company limits the range of perspectives likely to be printed there, the concentration of media ownership in the province is another factor that influences the framing of policy issues, and thus the range of likely policy outcomes. The result is not exhaustive coverage of all policy frames circulating in British Columbia regarding welfare, but a sampling of the most influential ones.

Evans and Swift used newspaper coverage to examine shifting constructions of single mothers between the early 1980s and the mid-1990s.\footnote{Evans and Swift, p. 74.} “Our analysis suggests that the construction of single mothers that had emerged by the mid-1990s in the press was highly congruent with a restructuring discourse and what Luxton refers to as the ‘reassertion of the legitimacy of inequality.’”\footnote{Ibid, p. 88.} In explaining their choice of data sources, Evans and Swift assert that, “Newspapers are not necessarily the most influential form of media, but they do help to filter and frame our construction of our social world. In so
doing, they reflect hegemony—the dominant discourse that shapes and reminds us of the views that we are supposed to hold."\textsuperscript{194} Newspapers, then, are useful to identify influential policy discourses in public circulation at a given time.

**Analytical Methods**

In the next chapter, I use critical discourse analysis to identify conflicting public policy frames circulating in BC with respect to welfare policy between 2002 and 2004 as well as to characterize each as policy frame as arising from either a hegemonic or oppositional policy discourse. I use discursive conflict analysis to examine the interaction between these policy frames.

I employ Schön and Rein's concept of *public policy frames* in which "the parties to a controversy employ different strategies of selective attention,"\textsuperscript{195} creating competing frames through which policy issues are differently interpreted.

From a problematic situation that is vague, ambiguous, and indeterminate (or rich and complex, depending on one's frame of mind), each story selects and names different features and relations that become the 'things' of the story—what the story is about. ... [Policy stories construct] a view of social reality...[leading to a] 'normative leap' from data to recommendations, from fact to values, from 'is' to 'ought.'\textsuperscript{196}

Johnson provides an example of this type of methodology in her discussion of public reaction to a case seeking to legitimate child care expenses as a tax deduction. She identifies equality, childcare-focus, choice and responsibility, and the public/private divide as four frames that existed in the public response to that legal challenge.\textsuperscript{197}

\textsuperscript{194} Ibid, p. 74.
\textsuperscript{195} Schön and Rein, p. 4.
\textsuperscript{196} Ibid, p. 84.
\textsuperscript{197} Johnson, p. 147.
My use of ‘policy frames’ differs from Schön and Rein’s, however. They define a policy frame as “the frame an institutional actor uses to construct the problem of a specific policy situation.” They see these frames as arising from larger “broad, culturally shared systems of belief, which we call metacultural frames. The oppositional pairs disease and cure, natural and artificial, and wholeness and fragmentation belong to the realm of metacultural frames.” Policy controversies arise when institutional actors argue from different frames. They are amenable to resolution by individual policymakers through “design rationality [a form of reflective policy practice.”

Schön and Rein emphasize the agency of individual actors in the policy process. I am less interested in individual agency, though I do recognize the agency of specific participants and institutions in the conflict I analyse. I am more interested in how the frames themselves are a manifestation of policy discourses that produce knowledge about policy issues. While Schön and Rein focus on isolated policy controversies from the perspective of policy-makers seeking to resolve them, I focus on conflict between policy frames as part of an ongoing struggle between policy discourses. Schön and Rein treat specific policy conflicts as arising from immutable, universal metacultural frames. By contrast I rely on Foucault’s conceptualization of discourses as being highly unstable.

My research treats debate surrounding public policy as a site of discursive conflict between policy frames derived from broad policy discourses. I rely on themes from critical theory to distinguish between policy frames and determine which policy discourses inform them in my comparative analysis. I identify key discursive threads;

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198 Schön and Rein, pp. 33, 34.
familiar themes, arguments, or other rhetorical patterns within each policy frame that demonstrate either the aliveness of or resistance to neo-liberal discourse.

Given that this is an analysis of a conflict, I am necessarily interested not just in comparison but also in analysing the interaction between policy frames. To do this, I create chains of texts that refer directly to one another. I review these materials in chronological order with reference to one another in order to address the relationship between texts (intertextuality) and to analyze the power dynamics operating between texts and policy frames. Smith’s study of “repression as a textual practice” achieves this type of reading of intertextuality by analyzing a series of texts. She observes, for example, “how texts that universalize or objectify, create forms of consciousness that override the ‘naturally’ occurring diversity of perspectives and experiences.”200 In my relational analysis I identify discursive tactics; both arguments and techniques employed by each public policy frame to compete for legitimacy. Tactics are employed in the context of larger strategies used by advocates within each frame to influence public framing of the issues. The purpose of identifying these tactics and strategies is to assess their relative impact in shaping the discursive terrain that the conflict unfolds upon.

Hegemonic and Oppositional Discourses

Fraser treats conflict between social groups over policy in what she calls “quasi-Gramscian” terms: “Struggles over cultural meanings and social identities are struggles for cultural hegemony, that is, for the power to construct authoritative definitions of

social situations and legitimate interpretations of social needs.” In this Gramscian reading, such ‘authoritative definitions’ or ‘hegemonic discourses’ function through the ‘consent’ of individuals and institutions who accept them and in turn contribute to recreating the realities they describe. Fraser identifies “needs talk” as “a site of struggle where groups with unequal discursive (and nondiscursive) resources compete to establish as hegemonic their respective interpretations of legitimate social needs.”

While a shared interest in hegemony is an intersection between critical theory and poststructuralism, there are important differences in how hegemony is understood within each tradition. A comparison between the following two quotes illustrates the tension between critical theory and poststructuralism regarding the nature of power as it pertains to discourse. Williams’ influences were from critical theory, and he refers to “a social history in which many crucial meanings have been shaped by a dominant class.” By contrast, Foucault takes issue with the tendency in critical theory to distinguish between dominant and dominated:

we must not imagine a world of discourse divided between accepted discourse and excluded discourse, or between the dominant discourse and the dominated one; but as a multiplicity of discursive elements that can come into play in various strategies. … Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it.

I argue here that there is in effect a dominant policy discourse. Neo-liberal discourse has clearly shaped the welfare policies currently in effect in this province.

However, I work from Foucault’s suggestion that while a given ‘multiplicity of

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201 Fraser, p. 6.
203 Fraser, p. 166.
205 Foucault in Ramazanoglu, p. 19.
discursive elements' may be more influential at one moment, it is neither static nor permanent. I am interested specifically in discursive strategies employed both to reinforce and to destabilize this dominant discourse.

Williams refers to historical semantics in which "the emphasis is not only on historical origins and developments but also on the present – present meanings, implications and relationships – as history." He invites an understanding of history as contingent and open to intervention. Through discourse analysis, I am searching for space to intervene in the process by which neoliberal policy discourse is reproduced. "Resistance to power ... comes through new discourses producing new truths. These may be 'counter discourses' which oppose dominant truths, or 'reverse discourses.'" If discourse forms contemporary realities, it also gives birth to new ones. My research is intended to assist in creating practical strategies for resistance at a discursive level.

Summary

The conceptual apparatus that informs my analysis is as follows. I have established that discourse analysis offers insight into the production of contemporary reality and is therefore relevant in analysing conflicts in which policy frames compete for discursive influence over public policy. I have described my two step methodology, a critical discourse analysis comparing policy frames, and a discursive conflict analysis of relationships between these frames. I first identify two public policy frames, or 'sides' to the conflict over welfare reform. Each frame is derived from a broader policy discourse. I treat neo-liberalism as a hegemonic policy discourse by virtue of its enactment into

\[206\] Williams, p. 23.
\[207\] Ramazanoglu, p. 20.
legislation, policy, and practice and demonstrate its aliveness in BC’s welfare reforms by identifying discursive threads within the policy frame characterized by an emphasis on personal responsibility. I also identify an oppositional policy frame contesting neoliberal reforms that is characterized by an emphasis on social responsibility. I continue on to study the conflict between these two policy frames, with particular attention to discursive tactics each frame uses to compete for legitimacy in shaping the nature of the conflict and the terms of the debate.
Chapter 4 – ANALYSIS: “PUBLIC POLICY EVOLVES WHEN THE PUBLIC REACTS WITH OUTRAGE.”

