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Playing with the Absurdity of Welfare: Experiences of Irish Welfare Conditionality

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ABBREVIATIONS

ANCO - *An Chomhairle Oiliúna* (Training Council)

ALMP – Active Labour Market Policies

BTEA – Back to Education Allowance

CE – Community Employment Scheme

DA – Disability Allowance

DEASP – Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection

FÁS – An Foras Áiseanna Saothair (Training and Employment Authority)

FE – Further Education

HAP – Housing Assistance Payment

IB – Illness Benefit

ICTU – Irish Congress of Trade Unions

INOU – Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed

INTREO – Public Employment Income Support Office

JS – Jobseeker Payments

JST – Jobseeker's Transitional Payment

LESN – Local Employment Service Network

MOU – Memo of Understanding

NESC – National Economic and Social Council

NESF – National Economic and Social Forum

OPFP – One Parent Family Payment

PTW – Pathways to Work

QFA – Qualified Financial Advisor

UC – Universal Credit

VTOS – Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme

WUERC – Waterford Un/employment Research Collaborative

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Find solace in the privilege to pursue,
Most people are crushed into servitude.

- Jonathan Bree, *You're So Cool.*

To my parents, Therese and Philip, whose hard work and sacrifice provided me with the privilege to pursue my line of flight.

ABSTRACT

This thesis critically explores the lived experience of negotiating and resisting work-related conditionality and sanctions in Ireland's burgeoning labour activation regime. Post-crisis Ireland has witnessed the emergence of a definitive policy trajectory emphasizing lifelong attachment to the labour force through activation measures underpinned by conditionality and sanctions. It is a shift marked both by the intensification of conditionality through increased surveillance, stringent enforcement of behavioural requirements and the privatisation of employment services, and its extension via its application to lone parents and others. This thesis utilises Foucault's (2007) 'governmentality' to explicate how individuals are governed according to a 'job-seeking' rationality which gains a concrete manifestation through techniques such as caseworker meetings, the provision of job-search evidence, and sanctions. It draws on 42 qualitative semi-structured interviews across a gender-balanced cohort of individuals on Jobseeker payments in Ireland, including active jobseekers, discouraged jobseekers, and lone parents. This is complemented with a 'bottom-up' conceptualisation of agency whereby street-level bureaucracy (Brodkin 2013); everyday resistance (Scott 1985; de Certeau 1984); lines of Flight (Deleuze 1995) and refusal of work (Tronti 1966a) are situated within Lister's (2004) typology of agency. In this way the research illustrates a multiplicity of, at times gendered, street-level tactics and strategies enmeshed in a complex pattern of compliance, subversion, evasion and resistance whereby claimants navigate the rationality and practice of welfare conditionality based on their own needs, interests and desires. Despite the production of a new array of techniques of conditionality their application remains light, appearing as bureaucratic concerns with formalities rather than genuine engagement. At times this arises as an 'unbearable lightness of conditionality' in which the absurdity of the welfare system confronts participants with indifference rather than penalty.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1:1 Introduction

In recent years Ireland has set upon the path toward the brave new world of labour activation policies underpinned by work-related conditionality and sanctions. While previously viewed as being light on the implementation of conditionality and sanctions there now appears a definitive policy trajectory utilising work-related conditionality to ensure lifelong attachment to labour market activity. This approach encapsulated under the *Pathways to Work* initiative (DEASP 2012, 2014, 2016) permits a vast array of interventions to govern the intractable problem of unemployment. Case worker meetings; ostensible contracts of mutual obligations; personal progression plans; training courses, and the provision of job-searching evidence are now utilized as mechanisms to govern jobseekers under a dominant rationality of 'active job-seeking'. It is one which shifts the emphasis from conditionality focused on categories (unemployed) and circumstances (means-tested) to issues regarding the behaviour of welfare recipients; unemployed people are interpreted as a problem. The emphasis on gaining employment is intensified via the partial privatisation of employment services through the JobPath programme, which operates on a payment-by-outcome model. Participation in paid employment is conceived and presented as the solution to personal and social ills. As such, a new armoury of policies and practices has emerged to elicit and maintain unemployed people as active jobseekers.

The primary focus of this research is the response to this new mode of governing from those that it impacts. The research uses qualitative semi-structured interviews to explore the everyday experiences of 42 recipients on Job-seeker payments in County Kildare, in the east of Ireland. It seeks out and investigates the ways of coping; the strategies of negotiation and types of resistance that emerge in response to this new regime across three groups:

jobseekers, discouraged jobseekers and lone parents. Three groups provide scope for exploring similarities in experiences but also differences and this emphasis is also underlined by a commitment to gender analysis throughout. The community level focus on Kildare allows for an exploration of types of strategies operating locally along with how and where they might differ. Moreover, it permits comparisons to research conducted in other areas as well as both nationally and internationally. The central research question explored here is:

- How do individuals experience, negotiate and/or resist work-related conditionality and sanctions in the Irish welfare system?

The research draws on Foucault's (2007) 'governmentality' to explicate how the welfare state is concerned with eliciting a rationality of 'active job-seeking'. The impact of this emergent rationality and its attendant techniques of practice are then explored through the lived experience of participants. As such, it foregrounds the agency of individuals and goes beyond interpretations of unemployment as a set of statistics to uncover its lived complexity and the strategies which it produces. In doing so it situates itself against both the easy characterisation of unemployed people as work-shy dependents and as passive victims of policy.

1:2 Aims of the Study

The aims of the study are to:

- Contribute new knowledge to the understanding of the lived experience of activation, conditionality and sanctions in Ireland.
- Produce a conceptual framework to understand the strategies produced in response to activation, conditionality and sanctions.

- Contribute new knowledge to the understanding of the agency of unemployed individuals

- Develop a gender analysis of this lived experience and resulting strategies.

- Explore the master narrative of work underpinning work-related activation, conditionality and sanctions

1:3 Rationale

In the late spring of 2014 as my master's programme hurtled toward a finish, I was pressed into thinking of what to do next; essentially, return to the real world of work or remain within the ivory tower through PhD research. The tension was heightened by rapidly approaching deadlines for doctoral scholarships; I needed an idea. Kathi Week's (2011) *The Problem with Work*, read as part of my MA, provided a spark of inspiration through its problematisation and demystification of work and its incumbent power relations. It re-awakened my own anti-work interests developed through the years working on shop-floors. At the same time, capitalist reorganisation was continuing in Ireland's slow emergence from recession; one of the few large employers in Kildare Town was downsizing, initiating redundancies and shifting toward a use of agency workers on short-term temporary contracts. Among these redundancies were my brother and numerous friends, who in their late thirties, and after twenty years in the same job, were unemployed and on the dole.[1] Yet, I observed that these redundancies illustrated a minor crack within the work ethic as these men enjoyed the escape from work; unemployment provided money and time for travel, for pursuing educational interests, and even for reforming old punk bands. It was, as Gorz (1989) would put it, the pursuit of self-defined autonomous activities free of work as economic necessity. However,

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[1] A common term for Ireland's Jobseeker social welfare payments.

within the midst was Ireland's new burgeoning activation policy illustrated in *Pathways to Work* (2012, 2014, 2016), imbued with the rationality of active job-seeking and built upon the imposition of work-related conditionality and sanctions. The brave new world of intensified labour market activation and its array of interventions were upon us. The intersection of these various strands coalesced into the basis of this project in exploring how people respond to the imposition of this activation regime; what are the strategies they develop to cope, negotiate, and/or resist? Allied to this personal rationale are more academic justifications.

- **1:3.1 A Nascent Literature on a Burgeoning Activation Regime**

As noted above, activation underpinned by an intensification of work-related conditionality and sanctions is currently in its adolescence in Ireland. Due to this adolescence there is a relatively small number of peer reviewed contributions to our understanding of this new mode of governing unemployed people (Boland and Griffin 2015a, 2015b; Murphy 2016; Collins and Murphy 2016, Whelan 2017, O'Connell 2017). As such, significant gaps remain in our data and knowledge of how conditionality and sanctions are experienced. The use of sanctions has risen annually since the introduction of *Pathways to Work* in 2012 suggesting it is becoming embedded within the system and a palatable part of the experience of being on welfare. Moreover, there is scant research comparing the impact and experiences of different groups in relation to activation, conditionality and sanctions. This is compounded by an absence of a focus on agency and the strategies developed as result of the new activation regime. This is all the more pressing due to the recent alterations in 2015 to the One Parent Family Payment and extension of work-related conditionality and sanctions to lone parents whose youngest child is 14 or older.

- **1:3.2 Voice, Agency and Humanity**

The second academic reason for undertaking this research is to give voice to those impacted by reconfigurations of welfare policy. It is guided by the principle that those directly impacted by a phenomenon are best situated to speak about it (Foucault 1977). While the research of Boland and Griffin (2015a; 2015b) uses interviews with unemployed people, the added value of my research is the deliberate use of different cohorts to allow comparisons within the project, and with existing research, to develop a deeper understanding of the experience. Moreover, my research is further driven by an exploration of agency through its focus on strategies. As such, it develops a counterpoint to much of the existing literature on unemployment which includes an implicit representation of unemployed individuals as passive victims of the loss of work. Much of this is motivated by attempts to 'de-other' unemployed people through an amplification of shared values (Cole 2008), but also due to an implicit pervasiveness of an economic rationality within the discipline of sociology (Fevre 2003). In developing a conceptual framework for understanding individual strategies I recognize not only strategies of negotiation and resistance, but also practices to live within and against attempts to govern their lives.

- **1:3.3 Exploring the Colonisation of Life by Work**

The final reason for carrying out this research is to better understand the colonisation of life by work and its relationship to the social construction of unemployment which underpins activation and work-related conditionality and sanctions. Over the preceding decade, there has been somewhat of a proliferation of academic anti-work and post-work literature on work's colonisation of life and attempts to escape it (Berardi 2009; Weeks 2011; Frayne 2015; Srnicek and Williams 2015; Fleming 2015). Yet with the exception of Frayne (2015),

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these studies lack an empirical base of original primary research. This research contributes to the empirical basis for rethinking work and in doing so is unique in its focus on unemployed individuals in rethinking the social organisation of work. This is not to say that anti-work subjectivities abound in the research to follow; they assuredly do not. However, through its focus on agency the research interrogates relationships to work, showing that while the work ethic's importance to participants is unquestionably clear, these iterations are sandwiched between qualifications, caveats and, at times, devaluations of its importance. New and old enjoyments of life outside work exist and are set against the real psychological and material deprivations of unemployment. In exploring this, the research contributes to debates on the social organisation and distribution of work and leisure time.

1:4 The Area: Kildare

Before progressing, I want to first contextualise the research location, County Kildare, for the reader. My father recalls a story from his youthful days when he worked delivering goods around the county and to the neighbouring capital city of Dublin. On a journey home down a country road toward one of the towns they happened upon a familiar elderly man on his way into town with a burdensome sack upon his back. In the spirit of local courtesy and assistance my father and his colleague offered the man a lift; reluctant to be a burden at first the man eventually relents and climbs aboard the trailer of their lorry. Not long into their journey with their newly acquired cargo my father peers into mirror only to see the elderly man sat in their trailer with his sack still perched upon his back. "Would you ever put down that sack?" my father beseeched. The old man's reply came: "now, young Finn, you were good enough to give me a lift, I can't ask you to carry the sack as well". I am tempted to begin and end a description of Kildare with this story; a monument to the sheer absence of

conventional rationality which pervades the place. One is put in mind of the quip often

attributed to Freud, although more likely emerging from an average Hollywood film[2], 'that

the Irish are impervious to psychoanalysis'; our madness makes sense to us. Yet, to end it

here brings the danger of an insular solipsism by mistakenly positing both an Irish and

Kildare exceptionalism, so perhaps more needs to be said.

Figure 1: Map of Kildare

Source: Map-of-Ireland.Blogspot.com

Returning to the story, my father's own employment biography gives something of an

economic synopsis of Kildare. From the reliance on its proximity to Dublin as a mass urban

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[2] The film in question is Martin Scorsese's *The Departed*.

market for the delivery of goods which resembles today's commuters delivering themselves toward the city for work. Then working across the numerous horse-riding stables of Kildare which still sprinkle the county's landscape and along with the Curragh Racecourse are central to its economy; and, finally, to the army and thirty years as a soldier. Soldiering and the military in general are embedded within the fabric of the county. The Curragh of Kildare has associations with the legendary Fionn mac Cumhaill and his Fianna Warriors, as well the arrival of Anglo-Normans in the 12th Century. Military encampments have existed in the Curragh since the 18th Century, with the British forces developing a permanent camp and training base in 1855; during the First World War over 20,000 soldiers were stationed there. Since independence it has become Ireland's largest army barracks and primary training base; along with the now defunct Kildare Town army barracks, it is central to the local social economy and sense of identity.