In this chapter, I apply the methodology and analytical processes described in the previous chapter to analyse the discursive conflict surrounding BC’s welfare reforms in 2002. First, I use comparative analysis to establish two policy frames, how they are distinguished from one another, and the broader policy discourses that inform them. I continue on to undertake a relational analysis which traces the conflict between these frames as it was presented to the public; through press releases from key organizations, transcripts of legislative debates, and media coverage of key events. The focus is on tactics and strategy used by each policy frame to stake out discursive space in the conflict. In my conclusion I elaborate what is to be learned from the tactics and strategy of each ‘side’ in order to strategize effectively in framing continued debates in terms that favour an intersubjective policy agenda which enhances equality.

Comparative Analysis Between Policy Frames

The conflict over welfare reform in BC was highly polarized. While there are necessarily complexities in any discursive contestation, here there were clear ‘sides’ arguing for and against reforms. In this part of my analysis, I examined all press releases issued by the BC government, the Fraser Institute, the CCPA, and the BCCWC between 2002 and 2004 that addressed welfare policy – including press releases addressing the

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initial budget (2002) in which the welfare cuts were introduced. Within these texts, the contrast was clear and consistent between two competing policy frames: the personal responsibility frame and the social responsibility frame. Differences within these frames are in rhetorical tacks rather than contradictions, and thus fall within the parameters of two frames. In the next section, I identify key discursive threads that emerge within the personal responsibility frame and show that this frame is derived from a hegemonic discourse of neo-liberalism. I continue on to discuss the social responsibility frame as an oppositional frame with respect to neo-liberal welfare reforms.

The Personal Responsibility Frame

"Personal responsibility for maximizing potential"\(^{209}\) is a guiding principle of BC Employment and Assistance. In the personal responsibility frame, able-bodied adults must secure their own income by participating in the market economy. As then Minister of Human Resources Murray Coell explained with respect to changes such as the time limit, "There are, of course, exceptions to these policies – for example, for people with disabilities, parents caring for young children, pregnant women and people fleeing abuse. But at the core is our fundamental belief that people who are able to work should work."\(^{210}\) Absent within the personal responsibility frame is any attention to the structural and gendered reasons behind the need for social assistance. The gendered dimensions of violence against women in relationships as well as single parenting in poverty are erased through gender-neutral language. It is assumed that those willing to

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work will find work. Persistent unemployment is therefore due to an unwillingness to work. "Two years is a reasonable amount of time for an employable person, who makes it their top priority, to find a job."\textsuperscript{211}

Considered alongside the dismantling of labour protections, welfare reform becomes visible as a move to reduce choice in the most marginal sectors of employment. The language of ‘unwillingness to work’ blames individuals for unemployment, revealing upon closer inspection the assumption behind what Stiglitz calls market fundamentalism. Unemployment is understood as workers’ unwillingness to settle for wages determined by the laws of supply and demand; regardless of working circumstances.\textsuperscript{212}

Income assistance in this policy frame is viewed as a system of temporary relief, only to be accessed under extreme duress. The Fraser Institute argues from this frame in support of reforms. As an example, they praise the use of time limits in the US: “welfare was turned back into a system of insurance and temporary relief. This was, of course, the intended purpose of a ‘social safety net’ in the first place – to catch those who temporarily fall on tough times when no other supports are available from family or community.” The suggestion that welfare has become something other, a dependency-inducing habit, is illuminated in the next sentence. “This is a far cry from the inter-generational poverty trap that the welfare system became over the course of the twentieth century. As temporary social assistance benefits were expanded into permanent income transfers, welfare dependency steadily grew even in times of economic boom.”\textsuperscript{213} In a

\textsuperscript{211} Hagen in Ministry of Human Resources. Feb. 6, 2004. Time Limit Policy to Protect People in Need. On News: Ministry of Human Resources.
\textsuperscript{212} Stiglitz, p. 35.
similar vein, an editorial by Coell explains, “We placed time limits on income assistance for employable people to discourage them from returning to welfare as a way of life.”

The personal responsibility frame stems from neo-liberal discourse, as I explore in this section. This frame is evident throughout public texts released by the government while reforms were in progress. It is also evident in texts by the Fraser Institute, a neo-liberal think-tank. I identify four key discursive ‘threads’ in texts speaking from this frame: fiscal restraint, caseload reduction, disentitlement, and privatization of service delivery.

The discursive thread of fiscal restraint is less explicit than other threads in texts addressing welfare reforms specifically. Most MHR and FI texts portray welfare reforms as being for the benefit of clients by supporting their independence. It was government-wide budget reductions, however, that instigated the reforms, and the fiscal restraint thread does emerge clearly in press releases related to the 2002 budget detailing the MHR cuts. According to Premier Campbell, “Government spending has increased far beyond our rate of economic growth over the past decade and is simply not sustainable.” The Fraser Institute also actively advocates fiscal restraint. Even after all of the Campbell cuts, according to an FI reaction to the 2004 budget, “The way forward is to enact the necessary policies that will enhance economic growth: meaningful spending reductions coupled with significant tax relief.” The personal responsibility frame dovetails with the overarching neo-liberal discourse emphasizing fiscal restraint.

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214 Coell, “Income Assistance Changes Support People in Need.”
It is in the discursive thread of ‘caseload reduction’ that the larger objective of fiscal restraint is enmeshed with welfare reform. The centrality of numerical performance measures is another characteristic of neo-liberal reforms, and welfare reform performance is measured primarily in terms of caseload reduction. In BC, for example, a key measure is the “percentage of British Columbia’s population receiving income assistance.” The Fraser Institute also evaluates success in terms of caseload reduction. “Welfare time limits, in conjunction with other reforms, do work and their success is already evident in British Columbia. Remarkably, there has been a 28 percent decline in welfare cases since the spring of 2001.”

Nearly all publicly available material from MHR between 2002-2004 explicitly or implicitly references the need for caseload reduction. Aside from the recurring argument that cuts are supportive to clients, only one text I reviewed builds a case for caseload reduction rather than simply positioning it as the self-evident objective. This fascinating editorial in response to “considerable public interest in welfare matters” also stands out as the only MHR text to link welfare in any way with economic conditions, pointing out that “There are two major influences on income assistance caseloads: (1) general economic conditions and (2) government policy.” Minister of Human Resources Murray Coell continues on, however, to argue that:

In the early to mid 1990s: the NDP government increased welfare benefits and loosened eligibility criteria while unemployment was actually declining. As a result, the caseload reached an all-time high in 1995, when one in 10 British Columbians was on welfare, at a cost to the taxpayer of almost $2 billion. Government policies had led to a culture of entitlement: there was widespread expectation that welfare could be a lifestyle for employable people.

218 LeRoy et al, “Staying the Course on Welfare Time-Limits.”
That's why our government redesigned the income-assistance system last year.\textsuperscript{219}

This editorial, the lone attempt in MHR texts I reviewed to justify the objective of caseload reduction that dominates the Ministry's work, can only be viewed as misleading. Not only does it leave out the changes to UI that increased caseloads in the mid-90s, it also omits the dramatic caseload reductions in the intervening years, falsely implying that reforms were in response to a ballooning caseload.