County Kildare shares its name with the town of Kildare. Its Gaelic variation, Cill Dara, translates into the 'church of the oak tree' with both town and county deriving its name from St. Brigid's monastery beneath an oak in Kildare Town. The county sits in the mid-east of Ireland in immediate proximity to Dublin, with a land mass of 1,695 km² making it the eight smallest county with 2.4 percent of the total land mass of the state. Despite this, it is the seventh most populous county in Ireland with a population of 222,310 marking an increase of 5.6 percent since 2011 compared to a national increase of 3.8 percent over the same period (CSO 2016). Much of the population growth occurs in commuter areas with high levels of residential developments (Naas, Maynooth, Kilcock and Celbridge), although Newbridge continues to have the highest population with 22,742 residents (*ibid.*). There are 23,545 non-nationals living in Kildare, amounting to 10.6 percent of the overall population down from 11.8 percent in 2011 (*ibid.*). The county has lower than national and regional

rates of Travellers with 743 members of the Travelling community living in the county (*ibid.*). There are 8,892 lone parent families in the county, with the experience overwhelmingly female with 7,715 (87 percent) classified as 'Lone Mother' (Kildare LCDC 2016). This represents 4.1 percent of the total number of lone parent families in the state (215,315) (*ibid.*). South Kildare contains a higher proportion of lone parent families, particularly in Newbridge-Kildare (24 percent) and Athy (26 percent), while Maynooth (19.2 percent), Celbridge (20.9 percent) and Naas (19.2 percent) in the North of the county have a much lower and broadly similar rate (*ibid.*).

My own perception of Kildare growing up was of a multiplicity of working-class towns made up of a proliferation of pubs and betting offices along with small local retailers and one main employer. It was a comment from a friend much later which alerted me to the wealth that exists in Kildare's countryside of which the 104 stud farms are the most visible representation. The equine industry within the county accounts for the direct employment of 5,000 people with approximately another 10,000 employed in associated industries and services (Kildare CDP 2017). This points toward the mixed economy across the county which relies heavily on retail and services, but also on technological and pharmaceutical industries within urban areas. The main area for employment in Kildare is in wholesale, retail, transportation and food services with 13,766 people amounting to 25.2 percent of the workforce employed in this sector, just above the national average of 24.8 percent (Kildare LCDC 2016). Due to its Christian, medieval and Anglo heritages along with scenic waterways, horse racing and golf attractions the Kildare economy also draws heavily on tourism with it contributing €120 million directly to the local economy. There are some large-scale employers dotted across the landscape in North Kildare including Maynooth University, Kerry Group (Naas) and technology sector employers Hewlett Packard and Intel

(both Leixlip). In south Kildare large scale employers such as Pfizer, Bord na Mona and Whitewater Shopping Centre are located in Newbridge, while the Defence Forces is in the Curragh and the Kildare Shopping Village and Modus Media are in Kildare Town. Despite this, over 93 percent of enterprises in the county employ 10 people or less.

Kildare's geographical proximity to Dublin marks it out as a commuter area. More than 40 percent of the total workforce living in Kildare commutes outside of the county with most (73 percent) commuting to Dublin (Kildare LCDC 2016). This partly explains the high levels of educational attainment in the county where 38 percent of the county's population have a third-level degree. Educational underachievement is also low with 12 percent reporting no formal or primary education, the fourth lowest percentage in the state (*ibid.*). The 2008 recession provoked a steep decline in many commuter areas, including Kildare. Deprivation levels in Kildare increased substantially over the immediate years following the recession as the county slipped from the third most affluent local authority in 2006 to fifth in 2011. It experienced the fourth highest rates of deprivation in the country at -8.1 percent over the same period, with most of this deprivation clustered in the east and south of the county (*ibid*.).   However, the extent of the impact varied internally with the provincial towns in the north of the county feeling less deprivation (O'Donoghue and Meredith 2014). Unemployment in the county peaked at 18.5 percent in 2011. It has since declined to 11.4 percent which sits above the national average of 6.2 percent. Athy, in the south of the county, is regarded as Kildare's only 'unemployment blackspot' with a rate of 35 percent down from 40.7 percent in 2011 (CSO 2016). Only 4 percent of the working age population in Kildare is unable to work due to illness or disability; just below the national average of 4.4 percent (Kildare LCDC 2016). Labour market participation currently stands at 64.1 percent, equivalent to the national average (CSO 2016). Both the county's recent history as well as its

relationship to the national averages in terms of unemployment, labour market participation and numbers unable to work marks it out as a site to explore the experience of work-related conditionality.

1:5 Structure and Outline of Thesis

Chapter 2 explores the master narrative of work as a dominant rationality permeating and fundamentally structuring life. In traversing the related literature, it situates work as paid employment, a naturalised and normalised phenomenon which penetrates the very fabric of our being. The mirror of this is the social construction of unemployment defined by a lack. As such, while not directly concerned with work-related conditionality the chapter situates its political function in relation to the master narrative of work. By briefly illustrating historical alternatives to the importance and domination of capitalist work as well as its emergence, the chapter points toward its historically contingent character. With this in mind it also draws on autonomist refusal of work (Tronti 1966a) and 'lines of flight' (Deleuze 1995) as possible routes out of the master narrative of work. This is complemented by feminist literature highlighting the devaluation of social reproductive labour which further serves as a timely reminder of the interconnectedness of material and immaterial labour. In doing so it sets the scene for the ambiguities within these trends which emerge through the later findings and analysis.

Chapter 3 outlines the project's theoretical approach to activation, developed from Foucault's ideas on 'governmentality'. It is an approach based on exploring the "inventedness of our world" (Burchell 1993:279), in which social policies are interpreted as social artefacts resulting from a particular configuration of power relations. It illustrates how governmentality operates through the 'conduct of conduct' (Foucault 1980) in which

dominant rationalities and attendant techniques of practice attempt to elicit particular ways of thinking, behaving and being. The approach however is beset by a number of problems including the under-theorisation of power differentials, the place of resistance and the role of the state, which undermines its analytical power. However, applied to unemployment and conditionality it illustrates how the 'problem' of unemployment is interpreted through a rationality of active job-seeking and governed by techniques of conditionality. In addressing some of the concerns above the chapter turns towards a bottom up interrogation of agency through Lister's (2004) typology of agency allied to two other agency-based frames, street level bureaucracy (Brodkin 2013) and everyday resistance (Scott 1985; de Certeau 1984).

Chapter 4 moves from the theoretical concerns of governmentality to a focus on the practice of conditionality and sanctions underpinning activation. The chapter begins with a review of the activation-workfare debate before exploring contemporary dominant trends in conditionality and sanctions. The section then focuses more specifically on the gendered dimension of activation, conditionality and sanctions, before moving on to discuss evidence regarding implementation. This review of the evidence then opens a space to explore the literature interpreting activation, conditionality and sanctions as a mode of neo-liberal governance. Drawing on the past examples it is suggested that this mode of governance is not unique to the present but rather draws on and shares similarities to past policies governing unemployment. An exploration and critique of the philosophical justifications underpinning this discussion can be found in Appendix 2. The chapter ends by returning to the issue of resistance emphasizing its neglect in studies of governmentality, and unemployment more generally.

Chapter 5 turns the focus more squarely onto the Irish case. It begins by way of a brief look at antecedent themes of workfare and work-related conditionality (Paz-Fuchs 2008b) within the Irish context. The chapter then delves into the present and begins with the imposition of austerity in Ireland following the 2008 recession which included numerous cuts to social welfare. It then charts the move from a passive welfare state to a burgeoning activation regime underpinned by conditionality and sanction through *Pathways to Work* and the partial privatisation of employment services under JobPath. This involves a brief overview of local welfare services in Kildare. Maintaining the gender analysis, this section includes a specific focus on the experience of lone parents, a group overwhelmingly populated by women. The review returns to the issue of power differentials within the political economy of Irish work-related conditionality by examining corporate welfare, particularly employer subsidies. Staying with the theme of power the chapter ends with a discussion of Irish unemployed resistance in both the historical and contemporary contexts.

Chapter 6 outlines the research design and approach, at the core of which is an exploration of the relationship between social research and social change. It is expounded through introspective interrogation, and at times castigation, turned on the discipline as a whole. The chapter is made up of two sections, beginning with the personal meanderings through the research question, its philosophical approach and the relationship between qualitative research and social change. This section ends with a discussion of the role of interviews within this relationship. This sets the chapter up for section two and the focus on the more practical aspect of how the research was conducted. From here the chapter explores and outlines the sampling techniques, engagement and interactions with participants as well as details about participants. A table outlining further details of participants is found in Appendix 4. The section then outlines its ethical approach, embedded within earlier

introspections, before discussing the question of credibility and generalisability in qualitative research generally and the project specifically.

Chapter 7 forms the starting point of the analysis of agency in relation to interactions with social welfare agencies, caseworkers and work-related conditionality. In this chapter I first explore participants' agency within what Lister (2004) terms the personal-everyday agency, traversing the various material and psychological coping mechanisms mobilized in navigating life on social welfare. What initially might not appear as directly linked to work-related conditionality nonetheless is important in outlining the context in which decision-making in regards to other forms of agency are carried out. This becomes abundantly clear in the second half of the chapter which explores the personal-strategic agency of 'getting off' welfare (Lister 2004). It emerges that the possibilities for agency here are restrained and permitted by the practices of 'getting by'.

Chapter 8 continues the analysis of participants' agency. Here the focus shifts to the political/citizenship element of Lister's (2004) typology. In exploring the personal-political/citizenship agency of 'getting back at' the chapter charts the multiplicity of everyday, and often seemingly mundane, tactics engaged in by welfare subjects within their interactions. In doing so the chapter looks for 'lines of flight' (Deleuze 1995), refusals (Tronti 1966a) and everyday resistance (Scott 1989; de Certeau 1984) in street-level interactions. At stake here are issues of autonomy and control in developing trajectories through welfare agencies and conditionality based on maintaining and advancing one's own interests. This leads to the second section of the chapter, the focus on strategic-political/citizenship. The key questions here are whether the welfare subject's agency is conducive to collective political organisation, and whether the latter's emergence is

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restrained or permitted by other forms of agency (e.g. getting by, getting off) and the ways in which this occurs.

Chapter 9 situates the preceding discussion of participants' agency in a more direct relation to the governmental power operating through Irish social welfare policy, agencies and caseworkers. It does so first by outlining and exploring the multiplicity of governmental techniques of work-related conditionality. In contrast to existing literature in Ireland I argue what emerges here is an 'unbearable lightness of conditionality' in which frustration is due to the government of lives premised on a superficiality of engagement. The Irish case of work-related conditionality is therefore marked not so much by punishment as indifference to individuals' needs. The second part of this chapter moves on to explore the place of paid employment in the lives of participants. Work emerges as the dominant governmental meta-narrative demonstrated by continued attachment to the work ethic, albeit one premised on the promise of 'proper' jobs. Yet, governmental power is never totalizing and here permits the exploration of minor cracks in its logic through the positives of unemployment which participants articulated.

Chapter 10 concludes with my reflections on my insights gathered across the 42 interviews with participants. In doing so I highlight what the analysis of their stories has to offer sociology across empirical, theoretical and methodological lines. I further reflect on the implications for social policy, and in particular, how the construction of activation policies and their use of work-related conditionality impact the everyday experience of unemployment.

CHAPTER TWO: WORK'S COLONISATION OF LIFE

> "I will work better,
> I will work cheaper,
> I will work longer,
> I will work my life away"
>
> - Sole & DJPain1,
> Capitalism (Is Tearing
> Us Apart).
>
> "You Don't Even Live Once (YDELO)."
>
> - McKenzie Wark, Tweet.