The disentitlement thread is evident in Minister Coell's frequent descriptions of MHR's changes as a move away from entitlement. For example, in introducing Bill 26 for second reading, he claims that it "underpins a move away from a culture of entitlement, which I believe has trapped too many British Columbians into an overreliance on government supports."\textsuperscript{220} Similarly, the FI praises the reforms; "Ending welfare as an entitlement is one of the most profound aspects of BC's reforms."\textsuperscript{221} The rhetorical disentitlement is sometimes quite subtle. A number of MHR press releases draw a contrast between deserving and undeserving, where welfare is assumed to be essentially only for people with disabilities. Anyone else has a dubious claim warranted only if they are 'temporarily excused from seeking employment.' In the press release "Income Assistance Changes Protect Disabled and Promote Jobs,"\textsuperscript{222} for example, we are informed that the new acts "focus resources on those most vulnerable."\textsuperscript{223} While the language suggests a targeted program that ensures that people "most in need" will be "protected," it actually describes a scaling back from provision of income assistance to

\textsuperscript{219} Coell, "Income Assistance Changes Support People in Need."
\textsuperscript{221} Clemens in Fraser Institute. Oct. 21, 2002. BC Welfare Reform Receives a 'B'. On FI Website.
\textsuperscript{223} Ibid.
those ‘in need’ to only those ‘most’ in need. Close attention to MHR texts shows that
that the language “most in need” and “most vulnerable” explicitly excludes people
classified as “employable.”

The Fraser Institute and MHR echo one another closely, but there are important
differences visible especially in the privatization thread. The FI’s more radically neo-
liberal vision sees welfare pushed out from government to private service deliverers and
not-for-profits. “The use of private sector providers and their particular competencies in
delivering welfare and welfare-related services represents an enormous step forward in
social policy in Canada and should be expanded.”

The only FI theme left out entirely by BC’s reforms is the role of non-profits and
volunteers in welfare provision. “Non-profit organizations can augment, and in some
cases supplant, the public sector’s provision of welfare and related services.” Even
though the MHR makes no mention of an increased role for non-profits, this is a crucial
thrust of the move toward disentitlement. The language of ‘diversion’ used by the FI
implies that people cut off welfare have somewhere else to be diverted to for basic needs,
in spite of all the strategies to ensure that welfare is the payer of last resort. Disentitling
people entirely from welfare is a form of downloading to the not-for-profit sector. The
implication is a shift from entitlement to charity.

All four of these discursive threads weave cohesively together and are consistent
with broader neo-liberal reforms across the government. According to Coell with respect
to the changes to income assistance, “The results so far are very encouraging: smaller
caseloads, less cost to the taxpayer, client success in the job market and a renewed focus

224 Clemens in Fraser Institute, “BC Welfare Reform Receives a ‘B.’”
225 Fraser Institute, “BC Welfare Reform Receives a ‘B.’”
on help for those who need it most.” Welfare reform as advocated by the Fraser Institute and implemented by the MHR in 2002 in BC is clearly an enterprise derived from neo-liberal discourse.

The Social Responsibility Frame

Instead of personal responsibility for maximizing economic potential, the social responsibility frame sees government as having responsibilities to its citizens. This sense of responsibility is expressed in the BC Coalition of Women’s Centres’ criticism of “the complete change in the basic philosophy of a social safety net” evident in Bill 26: “Not one member of government has lived up to their responsibility to ensure security or safety of British Columbians.” Instead of taxpayers paying for services, the social responsibility frame speaks of citizens in relationship with one another with a shared stake in a larger society. The following CCPA text describes this frame:

Canada has built a somewhat patchy, but important social safety net, based on an understanding that collectively we should provide everyone with protections against "universal risks to income", that is, against those natural and market events that can make any one of us unable to provide for ourselves and our families --sickness, disability, old age, child-bearing, unemployment and underemployment. We have agreed that Canada should distribute its resources in a way that provides a social minimum when these events threaten our security, either temporarily or permanently.

According to Rose, “the hold of ‘the social’ over our political imagination is weakening.” Representatives from the social responsibility speak consistently in reference to the hegemonic frame of personal responsibility. For example, the BCCWC

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226 Coell, “Income Assistance Changes Support People in Need.”
229 Rose, p. 136.
identifies assumptions behind the policies, such as “that a large number of welfare recipients could find work if they wished, but choose not too,” calling them “not fair and not factual.” Similarly, the CCPA argues that “the message of the time limit legislation is that if you have not gotten a job in 24 months, you are, by definition, "unwilling" to work, lazy, a malingerer, and should be cut off or have your welfare reduced as a penalty,” but “this is a false and mean stereotype.”

The social responsibility frame arises from a discourse of intentional resistance to neo-liberalism, often grounding itself in an understanding of historical processes that generate poverty as well as the concrete experiences of living in poverty. This frame appeals to a value-based argument: “Time limits on welfare ... are not consistent with Canadian social policy traditions.” Unlike the neo-liberal focus on individuals, it is concerned with interdependence: in terms of our social obligations to one another as well as our shared destiny with respect to the consequences of social ills. Within this frame there is an emphasis in varying degrees on four sometimes interwoven discursive threads: needs, rights, equality, and welfare as an automatic stabilizer.

The needs-based discursive thread within the social responsibility policy frame emphasizes government’s responsibility to meet the needs of citizens, especially those who are most vulnerable. One CCPA text points out that “fully one-third of all the people on welfare” at the time were children, asking, “What public purpose can possibly be served by depriving these children of what they need to grow up safe and healthy?”

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231 Day, “Take the welfare time limit off the books.”
232 Ibid.
The concept of basic human needs serves as a minimum standard for government support, and is sometimes explicitly constructed as a human right, as in this BCCWC quote: “Additionally, without the ability to access adequate food, shelter and clothing—the most basic human needs and Human Rights—women will become more likely to enter abusive relationships or stay in existing ones.”

Violation of human rights through welfare reforms has been a major rhetorical thrust of this oppositional frame. Human rights are the legal manifestation of a discourse of social responsibility to the citizenry. According to the CCPA, “BC’s move represents a fundamental shift in Canadian social policy—a denial of welfare when in need as a basic human right.” The time limits, especially, “violate basic human rights values that Canadians share, and that are expressed in both the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and in international human rights treaties that Canada has ratified.” The BCCWC shares the focus on human rights, arguing that, “this province has an obligation to protect charter rights and comply with covenant agreements signed by Canada. The right to basic human needs such as food and shelter will be violated through this shift.”

It is primarily the BCCWC that articulates the gender equality-based discursive thread. The argument with respect to income assistance is that,

Women are more likely to need welfare at some time in their lives because many raise children alone, and most still have lower paid and more precarious employment than men. Over 90% of women are sexually harassed at the workplace, with such high statistics it is necessary to have welfare to protect women. Many women are only one marriage breakdown, or one non-standard

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236 Day, “Take the welfare time limit off the books.”
237 BCCWC, “B.C. Women’s Centre Coalition Responds to Attack on Single Mothers.”
job away from needing welfare. Many women leaving violent men must have access to welfare in order to be able to escape.²³⁸

Welfare is fundamental to women’s freedom of choice. As a result, “Without access to adequate welfare, the clock will be rolled back for women’s equality in BC.”²³⁹ The CCPA relies more on a class-based argument about equality of distribution, as in the following quote: “Premier Gordon Campbell established himself as a friend of the rich with the lavish cuts in provincial income taxes announced in June, but all he has to offer the poor is more misery.”²⁴⁰

Used by the CCPA, the focus on welfare as an automatic stabilizer in economic downturns is derived from Keynesian discourse. It differs from the personal responsibility frame on two counts. First, it dispenses with the neo-liberal assumption that unemployment is by choice and connects welfare trends with larger economic trends. “It is normal for welfare rolls to decline during economic good times. … But it is quite another thing to plan for a reduction in welfare rolls when unemployment is stagnant.”²⁴¹ Second, it views government spending as money put into the economy as opposed to money removed from the public purse. Cuts are disturbing during an economic downturn, because “local economies are going to have less cash circulating at a time when they desperately need a fiscal boost.”²⁴²

In summary, I have identified two policy frames with some variation in rhetorical focus within each frame according to the emphasis of the organizations articulating

²³⁸ BCCWC, “BC Government Steals Orphans’ Pensions.”
²³⁹ Ibid.
²⁴⁰ Kerstetter, “Welfare cuts mean more misery for the poor.”
arguments from within these frames. The hegemonic frame with respect to welfare policy is one of personal responsibility, a concept which harmonizes the neo-liberal discourse of hyper-individualization and withdrawal of entitlement to state support with the fiscal restraint imperative by means of the language of caseload reduction. An oppositional frame of social responsibility focuses on a value-based argument of entitlement to support. State obligation to meet citizens’ basic needs is framed as human right essential to equality, and transfer payments are seen as an automatic stabilizer.