2:1 Introduction

In commenting on the incompleteness of Foucault's project Berardi suggested that what was lacking was a genealogy of work. It was for Berardi a genealogy of the idea that in order to have bread to survive one must first give their labour. This idea when disinterred from the repetition of social life, norms, values and practices was for Berardi '… stupid' (2016). He would go on to suggest that in fact all of Foucault's work can be read as in fact a genealogy of this idea, of the disciplinary, biopolitical and governmental regulations which in one way or another turn individuals into working subjects (in the sense of formal paid employment). Such is the ubiquity and dominance of work that its role as the fundamental structuring agent of capitalism is a naturalised and normal phenomenon. Even those without it, such as unemployed people, are defined in terms of a lack of work, while care-givers and home-makers provide much of the devalued social reproductive labour necessary to enable capitalist work. The central concern of this research, experience of work-related conditionality in Ireland, is therefore indelibly linked to wider issues regarding the social, political and cultural importance of paid employment in society. Indeed, it will later be argued that a purpose of work-related conditionality is to reinforce a work dominant society.

Although not explicitly focused on conditionality this chapter explicates the pervasive dominance of work's importance which frames and legitimates activation, work-related conditionality and sanctions.

It begins with the complicated task of defining what it is we are talking about; what is work? From here it moves on to develop a critical vantage point from which to view work's colonisation of life. This is done by exploring the role of work in earlier societies which championed different aspects of social life as higher goals, and through a discussion of the protestant work ethic's moralisation of work linked to early capitalism. From here the chapter moves on to discuss the increasing colonisation of life through its operation as a master narrative; the encirclement of life in a production-consumption relation; and the blurring of life and work in a post-industrial intimacy. The following section deals with the demonization of the non-worker through the lens of the social construction of unemployment. The final section explores possible routes out of this colonisation through the autonomist 'refusal of work' (Tronti 1966a) and Deleuze's (1995) 'lines of flight'. The chapter's purpose is to therefore situate paid employment as the historically contingent meta-narrative imbued by power-relations which work-related conditionality is both derived from and reinforces.

2:2 Defining Work

Work is endemic to our lives. Hardly a day passes in which we do not carry out activities we classify as work. Yet despite this, and indeed largely due to its embeddedness, from a theoretical and philosophical stand point 'work' is a labyrinthine and ambiguous concept eliding easy definition. It lures us into grey areas, inciting qualifications and rousing contradictions when we attempt to capture its defining characteristics (Frayne 2015). Do we

regard playing with one's children or carrying out art and crafts as work? Or does the carrying out of such activities with children other than our own in exchange for payment alter its nature and mark it out as work? Similarly, does the cognitive labour of computer coding cease to be work when performed in one's own time, in one's interest as a hobby? For Marx (1959), of course, work in its idealised form as joyous and autonomous creativity amounts to the defining activity of human beings. On this view, humans are distinguished from other animals through our ability for creative self-expression and to fashion and refashion our world, indicating the interplay between consciousness, thought, intentionality and its concrete materialisation. Alas, the owner-worker power relation of capitalism concomitant with its division of labour and technological advancement denies us our creative self-expression. The result is humans alienated from their work and consequently themselves, a point we shall return to later. One could traipse further down this philosophical winding course with the Arendtian (1958) distinction between work as a creative and intellectual enterprise in world-building set against menial task orientated labour. Such understandings perhaps sit well with artists, poets, writers, musicians and their creative ilk who can each make claim to 'my work' (Frayne 2015), but perhaps means little to those who toil in the grinding drudgery of, for example, cleaning toilets. This points to the loaded cultural perceptions and ethical views regarding work, often found animating a standard introductory question of social settings: 'what do you do?'. Here we find cultural perceptions about proper work, the respectability of certain activities over others, entwined with and providing the basis for the social measurement of individuals.

Yet for the present matter at hand we can abstract ourselves from these philosophical and theoretical concerns, because when we talk about work we tend to know what we have in mind. That is to say we tend to think strictly of what Gorz (1989) calls 'work in an economic

sense', that is of course formal paid employment whereby activities are carried out for a wage. Thinking about work then usually amounts to thinking about jobs – things we go to and come home from – and which serve society in a broad sense (Frayne 2015). Referring to the cases above, the childminder and the computer programmer are at work then when their productive time and effort is exchanged for a wage. This contrasts with 'work-for-ourselves' which is based on reciprocity and mutuality and so lacks a commercial basis as it encompasses activities performed out of a sense of duty, commitment and respect to others. This encapsulates care-giving and home-duties within the domestic sphere, such as cooking, cleaning, shopping and child-minding. It therefore appears as a gift, one which is overwhelmingly performed by women and exploited by 'work in an economic sense' (Gorz 1989; Frayne 2015). In a truly free society unfettered by capitalist compulsion Gorz argues that such activities would incorporate communal ventures such as gardening, education and healthcare (Gorz 1989; Frayne 2015). Gorz (1989) differentiates a further sphere for self-initiated undertakings based on a deliberate and free conscious choice, what he terms 'autonomous activities'. Rather than profit or utility, the primary goal is one's own interest and enjoyment which defines the Good, the True and Beautiful within their chosen activity. Autonomous activities are ends in themselves, devoid of economic necessity, where the process is as enjoyable and worthwhile as its completion (Gorz 1989; Frayne 2015).

However, while this chapter critiques a specific kind of work; that is, work as a job within the capitalist relations of production, this cannot be done in isolation. Any examination of work in this sense must recognise its relation to social reproduction and the interconnection of different dimensions of work (Dalla Costa and James 1975; Federici 2012). Such thinking highlights the relational nature of different modes of work which penetrates individuals' lives in complex and diverse ways, permeating boundaries of public

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and private realms. As such, individuals are not engaged in work that is waged or unwaged, public or private, formal or informal but rather multiple intersecting variations. Moreover, it is a deeply gendered experience in which social reproduction, domestic work, care and sexual labour remains primarily carried out by women even when they are in paid employment (James and Dalla Costa 1975; Federici 2012; Rubery 2014). As alluded to above, care and domestic work is devalued labour regarded as outside the productive realm derived from the social organisation of work founded on a strict public/private divide. The care of children counts as valued labour in the first sense, but is rendered normalised as parenting in the second. A critique of work and a demand for less of it then requires attention to its gendered dimension; it must be reorganisation and redistribution of all work.

2:3 Work in Earlier Societies

A look to the distant past situates the ascendency of work across the social and personal body(ies) as a product of the modern predicated upon historical contingency. In Ancient Greece for example, politics and civic duty were valued as the highest social contribution in a society where the autonomy and leisure for the required contemplation relied on the use of slave labour to carry out most of the burden of work. Indeed, for Aristotle (quoted in Applebaum 1992:34), work was only useful in creating enough wealth for leisure since the latter "is a necessity, both for growth in goodness and for the pursuit of political activity". Underscoring this subordination of economic ends to cultural and political goals Plato, through the mouth of Socrates, insisted on not having to work as essential to the pursuit of a virtuous life required to be a good governor in society (*ibid.*). Similarly, the Romans' shared dislike of work is captured within the Latin word for work, *labor*, meaning 'extreme effort associated with pain' etymologically sharing the same root as *labore* – 'to stumble under a

burden' (Gini and Sullivan 1989:5). While ostensibly like the Greeks in their attitudes to wealth, Roman nobility nonetheless amassed it by circumventing prohibitions on acquisition through utilising freedmen. The inability of non-nobles to enter the senate despite their wealth reinforced this hypocrisy and at least ostensibly maintained the cultural devaluation of work and wealth.

Early Jewish and Christian thinking shared beliefs about work as a symbolic painful necessity provoked by Original Sin. While neither Adam nor Eve lived the utopia of non-work in the Garden of Eden, their disobedience provoked the imposition of toil; in effect, God emerges as a boss. In Jewish society, work was perceived as a means of salvation through the expiation and atonement for the past sins of ancestors, thereby cloaking work in a religious veneer that was lacking in Greek and Roman societies. While Jesus had little to say about work Paul imbues it with value both as means to independence and self-respect and as a basis for distributing charity (Beder 2000). The themes of self-sufficiency suggested by Paul also animated early monastic life where work served the needs of the monastery and fostered community among the brothers (*ibid.*). Echoing Ancient Greece, work remained subordinated to a higher good of contemplation, although God becomes the direct object of contemplation. Stratification becomes part of God's plan with religious contemplation situated above manual labour evidenced in Aquinas' hierarchy of occupation with finance and commerce rooted at the bottom and agricultural activity as the highest good beneath religious work (*ibid.*). Augustine denounced business as an evil, while for Jesus a camel had more hope of passing through the eye of a needle than a wealthy man did of entering the Kingdom of God. Beyond the rich and powerful work was driven by necessity rather than acquisition as labour was primarily task orientated with intense periods of work rivalled by longer hours of socialising (Thompson 1969; Beder 2000; O'Carroll 2014). Throughout

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Christian, Jewish, Greek, Roman and the Middle Ages work lacked the ascendant exaltation and prominence it enjoys in contemporary modern societies. Each society championed value systems in which work was often denigrated or at least subordinated to other goals such as the contemplation of the good as well as cultural and political participation.

2:4 The Pulpit and the Factory: The Moralisation of Work

It is this mere tolerance of work as necessity within a rationality prioritising goals other than acquisition and accumulation which occupied Max Weber's thinking in opposing traditional societies against work-centred modernity. For Weber (2002), the reformation gives rise to a Protestant Ethic emphasizing discipline which fundamentally undermines the traditional task-orientation and needs-based approach to work and centres it as a virtuous end in itself. Yet, as Weber highlights, the origin of this new morality emanated from the Catholic Church through the discipline, dedication and work ethic of those within the walls of monasteries and other religious institutions (Weber 2002; Beder 2000). The Protestant Ethic democratises the divine 'calling' untethering it from the sole privilege of religious institutions and their activities. Within the new religion all occupations provided opportunity for a divine calling through service; work no longer constituted the curse of punishment for Original Sin (Applebaum 1992). Indeed, Calvinism insists that in the face of the unknowing regarding one's fate, one should nonetheless be dedicated, disciplined and industrious since laziness and sloth are hardly attributes guaranteeing passage into the Heavenly Kingdom. Outwork thy neighbour to prove that you have been chosen. The intrinsic value of work within this Protestant Work Ethic evolves then out of a condemnation of idleness and sloth, and the associated fear of contamination whereby such transgressions may infect and erode the social fabric. Self-sufficiency and independence were the foundations of a virtuous life provided by

work and structural excuses were given little quarter. As we will see in a later chapter exploring conditionality in Ireland, the symbols of dependency such as idleness, begging and vagrancy were strictly regulated through incarceration and bodily punishments. For instance, the establishment of workhouses sought to both confine the problem and enforce its correction; no charity for those who will not work (Beder 2000). Indeed, such concerns appear as antecedents to similar contemporaneous issues with the behaviour of unemployed people, to which work-related conditionality and sanctions are posited as solutions.

By legitimising the pursuit of profit, work was freed from the meeting of mere needs and served to infuse the spirit of capitalism. Benjamin Franklin's contemporaneous aphorism that 'time is money' pithily captures the undoing of the rationality that had underpinned 'traditional' societies in the name of a new moral code in which work and production of profit had become central (Beder 2000). The process also required the repetition of practice provided by factory discipline. The appropriation of the commons through enforced enclosures of land provided the burgeoning industrial society with ample workforce for manufacturing factories. The factory removed one's control of their labour as activities, such as weaving, previously carried out in the home became part of the mass production of commodities. In many respects this institutionalises the male breadwinner model where productive activity is necessarily "production for exchange" within the market (Alexander 1989:40). Female labour is rendered "production for use" confined to the home and family; thus serving to tie women to dependence on men through the wage (Odih 2007:15; Feredici 1998). The imposition of clock time is central to prioritising of work and productivity in everyday life and the constitution of workers in the modern sense (Thompson 1969; Beder 2000; O'Carroll 2014). The new discipline of the factory was not easily instilled in traditional workers unused to a routine of regular and long hours (Thompson 1969).

However, work increasingly becomes not only necessary for the continuation of productivity, the production of profit and the maintenance of moral order but is also constructed as advantageous to good health and well-being. As Weber (2002:121**)** put it the work ethic remained central within the spirit of capitalism as the "ghost of dead religious beliefs" delineating the measure of a person based on character. Eternal salvation was replaced by altogether more earthly goals such as improvement of one's station; social mobility and meritocracy as the foundations for reward on earth. Beder (2000) describes how the myth of the self-made man animated the American Dream as those at the bottom embraced the work ethic in forgoing leisure and pleasure in pursuit of class advancement even as opportunities for organisational promotion and educational reward became increasingly narrow throughout the 20th Century.

2:5 The Master Narrative of Work

Work assumes the position of a lodestar around which income, respect, social recognition and citizenship are distributed. Although in one sense citizenship is a formal legal category defining membership of a community, accompanying this is also a substantive category indicating notions of belonging and concomitant obligations of reciprocity. In this latter sense, work in contemporary societies is central to deciding who is included within the conception of citizenship as workers and non-workers are increasingly demarcated and socially judged as productive strivers or 'lazy' skivers (Patrick 2012). Work is reified to such an extent that it appears as a naturalised component of human nature such that Bifo Berardi's (2016) question as to why in order to have bread and water one must work appears oddly quaint in its simple questioning of this fundament of the Western world. The embeddedness of this rationality, paid work as societal expectation, underlines it as the most fundamental

mode of governmentality operating on our lives. It is a master narrative structuring the material, symbolic and cognitive arenas of the social world, a moral and cultural positioning which demands identification and incorporation with it. Hammock's (2011:313) description of a master narrative neatly captures the contemporary place of work:

> It represents a collective storyline which group members perceive as compulsory – a story which is so central to the group's existence and 'essence' that it demands identification and integration into the personal narrative.

We are always pre-constituted as workers. Our present temporal logic then appears historically expansive whereby past alternatives of non-work societies dissipate into cultural blind-spots.

Yet, as will be discussed in the following chapter, power relations are heterogeneous and diffuse such that power never penetrates the individual wholly to the extent that political rationalities are absorbed without question or modifications (Foucault 1980; 1981). Moreover, the incorporation and re-articulation of a dominant rationality provides a basis for challenge and resistance. For instance, the valorisation of work and the cultural significance of the work ethic provides a weapon for demanding better working conditions and pay, effectively a means of holding capital to account, while also providing a basis of inclusion for subaltern groups by emphasising their productive capacities and work ethic (Weeks 2011). These themes of "counter-conduct" (Foucault 2007:200), resistance and the possibility of acting otherwise to dominant rationalities are explored later in the thesis. However, it points toward a fundamental difficulty in researching relationships to and perceptions of work since horizons of possible alternatives appear distant and narrow. Workers and non-workers' declared attachments to work may arise from a genuine sense that work is rewarding and/or important yet may also point to a lack of perception as to how things might be other.

Moreover, it raises a broader point as to whether agency and resistance here emerges only as insipid and pusillanimous, bounded by the possibilities of merely re-articulating and subverting the dominant rationality. As will be addressed in the Methodology chapter this thesis involves a critical encounter with participants' responses to questions about work as possible automatic reiterations of cultural norms by situating these responses within and against the broader context of the interviews and the activities articulated in them. Moreover, drawing on a mixture of governmentality and Lister's (2004) typology of agency, outlined in the next chapter, it aims to tease out the possibilities of agency and resistance in encounters with both dominant rationalities and their attendant techniques of power and structural restraints.

- **2:5.1 Encircled by Production-Consumption Relation**

In Marx (1959), work provides the means of self-realisation through the development of our productive and creative capacities. It is this line of thought which underpins his critique of capitalism as smothering the creative capacities of workers and eroding the possibility of self-realisation and hence human fulfilment (*ibid.*). Through the division of labour and increasing specialisation underpinned by technological advancement, the worker becomes a mere fragment; an extension of the machine. The technological advancements of the 1950s provoked the possibility of less work and increased leisure. However, the increased free-time because of technological induced productivity was reabsorbed through the expansion of markets and the creation of new markets into a further commodification of social life. And so here we are today encircled by the market and dependent upon it for meeting needs and desires which it partly produces. Work is central to its normalisation since it is through paid employment that we earn an income to purchase goods and services within the markets, while

its absorption of our time and energy prevents us from developing interests beyond the easily accessible shopping malls and outlets (Frayne 2015). Markets encircle us and are intimately permeating social relations to such an extent that it appears difficult or abnormal to meet our needs outside of market capitalism. The reduction of work appears as sacrilege to the gospel of consumerism; they are indelibly connected since "you work to earn money in order to buy the things you need and want" (Lodziak and Tatman 1997:72).

For Adorno (2001:189), the workers allotted free time amounted to a mere "continuation of profit-orientated social life", providing little time for the pursuit of autonomous activities for intrinsic pleasure. Adorno (2001:190) champions true leisure as an "oasis of unmediated life"; a realm in which one is truly free of the economic sphere, its demands and related culture. It is hardly surprising that Adorno is charged with elitism for demarcating his serious interests such as reading, classical music and writing against the fickle immediate pleasures of 'low' culture. Moreover, one might point to increased interest in studies of leisure (e.g. Lo Verde *et.al* 2014) as evidence of a counterpoint to the dominance of work. Yet, Adorno's core point remains difficult to refute; that for many of us our free time is not our own, but rather it is structured and influenced by work. The pursuit of what Gorz (1989) calls self-defined autonomous activities requires dedication, concentration and the building of communities with others, all of which requires greater amounts of time than provided by the working life (Lodziak 2002; Frayne 2015). It is not that watching television or playing video games are low culture and must be denounced and dispensed with, but rather the issue is one of autonomy. As Frayne puts it "the worker is deprived of the time and energy to choose otherwise" (2015:71). Conditionality extends the colonising power of work through its reinforcement of the master narrative of work, the enforced requirement of employment and time-intensive activities to fulfil this requirement. This prompts questions

as to whether, and to what extent, this dominant narrative is absorbed and whether it closes off routes of de-commodification as well possibilities of enjoyment through non-work activities. The use of work-related conditionality potentially means that even in unemployment, one's time is increasingly bound to the logic of work through repeated activities to find employment.

- **2:5.2 The Post-Industrial Shift: A New Intimacy of Work**

Recent decades have witnessed pronouncements regarding a crisis of work haunted by the spectre of automation which would produce mass unemployment and/or the dissolution of work-based identity and meaning (Rifkin 1991; Casey 1995; Bauman 1998; Sennett 1998; Gorz 1999; Beck 2000). Some have argued that the once permanent identity defined through durable and continuous employment destabilizes and fragments due to increasing precarity, as a result identity becomes increasingly assembled through one's consumption (Bauman 1998; Beck 2000). The dignity, respect and character derived from embedding and investing in one's work over time no longer holds, producing a 'separatedness' corroding relationships between people which impacts upon not only the individual but the social fabric as a whole (Sennett 1998; Crawford 2009;). In response, others suggest that such theorists are too quick to bury work and its production of identity and emphasize continuity within the economic spheres of Europe through increased job tenure (Doogan 2001) and relatively limited use of casualised labour and zero-hour contracts (Fevre 2007; Strangleman 2007). Indeed, Fevre (2007) warned of the 'power of nightmares' in which immoderate critiques of work would only serve to deliver the social reality they described. Whether or not the 'end of work' theorists are to blame, more recent research has indicated an increasing prevalence of precarity through flexible employment contracts marked by "uncertainty, low income, limited

social benefits and statutory entitlements" (Vosko 2010:2; Vosko et.al 2016; ILO 2016). With this in mind, Offe (1985:141) argues that adherence to the work ethic only remains plausible when the conditions of employment recognise workers as "morally acting persons". Yet this seems an odd conclusion to draw since it is not clear at all whether the work ethic has declined alongside increasing precarity over recent decades. This project contributes to an understanding of the work ethic among Irish unemployed individuals exposed to its enforcement through conditionality. It further provides an opportunity to explore whether, thrown into the world as workers-in-waiting, our socialisation to the rationality of work delimits the boundaries of possible alternatives.

The concerns regarding the fragmentation of work and, by extension, life biographies are in part worked out in an attempt to understand the shift from industrial to post-industrial labour. Much of this shift is captured within the concept of immaterial labour which illustrates a move from industrial manufacturing to an economy primarily orientated toward knowledge economy and services (Lazzarato 1996; Hardt and Negri 2000).[3] Several critiques immediately arise in relation to the concept of immaterial labour. All labour obviously involves some level of immaterial and material activity and the manufacturing of concrete commodities has not dissipated into thin air but rather has relocated to the Global South in pursuit of lower labour costs. However, the concept of immaterial labour does not point toward a universal explanation but rather to dominant tendencies of our existing condition. One issue that the concept fails to properly explore however is the relationship to social reproduction and indeed this failure serves to flatten women's work from the plane of analysis. Social reproduction, upon which the work of capitalist economic necessity is built

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[3] Appendix 1 offers a short glossary of Marxist concepts (labour power; the reserve army of labour; active proletarianization; immaterial labour; and alienation) used in the text.

and made possible, is saturated with the domestic, care, cognitive, emotional and sexual labour of women (Dalla Costa and James 1975; Federici 1998). The disruption of the male-breadwinner model of work and women's increased participation in the labour market has done little to alter the situation but rather necessitates a 'second shift' of domestic and care labour (Rubery 2014). This critique deepens by returning to the issue of manual versus cognitive and emotional labour since by overlooking the already always existing embeddedness of cognitive and emotional labour within social reproduction it serves to remove women's bodies from the picture through an ignorance of the materiality of their labour (James and Dalla Costa 1975). It is an invisibility reproduced and extended through conditionality's binding of individuals and groups, particularly lone parents, to the labour market while making little allowance for the necessity of fulfilling non-employment activities.

Work within the knowledge economy promised opportunities for increased autonomy, creative expression and intellectual engagement (Bell 1973). Yet the extent to which this shift toward the knowledge economy instigated more humane forms of work is questionable. The move towards immaterial labour coincides with developments of new techniques of control beyond the disciplining of break-time and productivity targets. Capital captures our sociability putting it to work within a technocratic inauthentic exchange which commodifies communication, rendering it joyless and an empty shell of manipulation (Berardi 2009).   The capture of sociability happens in two ways, the utilisation of emotional labour and in the calling to be 'yourself', although the latter requires a presentation of a positive and extroverted self allied to corporate goals. Both O'Carroll (2014) and Casey (1995) indicate strategies of self-protection within this as individuals collude with dominant invocations, defend themselves against it, or submit knowingly. Indeed, O'Carroll's research highlights

how experienced workers counteract the encroaching unpredictability of working-time by refusal to go beyond contracted hours, including counting travel time as work. If this illustrates the boundedness of resistance inevitably structured by the dominant rationality, Frayne's (2015) research exploring the lives of those who have reduced or left work illustrates an altogether riskier strategy. Here individuals free themselves from paid employment to escape its increasing colonisation of life in order to pursue autonomous self-defined activities (Gorz 1989). What emerges from Frayne's exploration is the tension between being time-rich and money-poor as individuals attempt to maintain fulfilment in free leisure while reducing economic activity and in some cases struggling to survive. Increased work-related conditionality potentially increases the difficulty of such escape by attempting to close off social security as a route of non-market based survival (Wiggan 2015a).

Yet work can nonetheless be a congenial and enjoyable experience among colleagues (Gorz 1989). One might suggest that, rather than alienation, it is more appropriate to speak of alienating tendencies since work does not completely preclude expression, collaboration and initiative (Blauner 1964). It can be "satisfying, motivating and self-fulfilling … a potential source of life satisfaction" (Eikhof *et.al* 2007). Indeed, one of the degradations of unemployment is often the loss of one's social network and sociability developed in and through one's work (Jahoda *et.al* 1979, 1981, 1982). While this is undoubtedly true, it takes for granted the naturalisation of work and its current social organisation and distribution. And here we arrive at a point which has hitherto lain implicit within the discussion: the power relations existing within work. These power relations are obvious in the sense that for most of us the income necessary for subsistence and thus survival is obtained in exchange for our labour; we are dependent upon the economic elites. The supposed equivalency of the capital-worker contract is exposed when analysis shifts to the "hidden abode of production"

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(Marx 2010:279), illustrating how capital 'consumes' labour power (see Appendix 1) by putting its seller to work. This shift from market-based exchange to wage based production centres labour as the site of capitalist valorisation; focusing the wage as capitalism's central mechanism and illuminating work as its lifeblood (Weeks 2011). The effects of this power inevitably delimit the possibilities of autonomy, creativity and expression within work since they are dependent on, and subverted to, the goals of the company. Even within employment with relatively high levels of autonomy, such as technological sectors, skills and activities remain narrowly focused to the exclusion of wider interests and activities. The Irish software workers interviewed by O'Carroll (2014) highlighted dissatisfaction with how work projects impeded upon time spent on their own personal projects. Most fundamentally, workers do not get to question the use-value or impact of the product or services their labour contributes to (Frayne 2015). The knowledge and skills permeating through individuals and by extension society remain commandeered toward privatised accumulation with little direct regard for social use. Activation, work-related conditionality and sanctions may arise as an extension of this power by enforcing commodification, and is therefore in need of interrogation.