**Relational Analysis**

Having established the ‘parties’ to the conflict as policy frames, I now move into an investigation of relationships between these frames. In doing so, I am leaving behind Schön and Rein’s positivist understanding of policy frames and moving toward a poststructural understanding in which the frames themselves are positioned as actors. I observe how the policy discourse of neo-liberalism—expressed here in the policy frame of personal responsibility—functions in these texts through the use of discursive tactics. I examine tactics used by the social responsibility frame to resist the productive power of neo-liberalism. I also treat the larger discussion of strategy, with a particular emphasis on manoeuvres by each frame to influence the public’s discursive framing of the policy issues at hand. My purpose is to illuminate mechanics by which neo-liberal discourse has successfully influenced public policy as well as potential strategies for discursive resistance.

As noted earlier, for this part of my analysis I assembled textual chains of press releases, newspaper articles, and Hansard transcripts that referred to one another or the
same event. As an example, one such chain contains six texts addressing the 2002 budget. In anticipation, the CCPA coordinated its letter, "Forty BC economists call on the BC Government to reconsider spending cuts." On Feb. 19, 2002, the BC Liberals issued a press release describing their "Three-year plan to balance budget, restore prosperity." In reaction, the Fraser Institute argued that the budget was "not strong enough medicine," while the CCPA called it, "more poison pill than tough medicine." The Sun ran two articles about the welfare cuts forecast in the budget. The first ran as front page news and quoted advocates arguing that it is a human right to have basic needs provided for by the state. The second article appeared a week later in the business section and dismissed the earlier article as "wrong." It reasserted the personal responsibility frame, focusing on caseload reduction, and quoted the Fraser Institute: "A lifetime limit of assistance of five years or less would create an effective incentive to encourage recipients to find self-sustaining employment."

Other textual chains addressed the release of the 2002 MHR Service Plan, the Jobs Partnership program, the new policies taking effect, Bills 26 and 27, and an eligibility review of people with disabilities. One interesting chain was a series of MHR press releases announcing training initiatives. Each coincides with a period of public scrutiny, such as a series of province-wide releases that appeared Nov. 6, 2003 while opposition to

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the time limits was very concerted.²⁴⁹ A few texts did not fit into chains, such as an article about a fraud case.

The final chain, with by far the most texts, addresses the two-year time limit. The texts referred to earlier articles and articles in other publications, so I obtained those texts as well. I also reviewed all Hansard transcripts from 2004 that address the two-year time limit. Public interest and opposition to welfare reforms crystallized around the two-year time limit, and it is this chain that I will review in detail.

The Two-year Time Limit Textual Chain

It is a measure of success on the part of the social responsibility frame that the public conflict over welfare reform was fought mainly over the two-year time limit. It was the oppositional frame that established the discursive territory upon which the engagement took place. The question under debate became whether or not the policy was "mean-spirited" and the criteria for gauging this became the number of people affected. This in turn led to discussions about social consequences if this number was too large.

Often throughout the conflict the personal responsibility frame was on the defensive. Attempts by the government to sidestep the debate by avoiding key questions were portrayed by the media as secretive, and only reinforced the perception that this policy was somehow tainted. Scapegoating welfare recipients, used with great success in other jurisdictions, only backfired as it lent support to the perception that the government’s intentions were indeed malevolent. Even driving a wedge between ‘deserving’ and ‘undeserving’ recipients met with only limited success, in part because of

the high unemployment rate at the time the cuts took place. The government ultimately conceded on the key issue of the ‘two year time limit,’ saving face with a last-minute exemption that effectively gutted the policy without actually admitting that it was being rescinded.

The success of the social responsibility frame in discursively framing the debate was evident in the continued media attention to the government’s secrecy regarding the number of people affected by time limits, the widespread public concern about a social crisis on city streets as a result, and the extent to which organizations arguing from the personal responsibility frame were forced to argue within the language of the social responsibility frame.

The period of most intense media coverage of the controversy surrounding the time limit was Oct. 2003 to Feb. 2004. Early on, the conflict centres largely around speculation about the number of people to be affected and the social consequences. An Apr. 7, 2003 legislative debate over MHR budget estimates prefigures the debates to come. NDP opposition leader MacPhail sets up what will become the focal question for resistance to the welfare reforms, “Can the minister tell me how many people have been on social assistance for that full year?” Clearly not yet prepared for the question, Minister Coell responds that he will, “hopefully, get that within the session today.” MacPhail lays important groundwork, highlighting the number of children on the caseload and stressing the impact of cuts on people affected by the softwood lumber dispute. First, she makes concrete the identity of those affected by reforms. Second, she connects welfare to employment trends. Coell is pushed into a rare acknowledgement of these connections: “You're right: there are downturns in the economy that affect different
people.” Usually within the personal responsibility frame caseloads are divorced from employment trends, constructing unemployment an issue of personal choice. When MacPhail returns to the debate over numbers that will later capture the public’s imagination, Coell has caught on to her direction and begins his series of evasive stock replies with, “we have 7,000 available jobs only available for income assistance recipients,” intended to drive home the argument that anyone not working is choosing not to work.  

Several months pass before the debate is raised again in the house on Oct. 3. Versions of CCPA editorial “The ticking time bomb of BC’s welfare time limits” run in the Vancouver Sun on Oct. 6 and in The Province the next day. This editorial makes specific the nature of the social crisis that could result from time limits, discussing consequences of similar policies applied in the US. It also reconnects welfare to unemployment trends, labelling the combination of “punitive changes and an economic downturn” as “a toxic policy mix.”

On Oct. 8, 2003, Kwan, the second of only two opposition MLAs in the Legislature, continues to pressure for the number and explains that the opposition obtained a briefing note through a Freedom of Information (FOI) request, but that the numbers were blacked out. Coell responds, evasively, “Only the socialists believe that people fail.” Kwan estimates the number 27,000 based on the budget and paints a picture of the social impact of cuts. “More British Columbians are now sleeping on the streets, food banks are overloaded, and a study released yesterday said hunger is on the rise in B.C.” Coell

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moves to reposition the debate as one measured by the government’s success at caseload reduction. “There are 80,000 fewer people on income assistance.”

On Oct. 14, Minister Coell responds to CCPA Director Klein through a letter to the editor in the Sun entitled: “Welfare should be for those truly in need” suggesting that some clients are not. He positions the personal responsibility frame as common sense: “Our changes are based on a belief that a job is better than welfare and that people who are able to work should work. We are not alone in this thinking.” Then Coell responds to the concretization of people affected by reforms by outlining exemptions, a tactic employed often as public interest grows. The deserving recipient is made concrete and exempted from harsh measures while the undeserving recipient, the scapegoat, is generalized and constructed as a legitimate target of penalties.

When the projected number is leaked by an MHR employee to the press, the focus of the conflict turns to government secrecy about this number and further concern about the impact of time limits. On October 20, the NDP announces that, “According to confidential internal figures compiled for the minister on October 9 — less than two weeks ago — 28,000 people will be kicked off of income assistance in the first fiscal year.” Coell responds with the now familiar refrains about available jobs, adding that, “Since this government was elected, over 100,000 new jobs have been created.” The NDP continues with the exposé tactic: “It's simply not credible that this minister didn't

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have those numbers when he was standing up saying he didn't know, in this Legislature.

…[W]hy did he hide them from the public?"²⁵⁴

The next day, the story about the concealed numbers begins to catch on in the press. An article runs in the Victoria Times Colonist and the Vancouver Sun called: “Welfare rule could affect 28,000: NDP.” It refers to the leaked memo and the blacked out FOI and accuses Coell of “sidestep[ping] questions about how many people he expects to be thrown off welfare after April 1.” Coell responds that “any numbers given now would be sheer speculation.”²⁵⁵

On Oct. 22, the NDP raise the question again. Minister Hogg responds instead of Coell with an escalation in rhetoric, setting the list of exemptions against more explicit scapegoating: “The time limits are for employable people, people who refuse to work or refuse to be involved in training.” Hogg announces that the numbers will be released in January and accuses the opposition of “fearmongering.”²⁵⁶

The next day, a letter to the editor by Coell appears in the Times Colonist. His tone has changed in response to mounting pressure. He opens: “People who are opposed to this government's time limits policy are really saying that they are in favour of ‘welfare forever’ for individuals who can work.” He explicitly sets the interests of taxpayers against people on welfare and invokes the funds the system; and most of all, it is not undeserving recipient. “That is not fair. It is not fair to the thousands of income assistance clients who need assistance the most; it is not fair to the taxpayer who fair to the clients who can work and in doing so provide themselves and their families with a

better life.” He lists the growing number of exemptions and closes by reasserting the personal responsibility frame. “The changes are based on a belief that a job is better than welfare and that people who are able to work should work.”

Opposition pressure in the Legislature continues the next day. Hogg responds with a change in tactical directions, softening his earlier approach:

The member for Vancouver-Burrard and this government are all very concerned about those people on income assistance. … We just happen to have a different perspective in terms of how we can best address that issue. This government believes that employment is the best opportunity, the very best social program, that can exist for people in this province.

He continues again to distinguish between deserving and undeserving. “I want to remind this House that anyone who cannot work — anyone with physical, emotional or intellectual reasons — will be fully protected by this government. … Time limits are about employable people who won't work or who won't work training.”

Oct. 24, an editorial in the *Vancouver Sun* responds to Coell’s letter. “I opened the newspaper Thursday to find Human Resources Minister Murray Coell telling me what a dolt I am about welfare reform.” Willcocks describes the events in the legislature. “If the Liberals have a sensible plan, they should be willing to provide their best estimates on how it will work.” Media coverage at this point in the conflict is consistently framed with reference to the exposé tactic. “Their secrecy -- and the choice of bluster and insult over facts -- raise doubts about any claim to a practical, balanced plan.”

Questions continue in the Legislature on Oct. 27. MacPhail redirects questions about ‘the number’ to the Premier, who responds by pointing to a decrease in property

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crime, arguing that it "coincides directly with the decline in income assistance caseloads." This suggests a recognition that the social crisis tactic is resonating with the public. He continues; "the member opposite may want to spread fear, as she has in other situations." He lists the exemptions to the time limit, concluding euphemistically, "we are confident that British Columbians will have a much brighter future."\textsuperscript{260}

Discussion continues over the next week in the Legislature and in the newspapers. On Nov. 3, \textit{The Province} runs another editorial by Klein which refers to the mounting public pressure. "If radio call-in shows and letters to the editor are an indication, B.C.'s unprecedented new rule isn't sitting well with the public, either," suggesting that Minister Coell may be "nervous, too; he's introduced a variety of new exemptions to the two-year rule, no doubt hoping to delay the unseemly task of throwing thousands of people out onto the street."\textsuperscript{261} This editorial also concretizes those affected and contextualizes their experience within employment trends.

A person who stays on welfare for more than a year does so either because a tough job market makes steady employment hard to find, or they face some barrier to employment that makes finding and keeping a job extremely difficult. These barriers are often invisible -- social, mental and addiction problems unrecognized by the Ministry, a lack of affordable childcare, etc.\textsuperscript{262}

Klein refers to "the recent increase in squats and panhandling" and introduces the false economy tactic: "society will pay in increased health costs and increased crime."\textsuperscript{263}

Coell responds in \textit{The Province}, on Nov. 5. with a brief letter to the editor: "Seth

Klein continues to spread misinformation that thousands of people will be cut-off


\textsuperscript{261} Klein, Seth. Nov. 3, 2003. Welfare not a question of choice for most long-term recipients. In \textit{The Province}. Vancouver, BC.


\textsuperscript{263} Ibid.
income assistance in April, 2004 as a result of time limits.” He accuses Klein of dishonesty based on an interview in which Klein says, “I don’t believe we’re looking at thousands of people who will get cut off come April 1.” Coell writes, “That is what this government has been saying all along.”

On Nov. 6, the NDP exposes an MHR directive to staff, cultivating the sense of intrigue developed in discussions about the leaked FOI. MacPhail accuses the government of “censorship and secrecy,” citing the email. “Please do not provide any information to the public regarding potential numbers of clients being cut off or the effect of time limits on caseloads...The reason for this, likely obvious, is this is a very hot news story.” Kwan continues doggedly, “Will the minister just answer my question? ... I’ll say it slowly for the minister.” Coell responds with a list of training programs. Increasing interjections point to a heated atmosphere in the legislature. Coell accuses, “The members of the opposition have always wanted to see people fail.”

On Nov. 7, Klein responds to Coell’s accusations about ‘irresponsible use of numbers.’ He explains that he did say “the numbers will start small,” but that they will grow over time. “And it is going to get ugly.” He also counters, “my estimates and concerns are not misinformation. They are based on leaked numbers from Coell’s own ministry.”

On Nov. 11 a letter appears in The Province, challenging: “So, your neighbourhood has become full of street people, panhandlers, binners and drug dealers.” She encourages concerned citizens “to demand that the B.C. Liberals change their cutoff

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policy,” predicting “a sharp increase in petty theft, aggressive panhandling and break-ins because there will be thousands more people in distress and forced onto the street in April, 2004.” By now, concern about social crisis shapes much of the public discourse. The *Vancouver Sun* next publishes an FI opinion piece urging the government to maintain time limits. The personal responsibility frame has been pushed into debating the social crisis argument. “We’ve heard these stories of doom before,” in the US, but, “Such disasters never happened.” Caseloads declined and “between 63 and 87 per cent of those leaving welfare found employment.” The piece argues that “confronted with time limits, welfare recipients change their behaviour to minimize casual relief so that future eligibility can be preserved for times of emergency.” It also makes explicit the link between the undeserving recipient and the government’s argument that jobs are waiting for clients. “With more than 10,000 jobs waiting for welfare recipients through the ministry of human resources, there seems to be more than enough employment opportunities for those who wish to pursue them.”

Nov. 22 in the *Sun*, Hume outlines the social crisis argument in detail and challenges FI claims about US reforms. He cites US studies detailing dramatic increases in homelessness and hunger. He also refers to business-owners “lament[ing] the "cancer" of panhandlers and street people whom some see as a growing drag on the downtown retail environment” in Victoria. “Income inequity and homelessness blight more than the lives of those who don't have enough to eat or a dry place to sleep.” He also uses the

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false economy argument, accusing the province of “transferring the social costs to municipalities while pretending it’s balancing the books.”

Press coverage wanes until a cabinet shuffle on Jan. 28 in which Hagen replaces Coell as Minister of Human Resources, apparently “amid rumours that the former social worker did not want to have to preside over the cut-off.” Hagen immediately faces questions about the number of people to be affected by time limits. He promises to release the number by Feb. 6, ten months after Coell offered to release the preliminary numbers by the end of the day during the MHR budget forecasts.

On Feb. 5, The Province runs an editorial by the Fraser Institute and an article by Smyth entitled: “B.C.’s big secret: how many will be kicked off welfare?” The FI editorial argues that welfare has become an “inter-generational poverty trap.” It closes with the rhetorical tactic of speaking for the interests of people living in poverty, coopting language employed within the social responsibility frame.

When social activists and politicians such as James [the new leader of the NDP party] advocate for the removal of welfare time limits they claim to be looking out for best interests of BC’s most vulnerable citizens. Ironically, eliminating welfare benefit time limits will only perpetuate the dependency and hopelessness that really makes them vulnerable. We all want a compassionate social safety net; one that promotes independence rather than dependence. To that end, British Columbians would be well advised to pressure the BC Liberals to stay the course on welfare time limits.

Smyth’s article criticises the Liberals for “stonewalling on welfare caseload numbers.” He refers to the blanked out FOI. “Why? Probably because the Liberals are afraid that a potentially large number of welfare evictions could trigger an increase in

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crime and homelessness.” Smyth calls “classic political bafflegab” Hagen’s cited statement demonstrating a new response to public concern: “It’s important to understand that we’re not talking about numbers—we’re actually talking about people.”