2:6 Social Construction of Unemployment

The valorisation of work and the worker has as its corollary the demonization of the non-worker. Today the valorisation of work re-emerges as the primary obligation of responsible citizens (Patrick 2012). Within this narrative work is always defined in terms of paid employment with other activities reduced to an expedient enhancement of one's employability. The shame and stigma of non-work underlines a "culturalization of poverty" (Tyler 2013:162) evident within 'poverty porn' and perpetuates a myth of hardworking taxpayers against workless and feckless welfare dependents (Coote and Lyall 2013; Shildrick

et.al 2012). The social construction of unemployed people as irresponsible, lacking in self-control and effort coincides with the economic and ontological insecurity of late modern precarity to underpin vindictiveness within social policy. Increasing insecurity of working conditions, flexibility, lower pay and the extension of the working day which narrows both familial time and the pursuit of autonomous activities turns the gaze of worker-consumer-citizens downward (Young 2003). It produces a moral indignation composed of disgust and a disguised envy toward a perceived lack of restraint in those seen to live off the taxes of one's hard work (Young 2003; Grover 2010). Unemployed people characterised as living well off welfare become an easy target of blame in which the displeasures and frustrations of late modernity can turn to vindictiveness (*ibid.*).

Sociology too has, often unwittingly, played its part in constructing humans as workers and, by extension, non-workers as marked by loss. Fevre (2007) deplores the implicit acceptance of a dominant economic rationality within the discipline which loses sight of earlier non-economic thinkers such as Marx, Durkheim and Weber as a means of critique. Right-leaning critiques often coincide with political rhetoric in emphasizing deficient behaviours and attitudes toward work that require state responses through increased conditionality, sanctions and reduced payments (Dunn 2014; 2010; Dunn *et.al* 2014; Mead 1986). In response to this discourse the defenders of unemployed people and poor rally with tales of stoic negotiation of deprivation (Sinfield 1981); job-readiness (Lindsey and McQuaid 2004) and an irrevocable work-ethic (Moran 2016; Shildrick *et.al* 2012). On the one hand, such research is fundamentally important in challenging the 'otherness' of unemployed individuals which permits punitive interventions. Moreover, they attempt to shift the focus of the 'problem' from the individual to structural concerns which impact the lives of unemployed individuals, restricting autonomy and shaping the possibilities of agency. Yet

there is also a sense in which they continue to rearticulate unemployed individuals as workers-in-waiting and situate paid work as a necessary solution to social ills. It is a rationality which pervades the literature on unemployment to the extent that one could be pushed to say that there are no theories of unemployment, but only theories of a loss of work. Much of this is due to the influence within sociology of Jahoda *et.al*'s (1979, 1981, 1982) psycho-social 'deprivation model' developed in their study of unemployment in Marienthal, Austria, in the 1930s. Unemployment is immediately marked by the loss of manifest benefits such as income but is also compounded by latent psychological and social losses. According to the model, paid employment satisfies fundamental psychological needs: social contact, collective purpose, activity, self-identity and status, and structuring of time. For Jahoda *et.al* (1979, 1981, 1983) these latent benefits of employment are a psychological precondition of modern everyday life such that their loss brings negative and depressed moods (*ibid.*). Employment is therefore situated as an ideal state of which unemployment is a deficient mode of being (Frayne 2015).

The point is not that Jahoda *et.al* are wrong about the negative impacts of unemployment in either material or psychological terms but rather that it begins from a normative assumption regarding the centrality of paid work. Positioning work as the natural remedy of unemployment's ills ignores the latter's historically contingent construction (Cole 2007). Both Fryer (1986) and Ezzy (1993) provide critiques of the dominant deprivation model. The agency-restriction model (Fryer 1986) views unemployment as eroding agency and autonomy due to a restriction of economic self-sufficiency which limits one's control of their life. Ezzy (1993) suggests that the experience of unemployment is one primarily felt as a passage of status from an identity of worker imbued with cultural significance to the spoiled identity of non-worker (Goffman 1990). However, taken together the three approaches point

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to an understanding of unemployment as an overarching sense of loss inclusive of material and psychosocial losses which financially and socially restrict agency in the diminished social category of 'unemployed' (Sage 2018). Although in Jahoda *et.al* (1979, 1981, 1983) and Fryer (1986) there is still a sense in which paid employment remains the central defining feature of the individual; such that everywhere the individual is reduced to a worker, Ezzy's (1993) focus on the passage of status emphasizes the social construction of unemployment. The importance of this understanding is implied in recognitions of numerous individual and situational factors, such as education and gender, which influence responses to unemployment (Bartrum and Creed 2006). It is also attested to by the varying national legacies and discourses regarding unemployment which mitigates negative experiences. For example, unemployment impacts Swedish women more acutely than Irish women due to the former's national policy trajectories which have a longer history in emphasizing female participation in the labour market, thereby binding female identity more tightly to employment (Strandh *et.al* 2013).

Failure to attend to the social construction of unemployment may mean that unemployed individuals' agency becomes mired in doubt as the experience of unemployment is universally reported as negative; an inversion of the valorisation of the good life of work. Within and through this process we may become the Sociologist-King constituted by the object of our critique (the poor/unemployed) and our relationship to it (Ranciere 2004). Maintenance of designated roles within the perpetuation of existing power relations where the Sociologist-King pontificates upon and defends the image of the worker/non-worker below who although free to interchange occupational roles remain excluded from the power above (*ibid.*). One strand of this research pursues this understanding of the social construction of unemployment through the lives of participants to uncover if and in what way

the loss of paid employment emerges in their lives and whether counterpoints emerge, indeed, dare we ask, are there positives to unemployment? It therefore tentatively attempts a broader picture of the experience through an interrogation of juxtapositions, contradictions and paradoxes within the interviews. It seeks to draw out the experiences of unemployment derived from being time-rich which are situated in relation to the very real material and psychological losses of unemployment. In doing so it seeks not only to offer a fuller account of agency which respects the humanity of individuals, but also to point to the necessary material resources and freedom required to cultivate ways of living that break the dependence on paid work (Cole 2007). This is indelibly linked both to thinking about the social importance of work, and also more immediately the construction of active labour market policies, their aims and the use of conditionality to reach them.

2:7 Autonomia, Refusal of Work and Lines of Flight

This social construction of unemployment is implied within the autonomist tradition which situates the imposition, enforcement and organisation of work as central to its understanding of capitalism. It is an approach which also acknowledges and explores the historical transformability of working class compositions and its autonomy based on insubordination and self-valorisation via self-constitution in positive projects which reject and separate from capitalist valorisation (Weeks 2011). The working class then is a dynamic force against which capital must react and attempt to recuperate; a repositioning of the capital-worker dynamic which constitutes a 'reversal of perspective'. Within this, it is the wage system which operates as the dominant integrating mechanism into capitalist relations of production and the forms of life it engenders. Encircled by capitalism and its markets, work is its lifeblood providing the necessary income to survive and to consume. For Cleaver (2000:82)

it is the subordination of life to work within a "social system based on the imposition of work through the commodity form". The approach is anti-dialectical in its denial of historical dogma, universality or the restoration of the authentic essence of humanity. Its understanding of humanity remains rooted in class conflict and predicates the possibility of human collectivity, beyond the dependence of capital, on "the radical inhumanity of workers' existence" (Berardi 2009:44). Alienation here denotes not a loss of human essence through the degradation and constraints of capitalist work but rather an estrangement from such work and its rules. The shift in conceptual terminology brings with it an implied emphasis on the intentionality of one's estranged behaviour toward one's work. Escaping generalised alienation requires an active estrangement on behalf of workers constituted by a refusal to engage with or identify with capital's general interest (Tronti 1966b).

In place of the demand for a 'right to work' which serves to validate and normalise the capitalist exploitation it claims to challenge (Tronti 1966b; Grover and Piggott 2013), the autonomist call is for the 'refusal of work' (Tronti 1966a). Such a refusal is not a rejection of work *per se* but rather of its centrality to social life and its organisation along with its ubiquitous capitalist ideology and moralisation. It is a valorisation of human activities that escape capital's domination through its production-consumption encirclement (Berardi 2009). It points to the development of an 'alternative hedonism' (Soper 2008), of satisfying needs and desires beyond the narrow materialism of capitalism consumerism. Intangible pleasures of free time, personal contacts, building relationships and a slower pace of life and a range of other human activities provide space against the saturation of the production-consumption capitalist mode of life. Ferve's (2003) lament regarding the ubiquity of an economic rationality across sociology and the loss of non-economic critiques is appropriate here. Human life and social relations are too often reduced to the problematics of work, worker and

unemployment. Those critiques which capture exoduses from, or the cracks within, the dominant mode of life - from retreat to communes to increased leisure or didactic learning - are pushed to the margins (Frayne 2015; Holloway 2010).

While socialist modernisation and socialist humanist approaches remain focused on exploitation and alienation, the autonomist approach through active estrangement and the refusal of work is rooted in freedom and liberatory potential of concrete praxis (Negri 2005). It is at once both critical and rebellious in its analyses of work's colonisation and exploitation of social life, and creative practice that seeks to re-appropriate and reconfigure modes of production and social reproduction (Weeks 2011). The act of refusal is not limited to disengagement but rather initiates an 'exit' upon the which the limitations of the given horizon dissolve, thus altering the context in which the problem is situated rather than accepting alternatives on offer (Virno and Hardt 1996). It is an 'engaged withdrawal' which goes beyond a defensive reaction to an active process of invention in social life. As Hardt and Negri (2000:204) put it: "Beyond the simple refusal, or as part of that refusal, we need to construct a new mode of life and above all a new community". This hints toward the problem which political challenges to work's dominance share with investigations of the place of work in the lives of workers and unemployed people. In effect, thinking beyond work requires an ontological rupture since work is historically embedded in our very being; it goes to the heart of who and what we are as human beings. The refusals captured within the work of Frayne (2015) regarding escapes from work and increased leisure, and in Holloway's (2010) spaces of demarketised activity, elaborate the pursuit of self-defined autonomous activities (Gorz 1989), but remain on the individual level, and as Frayne in particular notes, imbued by financial and psychological risk.

Tronti (1966a) reminds us that reconfiguration of society requires a collective reconstitution:

> The goal remains that of refusal, at a higher level: It becomes active and collective, a political refusal on a mass scale, organised and planned. Hence, the immediate task of working-class organisation is to overcome passivity.

This positions the refusal of work as a collective struggle and self-creation in overcoming capitalist organisation. Yet in our contemporary juncture this situates the refusal as a provocation rather than concrete goal since we are a long way from establishing productive autonomy that overhauls the capitalist system. With this in mind, I acknowledge the collective aspect of the refusal of work but insist upon a 'smaller' more limited individual refusal of work toward the governing logic and practice of paid employment. This 'smaller' refusal indicates a more critical break with capitalist work than that implied by another concept I use, 'lines of flight', (outlined below). Moreover, to understand such actions as a 'refusal *to* work' would also lose the creative activities individuals might be engaged in while outside formal paid employment and diminishes the wider inventive possibilities this implies for challenging capitalist valorisation.