The next day MHR releases the number at last: “339 employable clients...may become ineligible over the coming year, or receive a rate reduction, as a result of non-compliance with their employment plan.” The number is “far lower than the tens of thousands that the opposition claimed.” This is due to a last minute 25th exemption for people complying with their employment plans, although it does not actually say so in the release. The discourse has clearly shifted. Now, MHR is “ensuring that those who are unable to work, or are doing everything in their power to find work, will be protected,” as is restated many times throughout the release. Success in concretizing the job-seeking person in the public imagination has led to a shift in discourse undermining the assumption that unemployment is by choice.

The next day, the Sun runs two reactions to the 11th hour exemption. Kines writes that the “government added a sweeping, last-minute exemption to its welfare cuts Friday before announcing” the number. MHR representative Richard Chambers “acknowledged that” the exemption could apply to thousands of people. Hagen “blamed the NDP for creating the anxiety around the welfare limits by exaggerating the number of people affected. ‘I wish the NDP hadn’t done that quite frankly,’ he said. ‘I think it was totally irresponsible and inaccurate.’” Numbers released earlier would not have been accurate, “and we want to make sure that we deal with these cases as people, because we are

dealing with people’s lives.” 274 It is clear in several of the government’s public statements that the public discourse expressing concern for people affected by the time limits has prompted a shift in the tenor of the debate.

Palmer’s article, “Welfare scare numbers fell wide of the mark,” calls the number of people affected by time limits “anything but unpalatable.” However, he points out that “there’s no mystery” about why, explaining the new exemption. He quotes Hagen stating that time limits will only apply to “those who are too lazy or unwilling to work,” 275 clearly an attempt to ensure that public concern is restricted to ‘deserving’ claimants.

On Feb. 16, the Sun prints an FI editorial calling the 25th exemption “a disastrous U-turn on welfare reform.” The text repeatedly positions itself as representing the best interests of people affected by the time limits. “Unfortunately, this move will harm society’s most vulnerable citizens.” There is a move to assert the time limit as common sense: “It doesn’t take a rocket scientist — or, for that matter, an economist — to predict that people will begin to use the system more casually once again, perpetuating a tragic cycle of low income and welfare dependency that transcends generations.” The consequence of the change, according to the FI, is that “Welfare rates will increase along with the associated costs, most appropriately measured not in dollars but in lives lost to poverty and despair.” 276

The FI editorial provokes two letters in response. First, on Feb. 16, a letter to the editor retorts, “It seems pretty obvious to me that if you cut people off welfare, there will

275 Palmer, “Welfare scare numbers fell far wide of the mark.”
be fewer people on welfare. The real question is, how are the people doing when they are "removed" from the welfare rolls?" The author employs the social crisis argument.

"How high will you need to build the walls around your homes, how much protection will you and your children need as poverty turns into the deepest of desperation to attain the most fundamental human needs like food and shelter?" 

A first person response accuses the FI of "living in dreamland" by assuming "welfare recipients change their behaviour to minimize casual relief so that future eligibility can be preserved." He concretizes based on his own experience:

If they think people caught in the quicksand of poverty are able to think that clearly and that far ahead, they are truly misinformed. Most are caught up in short-term crisis thinking as they scramble to eat, stay clothed, get around ... and carpet-bomb the world with resumes, most of which probably go in the garbage right after they leave. In our world, every day is an emergency. 

On Feb. 26 a CCPA editorial advocates eliminating time limits altogether. Day critiques assumptions about unwillingness to work and contextualizes welfare within the labour economy. "People who are poor are not lazier than people who are rich. They are competing for marginal jobs in a provincial economy where about 200,000 people are unemployed." She points out that, "The 25th exemption essentially acknowledges ... that looking for a job does not necessarily mean finding one."

The final text in this chain discusses MHR budget estimates on Apr. 1, 2004. Hagen praises the "fundamental shift in the culture surrounding income assistance from one of entitlement to one with a renewed sense of personal responsibility," describing the previous system as "a waste of human potential and taxpayers' money." He mentions the

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279 Day, “Take the welfare time limit off the books.”
exemptions then shifts to a co-opted empathy tactic with a new twist. "Now, I'm very aware that this ministry's successes are about people, not numbers. I'd like to share one of those stories with you today." His story about a woman struggling with addiction who had found a job through Job Wave is the only personal narrative provided by the personal responsibility frame in any of these texts, suggesting recognition of the opposition's success in concretizing the 'other.'

It is clear by the amount of coverage that this conflict captured the public's imagination. The government was pressured to concede when the public accepted the social responsibility frame at least with reference to the time limits. One interesting exchange demonstrates clearly the relationship between the public discursive conflict and the policy process. Once cornered into admitting that the last exemption was even a policy change at all, Hagen says, "That's actually how good public policy evolves. You look at how the public policy is working, and then you make adjustments as you go along." To which MacPhail retorts, "Yeah. Public policy evolves when the public reacts with outrage to the original public policy."  

Summary of Discursive Tactics

As Boyd observes, "Choosing a research method is a political decision." The political potential of discourse analysis is that it "subverts and challenges taken-for-granted understandings." The objective of my thesis, as mentioned earlier, is to develop my repertoire of tools to intervene in conflict with neo-liberal discourse. To this

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282 Phillips and Hardy, p. 84.
end, I will conclude this chapter with a summary of discursive tactics employed by the personal responsibility frame in this conflict as well as those used by the social responsibility frame to resist neo-liberal welfare reforms.

There are several attempts by the personal responsibility frame to position itself as 'common sense.' Phrases such as “it doesn’t take a rocket scientist” and “most British Columbians would agree” are moves to delimit the boundaries of what is ‘reasonable’ to exclude the social responsibility frame.

The euphemism tactic portrays the welfare cuts as empowering to clients. The language of support points to how the policies “help people achieve independence.” Positive language suggests that the government is simply supporting clients to realize their own dreams and “build brighter futures for themselves and their families.” In some cases, welfare cuts are even framed in the language of job creation, for example, the new acts “provide new tools to enhance employment opportunities.”

The scapegoating tactic invokes stereotypes to garner support for punitive policies. The consistent suggestion is made, sometimes subtly, that some of the people receiving benefits should not be. They are either lazy, unwilling to work, dependant, defrauding the system, or not ‘truly’ eligible. This tactic escalated as public pressure mounted and the government began to explicitly frame the interests of the ‘taxpayer’ and the ‘client’ as being in opposition.

A central tactic employs the language of ‘choice’ to blame people for requiring assistance. This is accomplished by divorcing receipt of welfare from any reason other

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283 MHR, “Income Assistance Changes Protect Disabled and Promote Jobs.”
285 MHR, “Income Assistance Changes Protect Disabled and Promote Jobs.”
than choice or individual deficiency. Rhetoric such as "choosing welfare as a lifestyle" strips away an understanding of the labour economy as having inherent unemployment and repositions poverty as an individual failing.

Where they are not seen as simply choosing not to work, people on welfare are portrayed as lacking skills. Again, poverty is constructed as an individual deficit as opposed to a social problem. A "new program for people on income assistance who need help learning basic life skills," for example, "will provide them with skills like good nutrition, proper hygiene, communication, goal-setting and financial management so that they can take better care of themselves and participate more effectively in their community." This implies that if people on welfare cannot make ends meet it is a problem with their ability to budget, not one of incomes far below the poverty line.

A stereotype is a generalized other, kept vague to preempt empathy from the public about the impact of cuts. A distinction is consistently drawn between the concrete deserving recipient and the generalized undeserving recipient. As the social responsibility frame succeeded in painting a picture of the 'other', the government responded by exempting people whose circumstances became concretized in the public imagination from the harsher reforms. This was especially evident in the 25th exemption for persons seeking work unsuccessfully.