It is of course somewhat far-fetched to think of resistance and capital as existing in a dichotomous relation since for many of those seeking increased free time, it is driven by a desire for increased leisure and less stress rather than movement toward an anti-capitalist collective (Thorborn 2003). Demands for fully automated luxury communism are not yet on the horizon. Deleuze's (1995) concept of 'line of flight' is a helpful addition in this regard. While similar to Foucault's ideas on technologies of the self, discussed in the next chapter, 'lines of flight' imply a more deliberate subversion of dominant attempts at subjectification. From a perspective of power as productive they represent not so much a flight from

assemblages of power but rather an inventive force which those assemblages attempt to configure or close off. Much of this chapter has already explored work's increasing colonisation of social life and this can be read as attempts to capture lines of flight by tethering them to the capitalist production-consumption relation and its valorisation. On this view work-related conditionality appears as a state implemented mechanism of capital which closes off routes of economic survival outside of paid employment (Wiggan 2015a). Thinking the 'reversal of perspective' and the refusal of work permits pursuing intended critical breaks from the logic of capital. On the other hand, 'lines of flight' leads us away from looking for practices that unite resistance and/or affirm a pure space of autonomy outside of capital and into exploring existing diversity of practices, needs, desires and inventions and seeking to deterritorialise the regimes of work and equivalence inherent to them (Thoburn 2003). Such an approach focuses on escape while giving primacy to both a politics from below and varied social life conducted by workers and non-workers which may produce resistances that may not be progressive or do not appear as immediately political, or be couched in such terms (*ibid.*).

And here we must return to the feminist critique of the autonomist concept of immaterial labour discussed earlier. The concept of immaterial labour while pointing to dominant tendencies within global relations of production nonetheless ignores the immaterial labour (cognitive and emotional) involved in the social reproduction primarily carried by woman. In doing so, it commits a double violation by concomitantly erasing the female bodies performing social reproduction from the conceptualisation (James and Dalla Costa 1975; Federici 2012). This failure of difference matters when we are attempting to understand impacts of work, but also in attempting to develop lines of solidarity and understandings of how specific modes of refusal, exit and invention come about. To think a

politics of work only or primarily in terms of those in varying degrees of paid employment makes little sense. It involves recognition of the production of the Social Factory, a spread of economic rationality subsuming workers and non-workers into the generalised interest of capital and disposed toward the production of profit (Tronti 1966b). With this in mind, it must be inclusive of caring work and other social reproductive work primarily provided by women, as well as the social labour of unemployed people and the workers-in-waiting, (e.g. students); indeed, all whose lives are structured by the existing relations of production, social reproduction and imposed necessity of work. It involves thinking about not only waged labour but also the social wage which at once undermines the authority and power of waged labour while operating as a site of control and discipline which allows waged labour to exist (Barbagallo and Beuret 2012). As such, it adds to our encirclement by defining our needs, problems and the types of solution which configure social relations and subjects in particular ways (*ibid.*). Given the colonisation of our lives by work, the social wage becomes a site of struggle linked to social reproduction, possible refusals and demarketised lines of flight toward escape from the paradigmatic cage of capitalism. Moreover, work-related conditionality reconfigures aspects of the social wage by attempts to tightly enforce paid employment and its valorisation while also extending its commodifying logic to formerly exempt groups (e.g. lone parents).

2:8 Conclusion

This chapter has explored how work has increasingly come to permeate and structure our lives. While not explicitly focused on work-related conditionality it has drawn out the meta-narrative of work and its importance which exists *a priori* to its articulation and enforcement through activation policies and conditionality. We exist within a social factory where relations are configured toward the production of profit. The wage and the valorisation of

work operate in tandem as providing the material necessity to work and the desire to do so via work's tethering to identity, status and the transitory glow of consumption. The shift toward immaterial labour in post-industrial societies heightens this process as we become increasingly encircled within the production-consumption nexus. It is a powerful and pervasive meta-narrative which, as we will see in the coming chapters, provides activation and conditionality legitimacy and justification regarding the enforcement of what appears as natural; work. On the other hand, it implies a political function of work-related conditionality in sustaining dominant power relations. Yet, the distance of the past provides a critical vantage point from which one can see beyond the mystification of work to historically contingent relations of power and perhaps to questioning both its positivity and importance.

It also provokes questions related to the social construction of unemployment; how it is experienced in the daily life of individuals and whether it is always felt as a loss. If work lacks an inherently positive character perhaps then unemployment is not innately one of deprivation. Such questions directly impinge upon the construction of social policies emphasizing participation in work and which serve to both sustain and reinforce the meta-narrative work as well devaluing its opposite. While much sociology for valid and important reasons seeks to de-other unemployed people by recognition of shared dominant values such as the work ethic, this research attempts a broader recognition of agency. It looks for the gaps and conflicts within the reiteration of the work ethic as well as drawing on the autonomist 'refusal of work' (Tronti 1966a) and Deleuze's (1995) 'lines of flight' to explore the possible pursuit of self-defined autonomous activities. Such possibilities must now contend with an intensification and extension of conditionality which suggests a closing down of avenues of economic survival outside of paid employment. The following chapter

turns to the theoretical toolkit for exploring the dominant rationality constructing and governing the problem of unemployment and its attempted implementation through work-related conditionality.

CHAPTER THREE: GOVERNMENTALITY

3:1 Introduction

Pathways to Work (DEASP 2012, 2014, 2016) implements a new mode of governing unemployment based on a particular interpretation of unemployment as an individualised social problem to be remedied through increased levels of compulsion. As this chapter and later chapters will show, this interpretation is underpinned by naturalized negative assumptions about unemployed people. This thesis draws on Foucault's (2007) 'governmentality' to conceptualise how this political rationality about unemployment operates and the techniques used to manage unemployed individuals. One of the benefits in this approach is its ability to disconcert taken for granted assumptions dominant within societies to reveal historically contingent forces. In exposing the "inventedness of our world" (Burchell 1993:279) it can reveal not only a particular organisation of power relations, but that things could also be otherwise. The purpose of this chapter is to elaborate the analytical insights and limitations of using governmentality to investigate the use of work-related conditionality. Governing is understood here in a broad sense which exceeds the confines of the state to incorporate the self-formation of individuals through the 'conduct of conduct' (Foucault 1980). This is inextricably linked to Foucault's conception of power as an inescapable set of relations which are productive, facilitating and creative, and through which subjectivities are shaped. The approach outlined here then eschews an understanding of unemployment as a set of statistics in order to comprehend it as lived experience within a particular rationality of rule. The chapter is broken into three parts beginning with an outline of governmentality; section two then explores the governmentality of unemployment; and the third section explores agency and resistance in relation to this. The previous chapter outlined the refusal of work (Tronti 1966a) and 'lines of flight '(Deleuze 1995) as possibilities of

agency and resistance. Here these are augmented with Lister's (2004) typology of agency, street level bureaucracy (Brodkin 2013) and everyday resistance (Scott 1985; de Certeau 1984) in order to overcome the limitations of governmentality.

3:2 Governmentality

There are two senses in which Foucault uses the concept of governmentality. Firstly, it denotes a historical shift in thinking about and understanding the exercise of power in modern societies. For Foucault this is manifest in early modern Europe through the emergence of a particular rationality of rule in which government is no longer concerned with the self-preservation of the sovereign, but rather adopts a positive concern with the population within a territory and the management of life as a whole. Foucault (2007) introduces the term 'biopolitics' to illustrate how modern governmental power is concerned with the 'life of the people' and gives rise to a centralised bureaucracy attending to public health, living conditions, life expectancy, birth rates etcetera. This administration of life operates as a pastoral power aimed at optimising the well-being and capacity of subjects, thus potentially creating a more docile and productive population (*ibid.*). Beyond this historical meaning, a second notion of governmentality has been developed, largely through the work of secondary commentators. Governmentality in this sense is directed at considering the 'how' of governing through an examination of the nature and practice of government in advanced liberal states (Dean 1999). Governmentality links the notion of governing with a particular kind of rationality deployed as an instrument in calculating how best to govern (Edwards 2002). Such rationalities often go without scrutiny and appear as taken for granted assumptions embedded within the activity of governing and social institutions. An analysis of governmentality entails a focus on both the discursive field containing the rationalisation and legitimisation of the exercise of power along with the interventionist practices manifest

in specific programmes and techniques which aims to govern according to that rationality (McKee 2009). This focus on the interconnection between thought and modes of governing is central to this thesis and allows it to draw attention to the objectives of elites and the means through which these objectives are pursued without limiting the analysis to the intent of sovereign rulers (*ibid.*).

Rationalities are made manifest in organised strategies, techniques and programmes aimed at directing human conduct and through which a governable subject is discursively constituted and produced. Governmentality is a political project aimed at fashioning and refashioning conduct based on cultural norms and values in order to elicit a particular image of human beings. Political rationalities emerge by combining what is desirable with what can be made possible through the necessity of practical interventionist techniques and strategies (Rose and Miller 1992). Such rationalities are not fixed or universal, but rather are heterogeneous and historically contingent responses to particular problems at particular times (McKee 2009). A key ingredient of political rationalities is the embodiment of a moral dimension through the articulation of 'truths' regarding human existence. Indeed, it is argued that the deployment of a neo-liberal political rationality amounts to cultural reconstruction aimed at limiting the role of the state, not through retrenchment, but rather through the intensification of moral regulation which expands the 'individualisation' of society through the 'responsibilising' of the self (Peters 2001). This cultural reconstruction denounces a culture of dependency promoted by the welfare state in order to give rise to an 'entrepreneurial self' and 'enterprise culture' in which individuals are simultaneously called upon to act as responsible moral agents and calculative rational choice actors improving their human capital through personal investment (*ibid.*). The previous chapter indicated how the negative social construction of unemployment is underpinned by suggestions of immoral

cultural attributes such as preferred worklessness. It is not the truth or falsity of such rationalities which matter, but rather how this social construction of knowledge is constructed as objective and forms a particular concept of the human subject. An analysis of governmentality then highlights the "inventedness of our world" (Burchell 1993:279) and exposes social policy as social artefacts determined by the particular historical trajectory of the society it is embedded in (Marston and McDonald 2006).

However, the concept of governmentality is not restricted to an analysis of state institutional power through which social policy is implemented. Foucault uses a broad notion of government which was common well into the 18th century in order to represent the links between forms of power and the process of subjectification. Thus, governmentality emerges as the link between Foucault's two seemingly disparate projects, on the one hand an interest in political rationalities evident in lectures and interviews, and on the other, an interest in the "genealogy of the subject" (Lemke 2000:2). It is through the problem of government that Foucault analyses the interconnections between technologies of domination and technologies of the self. The art of governing is then conceived as the 'conduct of conduct' ranging from self-governance to the governing of others (*ibid.*). The wordplay on conduct highlights a calculated attempt to direct human conduct toward particular ends (Dean 1999). Beyond an administrative management of a population, government includes self-control and guidance of others, such as family. Subjects are not simply made through a dominating power, but are active in their own governing and the governing of others through adherence to social codes and norms. While disciplinary and sovereign modes of power do not disappear, government is primarily operated through freedom. Subjectivities are not to be imposed but fostered and enticed as governing extends into the very soul of the individual (Rose 1999). Dean (1995:576) highlights how the reform of social security and income support practices

concerning unemployed citizens in Australia aimed at remaking individuals as active entrepreneurs of their self, combating the risk of dependency through an ethical obligation to job-seeking:

> … the jobseeker as active subject participates in activities that enhance his or her prospects of entering or returning to paid work, while at the same time remaining bound to social networks and engaging in practices that overcome those attributes (fatalism, boredom, loss of self-esteem) which constitute the 'risk of dependency'.

The terrain of governing is ubiquitous, going beyond the confines of the state apparatus to the public realm as well as the ethical self-formation of subjects so that welfare subjects are actively involved in shaping their self through techniques and strategies of self-improvement (Cruishank 1999; Rose 1999).

The concept of governmentality is permeated by Foucault's conception of power as a set of relations which is ubiquitous and subtle; moreover, modern power is made manifest as a micro-physics of power. This is a form of power which:

> … applies itself to immediate everyday life which categorises the individual, marks him by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity, imposes a law of truth on him which he must recognise and which others have to recognise in him. It is a form of power which makes individuals subjects. (Foucault 1982:212).

Such an approach denies the essentialist view of the individual as a pre-given entity; rather, the individual is both a product and instrument of relations of power (Foucault 1980). It rejects an understanding of power as hierarchical, monolithic and unidirectional in favour of a conception of power as a productive network permeating society which operates to shape and mobilise particular subjectivities (Foucault 1980). In contrast to negative conceptions of power as repressive, power, Foucault's (1982) is primarily concerned with understanding

how power structures the possible fields of actions available to individuals. Such an understanding of power is often viewed as negating the agency of individuals and thus undermining any possibility of resistance. Schrag (1999) reads Foucault's use of terms such as resistance and struggle as nothing more than rhetoric, arguing that for Foucault passive individuals are normalised and dominated through totalising structures. For Foucault (1977:194), power relations require a free subject capable of acting as they cannot be understood simply as negative impositions, but rather:

> … power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth. The objects and rituals of truth. The individual and the knowledge that may be gained of him belong to this production.