A further generalizing tactic is the use of caseload statistics, in which numbers diminish the humanity of those affected. As discussed by Cruikshank, statistics allow government to act at the level of population to bring 'deviance' into line with statistical norms. As far as tactics, the personal responsibility frame uses language such as 'target'

286 Coell, "Income Assistance Changes Support People in Need."
and ‘success’ to position caseload reduction as the desired ‘goal’ while removing other standards for evaluation, such as poverty reduction. When the government was pressured to justify the need for caseload reduction, it used misleading, outdated statistics, a tactic MacPhail calls “fun with numbers.”

As Fraser points out, a strength of neo-liberalism is its ability to co-opt tactics used to oppose it. We see the cooptation tactic used, for example, when the government is under pressure and begins to talk about “deal[ing] with these cases as people” and present personal narratives in support of their objectives. Similarly, the Fraser Institute makes claims that marginalized people will suffer because the time limit has been reversed and refers to the need for a “compassionate safety net.”

The delegitimization of opposition is an obvious tactic. In this textual chain, the most interesting example is the use of the language ‘fearmongering.’ This seems to be critical to a strategy in which the BC Liberals floated ‘test balloon’ cuts. If strong opposition emerged, the cut was covertly rescinded alongside claims that critics were fear-mongering. Thus the party was able to respond to public pressure without appearing to back down while also painting its critics as unreasonable.

The last tactic I will address is one of dissembling. The opposition was successful in pointing out what the government was not saying on a number of occasions. Critically, MacPhail pointed out on Apr. 1, 2004 that caseload reduction targets were not thrown off by new exemptions. She suggests that the disentitlement process became an administrative function in which MHR workers are instructed to make compliance with employment plans difficult, and people who exhaust the time limits might be found ineligible if they reapply. These questions warrant further study than is within the scope
of this thesis. Suffice to say that the MHR “exceeded” its 2004/2005 ‘target’ of 4.3% by decreasing caseloads to 3.6% of the population, suggesting that perhaps the most successful tactic of all has been to shift discursively in response to public concerns while ‘staying the course’ out of the public eye. As Neysmith observes, “One of the strengths of neoliberalism is its capacity to absorb critiques and transform them in ways that reproduce the very conditions that launched the critique in the first place.”  

It is clear that I am partial in this conflict. Simply put, I am arguing from the social responsibility frame. Thus while I refer to ‘tactics’ employed by this frame, it is with a sense of the urgency of strategic resistance, rather than to criticize these tactics. That said, the personal responsibility frame is bound by an ethical framework corresponding to its values. I identify four nested tactics employed effectively in this conflict to build support for reversing the two-year time limit.

In the exposé tactic, assumptions and tactics from the personal responsibility frame were simply held up to the mirror. The leaked numbers and blanked out FOI particularly demonstrated anti-democratic methods employed by the government, and received substantial media attention. This tactic was made possible in part by support from social workers opposed to the reforms.

The second critical tactic used by the social responsibility frame was consistent concretization of the ‘other’ affected by reforms. This was accomplished through a focus on specific details about who would be affected and how. During debate over Bill 26 in the Legislature, for example, the opposition read dozens of first person narratives detailing the impact of cuts, sometimes with their authors in attendance. This strategy

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worked against the scapegoating tactic to access the public’s empathy and shift the tone of the debate.

A key turning point in this process of concretization was the focus on workers laid-off as a result of the softwood lumber dispute. This example was also part of a contextualization strategy used to counter the argument that unemployment is by choice. The oppositional frame succeeded in drawing connections between high unemployment rates combined with systemic barriers to unemployment as reasons for being on welfare. The success of this strategy is most evident in MHR’s decision to exempt people actively seeking work from the two-year time limit.

Once the ‘other’ had shifted in the public imagination from a generalized other to a human deserving of empathy, the number of people affected by the time limit took on a human dimension and became the focal point of resistance. Instead of serving to distance the public from the humanity of those affected, this statistic now became threatening, particularly as public discourse drew connections between welfare cuts and the increasing presence of visibly homeless people in the streets. The ‘social crisis’ tactic encouraged these connections, linking cuts explicitly to social consequences of increasing poverty such as increased crime, panhandling, addiction, and declining public health. The political imaginary of the ‘urban streets’ played a tremendous role in consolidating opposition to the time limit.

Once the social crisis discourse had caught on, the ground was laid for the false economy tactic. This argument co-opts the ‘fiscal restraint’ argument from neoliberalism, connecting decreased spending on preventative social justice measures to increased costs in crisis response services such as jails, shelters, and hospitals.
At the root of oppositional strategies used by the social responsibility frame was a move to de-individualize and re-politicize poverty, undermining the assumption of choice by the personal responsibility frame. Neo-liberal tactics were vividly exposed, generating wide-spread public interest. The oppositional frame was successful in promoting itself to a broad audience, illuminating connections between deteriorating social programs and deteriorating social conditions.
Conclusion – TALKING BACK TO NEO-LIBERALISM

This thesis is first and foremost an attempt to locate space for resistance to neo-
liberal social policy. To do so, it explores how neo-liberalism influences welfare policy. I argue that the policy process is one in which policy frames compete discursively to win influence over the public’s understanding of specific policy issues. Over time, a succession of such conflicts leads to shifts in broad policy regimes, such as the discursive shift from ‘welfare state’ to ‘free markets’ that I discuss in my first chapter.

This thesis contributes to the field of Dispute Resolution by centering the role of discursive conflict in the policy process and by integrating a Foucauldian analysis of power in this process. Theoretically, my research explores the nature of power as it functions through exclusionary discourse to produce exclusionary economic policy. I raise the alarm about detrimental impacts of such policies, making a case in support of a policy discourse that recognizes the subjectivity and concrete experiences of people marginalized by economic processes.

Methodologically, I present discourse analysis of media content as a means of understanding conflicts over public policy and illuminating the shifting discursive landscape of an ongoing conflict over time. I conclude that discursive analysis of public policy frames and the interaction between them can be applied to strategic intervention in public policy conflicts.

The dialogical struggle over framing, I argue, has a great deal to do with the shaping of policy. Empirically, I trace this struggle over framing in the context of a specific conflict. I demonstrate the presence of neo-liberal discourse within the welfare
debates in BC, and identify specific discursive tactics used in these debates to assert neo-liberal hegemony. I identify an oppositional discourse operating to challenge neo-liberal welfare reforms, and demonstrate that resistance movements, by intentionally reframing policy debates, can make certain policies politically untenable for government, as was the case with the two-year time limit.

The hegemonic public policy frame in BC during the period of 2002-2004 with respect to welfare policy was one of ‘personal responsibility,’ derived from a neo-liberal discourse of hyper-individualism and fiscal restraint. By rendering invisible the social context surrounding why a person would require income assistance, this frame makes the problem of poverty visible only through the lens of the individual. The causes of poverty, in this frame, are individuals’ unwillingness to work or deficiencies in their skills. Decontextualization serves to depoliticize poverty, constructing it as a matter of personal choice, even a “lifestyle” choice.

Ferguson discusses a similar process in international development discourse. He makes the depoliticizing move obvious by bringing it into perspective in the following passage:

After all, we would not seek to explain why the people in the South Bronx are poor by noting that the South Bronx lacks natural resources and contains more people than its land base can support. The South Bronx is a slum, and that is a social fact, not a geographical one. But for ‘development,’ [a less developed country] must be looked at as a national economy, and Lesotho is thus not an impoverished labor reserve, but a ‘dependent’ national economy. This generates some peculiar sorts of explanations.

In the oddly geographical, ‘national economy’ conception of things, for instance, it is rarely asked why Lesotho is resource-poor (the answer of course is that most of the good Sotho land was taken by ‘neighboring South Africa’) or why it has the peculiar national boundaries it does (the answer being that it was created as a ‘native reserve’ and labor pool for the South African economy.) History as well as politics is swept aside, and the relationship between the two ‘national economies’ of Lesotho and South
Africa is seen as one of accidental geographic juxtaposition, not structural integration or political subordination.\textsuperscript{289}

Similarly, the personal responsibility frame erases a history of deeply inequitable access to employment and capital, the persistence of systemic discrimination in the workplace, the gendered construction of care-giving responsibilities, and the normative valuation of work as some of the many causes of poverty that create a need for income assistance. Further, this frame masks the increasing success of transnational corporations in undermining labour protections even in industrialized nations as well as the withdrawal of the state from its equality-seeking responsibilities, both conditions that affect the nature of employment and poverty.

Fraser argues that ‘needs talk’ is a critical political axis, pointing to a dialectical struggle in which oppositional discourses seek to politicize certain needs while hegemonic discourses seek to depoliticize them. According to Fraser, “family and official economy are the principal depoliticizing enclaves that needs must exceed in order to become ‘political’ in the discourse sense in male-dominated, capitalist societies.”\textsuperscript{290}

Needs that escape the confines of these enclaves enter the ‘social’ arena.

Of course, the politicization of needs in oppositional discourses does not go uncontested. One type of resistance involves defense of the established boundaries separating ‘political,’ ‘economic,’ and ‘domestic’ spheres by means of ‘reprivatization’ discourses. Institutionally, ‘reprivatization’ designates initiatives aimed at dismantling or cutting back social-welfare services, selling off nationalized assets, and/or deregulating ‘private’ enterprise; discursively, it means depoliticization.\textsuperscript{291}

Critical to the depoliticization process, Johnson identifies, is the ‘rhetoric of choice’ used to delineate boundaries between matters of public (and therefore political) and


\textsuperscript{290} Fraser, p. 169.

\textsuperscript{291} Ibid, p. 172.
private (and therefore personal) concern. It is a very short step indeed from personal responsibility to blame; “since agency connotes accountability, choice also has great power as a discourse of responsibility and blame.” According to Johnson, the ‘rhetoric of choice’ “obscures the raced, classed, and gendered presumptions that produce differential conditions governing choice and then functions in a punitive fashion, dispensing shame and blame.”

Benhabib’s distinction between the generalized and concrete other is useful in understanding how the personal responsibility frame constructs individuals as objects of policy. Her analytical distinction maps onto a rhetorical distinction between deserving and undeserving recipients of income assistance in MHR texts. Texts that seek to disentitle address a generalized other and employ blaming language such as “people who choose not to work.” The same texts often construct a direct contrast against concrete circumstances in which a person’s claim to welfare is constituted as legitimate; particularly evident in the increasing number of exemptions to the two year time limit and the use of these exemptions to defend the time limit.

Having located the problem of poverty within the individual, the personal responsibility frame at an aggregate level addresses generalized ‘others’ by means of caseload statistics. Solving the problem of poverty, which is understood to result from individuals’ poor choices, becomes a function of reducing welfare caseloads through ‘incentives to work.’ As Cruikshank explores, caseload reduction ties into Foucault’s analysis of bio-power in which the state acts upon individuals to bring diversity into line with statistical norms.

292 Johnson, p. 13.
293 Ibid, p. 125.
294 Ibid, p. 140.
Any system that is structured as competitive necessarily creates ‘winners’ and ‘losers.’ While poverty is often treated as an anomaly, it is inherent to a competitive labour market. Welfare programs fail to solve the problem of poverty because it is inherent to the structure of capitalism. They can, however, mitigate effectively against absolute poverty, and they can also reduce relative poverty by insulating people disadvantaged by market forces through equality-seeking measures including social programs, progressive taxation, and transfer payments. The neo-liberal program is precisely to reduce these mechanisms that interfere with ‘competitiveness,’ and thus it is a program that deliberately increases inequality.

There has been a coherent, cohesive, and intentional resistance to neo-liberal welfare policy reforms in BC, which I characterize as the ‘social responsibility frame.’ While there are differences within this frame (particularly threads which focus on rights, needs, or equality) the similarities are strong enough that they can be encompassed within a larger policy frame. There is a discursive emphasis on collective responsibility for maintaining a social safety net. There is also a sense of mutual investment in that net based on the impact of poverty on a collective social whole and the possibility that misfortune could beset any individual within that whole.

In BC between 2002 and 2004, advocates from within this policy frame were successful concretizing the identities of individuals affected by the policy changes in the public imagination to the extent that MHR’s ability to undertake the intended reforms was somewhat compromised. This concretization was accomplished through personal narratives, articulation of the circumstances that lead to a person’s being on welfare, and attention to the consequences of reforms. Once public discourse began to treat reforms
with respect to a concrete other, they became largely unpopular. Resistance from within the ‘social responsibility frame’ succeeded in concretizing the number of people to be cut off welfare by illuminating both consequences for individuals and for the social fabric of the province. As a result, this number itself became the focal point of resistance.

Foucault’s thought stakes out considerable space for resistance at a theoretical level. “Every power relationship implies, at least in potentia, a strategy of struggle, in which the two forces are not superimposed, do not lose their specific nature, or do not finally become confused. Each constitutes for the other a kind of permanent limit, a point of possible reversal.”295 He also writes that, “It would not be possible for power relations to exist without points of insubordination which, by definition, are means of escape.”296

Neo-liberal discourse works by framing the impacts of social, political, and economic conditions on individuals as individual pathology, thereby pointing to a limited range of solutions from individual punishment and coercion to individual support and reformation. Challenges to neo-liberalism seek to make visible and accountable the apparatus which creates these impacts in the first place. The dialectic between these positions can be read as a competition for the productive power to influence specific and broad policy outcomes.

The exceptional ability of neo-liberalism to ensconce itself internationally as the common sense of public policy belies its profound shortcomings. As Barber explains, “by pitting individual liberty against community, the institutions of the West have aimed at satisfying only our need for personal autonomy, leaving in limbo our need to be

295 Foucault in Hanssen, p. 156.
296 Foucault in Cruikshank, p. 80.
accepted, participating members in a supportive and meaningful community.”

Similarly, according to Rose, “Hence the fundamental dialectic of modern society –
maximum individualization and maximum ‘freedom’ is developed only at the price of
maximum fragmentation, maximum uncertainty, maximum estrangement of individual
from fellow individual.”

Metaphorically, the frailty of neo-liberalism is that of an ideological mono-cultural;
it is weak because it undermines diversity, and diversity creates resilience. It is weak
because it emphasizes self-interest while eroding relationships and interdependence. It is
vulnerable because it is a political program that subordinates so many different people
and groups. Neo-liberalism is susceptible to resistance precisely because it creates so
many ‘points of insubordination.’ In response, I present a strategic framework for talking
back to neo-liberalism which employs discourse analysis to analyse hegemonic policy
frames in order to intentionally intervene in reframing public policy debates in the
language of an oppositional discourse of social responsibility and interdependence.

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298 Rose, p. 66.
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Appendix 1 - DATA SOURCES IN TEXTUAL CHAINS

Release of MHR Service Plan (Chronological Order)


Privatization (Chronological Order)


2002 Budget (Chronological Order)


April 2002 – New Policies Come into Effect (Chronological Order)


Bills 26 and 27 (Chronological Order)

<www.news.gov.bc.ca/default.asp?organisation_obj_id=0b00921e80002ca9>


<www3.telus.net/bcwomen/Archives.html#media>


<www.news.gov.bc.ca/default.asp?organisation_obj_id=0b00921e80002ca9>


<www.news.gov.bc.ca/default.asp?organisation_obj_id=0b00921e80002ca9>

<www.news.gov.bc.ca/default.asp?organisation_obj_id=0b00921e80002ca9>


<www.policyalternatives.ca/index.cfm?act=main&call=F4FB3E9D>

**MHR Training Announcements (Chronological Order)**


<www.news.gov.bc.ca/default.asp?organisation_obj_id=0b00921e80002ca9>


<www.news.gov.bc.ca/default.asp?organisation_obj_id=0b00921e80002ca9>


<www.news.gov.bc.ca/default.asp?organisation_obj_id=0b00921e80002ca9>


<www.news.gov.bc.ca/default.asp?organisation_obj_id=0b00921e80002ca9>


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**Texts Not in Chains (Chronological Order)**