Subjects require the freedom to choose between competing strategies; power does not curtail or mark the body, but shapes the conditions of human action. Power relations are all encompassing and inescapable; however, that "power is everywhere" (Foucault 1977:63) does not mean that domination is all pervasive. Rather, to every discourse there is a counter-discourse, every new truth has the potential to exert a new regime of truth and every emancipatory power relies on the counter-power to which it is opposed (Butin 2001). Through technologies-of-the-self individuals can call upon, distort and/or subvert a multiplicity of socio-historically located discourses in producing subjectivities which, at various times, may be amenable to dominant rationalities; articulate forms of 'counter-conduct'; or a mixture (Foucault 2007). Power relations necessarily entail the possibility of action, thus, there is always the possibility of resistance, the lack of which cannot be taken to mean the lack of an ability to resist (Butin 2001). However, the choice implied within ethical self-formation downplays historical social, economic and political differentials of power which construct how we perceive and experience choices. Not enough attention is paid to

how power is related to social inequalities of class, race and gender; both in the differentials of accessibility to modes of power among varying social groups, and to how technologies of power can involve gendered or racist discourses (Cooper 1994). The research presented here will serve to explicate a more nuanced understanding of how power operates in the lives of participants.

However, the role of freedom within Foucault's conception of power is particularly useful in understanding the pervasive dominance of a neoliberal rationality which emphasizes individual choice within markets. Neoliberalism here refers to the infusion of market logic throughout society as a dominant "organizing principle for all social relations" (Soss, Fording and Schram 2009:2). It is one in which the state becomes an active instrument in constructing the neoliberal project via the development of market opportunities, absorption of market costs and the elicitation and/or imposition of market discipline (*ibid.*). Marketisation operates at three interrelated and mutually reinforcing levels: principles, (the deployment of economic rationality), practices (the production of policy spaces providing market opportunities) and people (the elicitation of self-governing consumer-citizens) (Whitworth and Carter 2014). This emergence of the competing creature involves a change in how human beings make themselves and are made as subjects by fostering the propensity to compete (Read 2009). This is aided by the expansion of the field and scope of economics which permeates the decision-making process of human beings to such an extent that everything for which human beings attempt to realise their ends, from marriage, to crime, to expenditure on children, is underlined by a cost-benefit analysis (*ibid.*). As argued in the previous chapter what emerges is capital's colonisation of the individual through work as both 'labour' and 'worker' are redefined to become 'human capital'; one invests in themselves through education and training to improve their capacity to earn income (*ibid.*). As subjects

we are shaped as *homo economicus* which is distinct from the legal subject of the state, *homo juridicus* (*ibid.*). For Foucault (2008:256), "*homo economicus* is an entrepreneur, an entrepreneur of himself". This neoliberal regime of truth shapes the competitive subject through a mode of governmentality which operates on interests, desires, and aspirations rather than solely on rights and obligations. Freedom is central to this neoliberal mode of governmentality as subjects require the freedom to choose between competing strategies. In this sense, neoliberalism is characterised by intensification as power becomes less restrictive but saturates the field of actions and possible actions (Read 2009). The government of unemployment becomes a key site for the construction of this neoliberal subjectivity through its elicitation of the active jobseeker rationality. The use of conditionality to enforce formal paid employment is central in closing routes of refusal by increasingly binding economic survival to labour market participation and the need for human capital development.

However, the exploration of power and its construction of subjectivity in governmentality studies are undermined by a dearth of empirical evidence. Studies which explore a 'discursive governmentality' are important in excavating evidence of political rationalities in government documents. However, there is at times a disconnection between the study of particular rationalities of rule and the social relations through which they operate (McKee 2009). For example, Peters (2001) identifies governmental attempts at fostering of an 'entrepreneurial self' and 'enterprise culture' in which conduct is refashioned toward an ethical obligation of self-investment in one's own human capital as a form of personal and social responsibility. However, this focus on the discursive realm limits the analysis to what is desired rather than to what is possible through the messy practical implementation of policy; it does not account for why the governable subject does not turn up in practice (McKee 2009). This concern with the perspective of the 'governors' implies a hierarchical

and monolithic representation of power which is imposed on individuals. Such an approach further hints at governmental programmes and strategies as cohesive projects rather than being internally contradictory, unpredictable and marked by conflict and contestation (*ibid.*). It is from this base then that the research makes a significant contribution through the focus on the experience and agency of job-seeker participants. It allows for exploration of how policies utilising conditionality and sanctions translate to street-level practice through their impact on participants and their navigation of their contours.

A further critique of the governmentality approach is its removal of sovereign power through the rejection of state theory. The capillary nature of Foucault's conception of power downplays the central role of the state as the notion of governing bursts the confines of state institutions to incorporate a plurality of sites involved in governing. Foucault (1991:101) dismissed the state as "a composite reality and a mythologized abstraction, whose importance is a lot more limited than many of us think". While Rose (1999:5), following Foucault, identifies the state:

> … simply as one element – whose function is historically specific and contextually variable – in multiple circuits of power, connecting a diversity of authorities and forces, within a whole complex of assemblages.

The governmental power of the state is neither all powerful nor unidirectional but rather a contingent and constrained multiplicity of practices contributing to the production of subjectivity (Cruikshank 1999). Yet, to describe the state apparatus as merely one element shaping the 'conduct of conduct' (Foucault 1980) seems to undermine its distinct and crucial role in enacting policies which are central in the deployment of particular rationalities directed toward the shaping of subjectivities. As Garland (1997) points out, under public law state agencies benefit from access to legal and economic resources as well as an array of

supporting organisations. This access to resources is complemented by their derivation of the discursive legitimacy of state power in validating authority. Kortewag's (1998) study of the self-formation of welfare mothers via their responses to welfare reform in the United States and the Netherlands highlights yet another example of the continued importance of the state. For many in receipt of social welfare payments, the state remains an important buffer between them and poverty. The state's management of poverty and provision of sustenance, pastoral power and the sovereign power of right over life provide it with its own logic of operation and unique power despite governmentalisation. In understanding how power relations operate the state deserves attention as not one element among many, but as an element which is crucial. This research seeks to complement and build upon the already existing empirical work in governmentality studies while analysing gendered differences in regards to modes of power; in doing so it will keep the state as a central element in understanding the exercise of power in governing.

3:3 Governmentality of Unemployment

A governmental approach to unemployment addresses policy as a regime of social practices which utilises techniques of government combined with the deployment of a particular political rationality. As highlighted above, this combination is oriented toward shaping human subjectivity and behaviour toward particular ends. As a mode of inquiry, it is useful in illustrating how every day practices involved in the implementation of policy aim to shape particular social identities, and how such identities are taken up or rejected (Marston *et.al* 2005). The International Labour Organisation defines unemployment as not working, but being available for work and seeking work. While this definition informs national approaches to unemployment, Boland and Griffin (2013) nonetheless note an absence of a coherent definition of unemployment with the result that it often exists as a statistical and tightly

controlled concept in most countries. The lean rigidity of this definition excludes much of the actual lived experience of unemployment and thus reinforces a rationality foregrounding a lack of work which invites political and societal judgement. It is therefore particularly problematic in analysing the experience of unemployment in advanced liberal democracies which involve a shift from welfare to workfare or activation emphasizing incentives to work and the enforcement of job-seeking (*ibid.*). This section begins by exploring the deployment of a particular rationality which individualizes the problem of unemployment. It then moves on to discuss the use of techniques which attempt to manifest the governing rationality through a focus on street-level bureaucracy (explored below) and case-management of clients.

- **3:3.1 Rationality**

Since the 1970s there has been a shift of emphasis in welfare states from matching the vocational desires of individuals to the needs of the economy to one involving a constant attuning of the 'self' through personal investment (Darmon and Perez 2011). For Rogers (2004) this includes a redefinition of the conditions in which unemployment is experienced; the problem of unemployment transforms from a concern with availability of jobs to the 'employability' of individuals and how a jobseeker performs and conducts themselves. Western welfare states have seen an increasing administration of policies and programmes which reorganise the boundaries of public and private responsibility for social welfare (Marston 2008). In 'the great risk shift' described by Hacker (2006) social policies seek to increasingly replace income assistance from the welfare state with increasing reliance on the private market. Concomitantly, such policies aimed at unemployed people are underlined by an intensified valorisation of work, denoted by 'welfare-to-work' and 'work-first' policy descriptions (Marston 2008). This has given rise to an emphasis on promoting formal paid

labour through policy tools of activation and welfare conditionality which is notable throughout OECD countries (Patrick 2012). The amalgamation of work and welfare produce a policy context in which receipt of welfare is increasingly dependent upon completing work related activities, a process some scholars term 'workfare' (Peck 2001; Marston 2008). Due to the similarities in goals and the blurring of the distinction between welfare and work this thesis uses activation and workfare interchangeably; a point returned to in the following chapter. These policies underline employment as the best form of security while emphasizing the twin planks of obligation and responsibility.

Paid work emerges as the primary social obligation while unemployed people and those viewed as 'economically inactive' (e.g. sick, in full-time study, carers) appear as problematic and in need of tough interventions (Patrick 2012). Katz (1989) highlights that contempt for the poor and support for capitalism have always been entwined since when people are measured by how much they produce, those who produce least of all are judged most harshly. Similarly, Warren (2005) identifies a long history of political rhetoric demarcating 'deserving' workers from 'undeserving' non-workers. The use of welfare conditionality as a means of activating claimants falls within this historical practice as it subtly neglects structural factors in preference for a focus on individual barriers to employment. This 'supply side' focus implicitly suggests that unemployment is a personal failing prompting division between workers and non-workers; the deserving and undeserving based on assumptions of perceived 'worklessness' in deprived communities (Patrick 2012). There is a burgeoning literature in the U.K demonstrating the role of shame and stigma in the politics of welfare as working class communities and minorities are bombarded with political denunciations of their irresponsibility (Shildrick 2018; Tyler 2013; Jensen 2014). This weaponisation of shame and the individualising rhetoric of responsibility may coalesce and

become internalised within the subject. Unemployment, defined in opposition to work, the lodestar around which income, identity, status and citizenship are orchestrated, becomes marked by an experience of insufficiency. Through their social, cultural and political values in relation to the master narrative of work and the derived value of unemployment shame and stigma may act as discursive macro-techniques prompting individuals into any work. Although the supposed 'worklessness' of unemployed people does not emerge in studies (Shildrick *et.al* 2012), workfare programmes nonetheless involve the assumption that unemployment benefits hinder labour market participation (Kalil *et.al* 2001). An assumption which often reflects the view of conservative social policy writers:

> To explain no work, I see no avoiding some appeal to psychology or culture. Mostly, seriously poor adults appear to avoid work, not because of their economic situation, but because of what they believe (Mead 1986:12).

This problematisation of unemployment provides a cognitive framework in which unemployment appears as personal failing and ignores structural facts while emphasising supply side solutions (Patrick 2012; Cole 2008).

Research has identified a degree of convergence in the policy of welfare states categorised within different worlds of welfare (Brodkin and Marston 2013). There is a similarity in rhetoric and discourse regarding activation, often underlined by the eulogisation of paid work, along with the conditionality of social assistance based on recipients' behaviour, and the promotion of self-reliance. Indeed, Marston *et.al's* (2005) comparison between Australia's liberal welfare state and Denmark's social democratic welfare state highlights similarities in employment policy discourse which emphasizes self-reliance through formal paid work, a neglect of demand side policies in favour of supply side strategies to combat unemployment and increasing use of new managerialism techniques and

case management in dealing with long-term unemployment. However, the authors are wary of overstating the degree of convergence, in particular, acknowledging the small sample used in the study (*ibid.*). Moreover, they argue that despite these similarities, these procedures and measures are not implemented in the same manner in both countries as case managers operate differently in each country (*ibid.*). However, while the 'active citizen' is shaped differently within different national contexts, there is nonetheless a ubiquitous discourse of self-reliance (*ibid.*). Such a discourse is derived from the neo-liberal rationality which prioritises and champions the self-enterprise of the individual; in order to overcome the perceived dependency hitherto induced by social welfare states the individual must be disciplined to be responsible and motivated to improve their self (Schram *et.al* 2010). To this end the state is restructured to operate according to market logics (Schram *et.al* 2010; Marston 2008). The obligation to work rises as the primary responsibility of the 'self-sufficient' citizen with citizenship itself recast as an economic entity reduced to self-care, maintaining one's needs through the market (Schram *et.al* 2010). However, as implied above, there is a need to explore national similarities and differences in the development of jobseekers encouraged toward life-long labour market attachment. This research is an attempt to aid in filling this gap by building on the limited existing research in Ireland (Boland and Griffin 2015a; Murphy 2016; Whelan 2017).

Baachi (1999) notes that the discursive framing of a problem inevitably frames and informs the potential solutions. Literature highlights the changing governmental approach to how the problem of unemployment is defined; the dominant concern is no longer of achieving full employment, but rather an individual concern with the employability of the individual (Wiggan 2012; Whitworth and Carter 2014; Boland and Griffin 2015a). Moreover, this focus on employability is situated within a mode of governing which enlists

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the agency of unemployed people to alter their behaviour, attitudes and practices; it is a form of governing *with*, rather than *of*, the targeted population (Walters 2000; Dean 1999). Cruikshank (1999:1) highlights how self-esteem and empowerment become ethical obligations of social responsibility and citizenship within this new mode of governing:

> Individual subjects are transformed into citizens by ... technologies of citizenship: discourses, programs and other tactics aimed at making individuals politically active and capable of self-government.

It was earlier noted how Dean's (1995) work illustrated the refashioning of unemployed individuals through the development of the correct attitudes, dispositions and conduct for 'job readiness'. This is concomitant with a shift in language where rather than a *claimant* being granted their rightful *benefit*, the state provides a conditional *allowance* to a *client*; *unemployed* benefits are replaced by a diversity of allowances and services for the *jobseeker* (*ibid.* p.574; emphasis in the original). Rogers (2004) emphasizes how this ethical subject is called upon through an analysis of two British government documents aimed at jobseekers: *the job kit: Your job search guide* and *Job hunting: a guide for managers, executives, professionals, new graduates*. The ethical subject of the 'good jobseeker' is constituted as a 'business professional' and 'thoroughly enterprising' individual whose days are organised around work-related activities (Rogers 2004). Individuals are not only expected to perform, but to adopt particular attitudes; to be motivated, flexible and not to become dispirited (*ibid.*). Rogers highlights that although both documents emphasize motivation and enterprise they are aimed at different category of jobseeker, with *the job kit* targeting long term unemployed lacking qualifications. Thus, it introduces a similar dichotomy to that of that of the 'deserving' and 'undeserving' through articulating a good jobseeker as opposed to a deviant jobseeker (*ibid.*). In this way categorisation, a shift in language and job-seeker assistance

materials operate as discursive techniques framing unemployment as an individualized problem to be overcome.

Moreover, the eulogisation of formal paid work which underpins labour activation and welfare conditionality contains an explicit gender dimension as it devalues other activities often occupied by women. Participating in formal paid work as the primary social obligation of citizens entails an ever-reducing category of those not expected to work (Lister 2003), while such a discourse is also exclusionary in undermining other forms of contribution, such as caring, parenting and volunteering (Patrick 2012). Moreover, there is an element of gender equality with a vengeance whereby the erosion of gender difference entails an imposition of sameness which is punitive to women (Haney 2004). Participants in Marston's research (2008) actively asserted their role as carers to their children as their societal contribution, yet as Marston highlights, the political challenge is to value care work in the public discourse regarding work and welfare. The difficulty of such a challenge varies across national contexts due to the social, political and cultural influences impacting the development of neoliberal rationality as well as constructions of gender. Korteweg's (1998) work has highlighted the different experience of 'activated' mothers in the United States and the Netherlands based on different socio-historical discourses around welfare and motherhood in each country. In the former, discourses surrounding laziness and the sexual promiscuity of poor women combined with an expanding conception of maternal responsibility beyond being a stay-at-home mother to incorporating participation in the labour market. The combining of these trends produced an understanding of a 'good subject' as worker-citizen who supports herself (*ibid.*). In contrast, women in the Netherlands could draw on discourses regarding the importance of motherhood previously protected by state legislation. Thus, when the state attempted to reframe obligation through changing the law,

these women utilised discourses regarding motherhood to argue for a shift in the law's requirement of engaging in paid employment to ensure that it did not detract from their motherhood (*ibid.*). Yet this resistance to commodification highlights the complexity of resistance since it operated through the articulation of dominant gender-based norms of social reproduction which are littered by inequalities. This suggests the difficulty of complete refusal as practices which attempt to escape conditionality may not escape broader related dominant and unequal societal power relations. It is also possible that one may be involved in a rejection of the practice of conditionality while simultaneously adhering to, and being governed by, the master narrative of work.

-   **3:3.2 Techniques**

The deployment of a neoliberal rationality of the self-enterprising and responsible individual is only one element of the governmentality of unemployment, constituting as it does the desired outcome, yet such an analysis of governmentality is incomplete without including the techniques through which what is desired becomes what is possible. Recent work on the governing of unemployed people seeks to go beyond a discursive analysis of policy documents to investigate the 'street-level' implementation and experience of policy (Jordan 2018; Welfare Conditionality Project 2018; Boland and Griffin 2015a). In pursuing this direction this research is also framed by the street level bureaucracy approach (Lipsky 1980). This approach emphasizes the micro-network relations of power operating at the frontline of policy implementation. In one sense this approach concerns itself with the space between intent and practice; how objectives outlined in policy documents translate into ground-level practices. Yet, it also positions street-level organisations such as social welfare offices as sites of policy construction. As Brodkin (2013) notes social policies are often the product of political indeterminacy due to internal inconsistencies and the need for compromise. Such

indeterminacy may produce unintentionally flexible policies which delineate space for interpretation at the ground level. Similar uncertainty may emerge at implementation level due to levels of discretion bestowed upon street-level bureaucrats (Brodkin 2013). 'Organic' approaches carried out by front-line workers may also flow upwards to become part of official policy. This was the case in Ireland where the street-level welfare practice of switching weekly payment locations for jobseekers prompted the latter's confused presence at their local office and provided an opportunity for engagement (Murphy *et.al* 2018).

The agency of bureaucrats within street-level organisations also marks it out as a site of politics whereby they become the enforcers or mediators of politically contested policy as well as structuring the possibilities of claims-making against the state, asserting rights and pursuing redress (Brodkin 2013). Given the othering of unemployed individuals street-level bureaucrats may also guard against or heighten the sense of stigma through interactions (Kingfisher 1996). In this sense street-level bureaucrats are fundamental to policy construction but also to the experience of welfare recipients since the former's interpretation, enforcement and mediation of policy may restrain or permit the agency of claimants in a multiplicity of ways. Research has highlighted how caseworkers can be sympathetic toward claimants while also avoiding the implementation of sanctions (McDonald and Marston 2005). Similarly, research has identified how caseworkers draw on identities as social workers to reject the onslaught of new managerialism reforms (Darmon and Perez 2011). Yet, McDonald and Marston's (2005) research underscores the importance of organisational rules in shaping caseworker behaviour as the decreased autonomy and discretion of Australian caseworkers resulted in a more punitive approach than their less restrained Danish counterparts. This experience of frontline workers is obviously missing from this research. This is primarily due to difficulty in gaining access to social welfare offices in Ireland. It is

also due to the desire to explore the experiences of those welfare claimants in the midst of an emerging government of unemployment underpinned by work-related conditionality and stigmatised othering through political and media rhetoric. The question regarding the experiences and roles of street-level organisations and bureaucrats in Ireland is an important one which is fundamental to understanding claimants' experience of welfare as well as to robust and rounded policy evaluations. For the time being however this research draws on street-level bureaucracy theory to explore the opposite side of the relationship. It is concerned with exploring the agency of the street-level client as they navigate the interactions with social welfare offices and caseworkers as well as the contours of state power and policy mediated through them.

This approach opens up the micro-politics of unemployment and welfare by illustrating how claimants interact with and respond to policy as it is negotiated and implemented by frontline staff. Case management acts as a technology of government which combined with the deployment of a neoliberal rationality aims at eliciting subjectivities congruent with the self-enterprising individual of the active society. Social welfare claimants appear as malleable entities to be shaped through interaction with case managers; the jobseeker is inadequate but adaptable. The good jobseeker must be realistic in recognising their limitations and adjust their expectations accordingly while nonetheless being aspirational (Boland and Griffin 2018; Damon and Perez 2011; Marston *et.al* 2005; Rogers 2004). Indeed, the welfare office operates as a site of surveillance and social control disciplining claimants to the logic of the market as individuals are required to attend meetings at the request of case managers; to have knowledge to navigate the process, while performing the obligations of the jobseeker (Boland and Griffin 2013). For Schram *et.al* (2010) the contemporary overarching paternalism of social welfare states is tied to a neoliberal

rationality and implemented through new managerialism evident in the control exerted through intensive case management. This underlines the importance of knowledge within the process as social work turns into technocratic categorisation in order to make individuals manageable (Caswell *et.al* 2010). For example, under *Pathways to Work,* local welfare offices in Ireland utilise the Probability of Exit (PEX) algorithm to classify clients according to their distance from the labour market and to determine interventions based on this. The reduced discretion of the caseworker is often allied to a proliferation of standardized procedural techniques through behavioural conditionality (e.g. attending interviews, responding to letters, job-search activity, human capital development, signing on). Augmenting these are techniques of surveillance and monitoring (e.g. provision of job search evidence) as well as sanctions for non-compliance (Watts and Fitzpatrick 2018).

This highlights the 'governing of those who do the governing' as frontline workers increasingly work toward standards and are obliged to meet targets in order to continue employment (Schram *et.al* 2010). The attempted erosion of the street-level worker's discretion through standardized techniques, as discussed above, can serve to erode the complexity of individuals and their needs; replacing them with a categorised statistic (Caswell *et.al* 2010). These changes may also produce a new professional identity for the jobseeker where unemployment becomes a type of work in which benefits are conditional on fulfilling obligations (Boland and Griffin 2013). To obtain benefits, an unemployed individual must apply for and undergo a recruitment process, performing a role to then sustain benefits through attending a particular office at set times and performing specific acts while holidays are limited (*ibid.*). Personal progression plans, caseworker guidance, job-search activity, training and educational courses – the good jobseeker must be motivated, optimistic and committed to the development of their human capital (Rogers 2004). As

already noted, the 'street-level' focus has tended to be restricted to workers. Moreover, despite organisational changes street-level workers do often appear as active agents capable of negotiation and resistance in relation to policy practice, but there appears little about agency and resistance in relation to the welfare claimants in the literature. This research incorporates the SLB (Brodkin 2013) approach alongside Lister's (2004) typology of agency (discussed below) within a governmentality approach. As such, it is a hypothesis of this thesis that theorizing the agency of claimants, as we do workers, will lead to uncovering nuanced practices of complicity, resistance and/or refusal.

3:4 Agency and Resistance

As the preceding discussion demonstrates the governmentality approach is valuable in explicating the historically contingent macro-level endeavours at governing particular populations in particular ways. It draws attention to the constructed political rationalities which attempt to define how social issues can be thought about, spoke about and the attendant techniques which attempt to align individuals' behaviour with it. What counts here is a not merely an ideological 'buy in' to a neoliberal rationality, but rather how it combines with techniques of governmentality to shape possibilities for freedom and autonomy (Dean 1999). Yet, the approach has its limitations, most notably through its underdeveloped conception of agency. Foucault does not do away with agency or resistance but situates it in constant relation to power, whereby dominant power is always operating, though not totalising, as it attempts to shape the avenues of possibilities, often in minute and mundane ways. As such, its truths may permeate to varying degrees, be rejected or contested in the practices of ethical self-formation which engage with and navigate the contours the power. However, while this would suggest that agency is foregrounded within a governmental approach (Whitworth and Carter 2014) it is in fact to cast the conception of agency and the

possibility of resistance so broad as to tell us very little about it in practice. What are the specific modes of engagement with dominant power and its particular truths regarding particular social issues; does it produce complicity, subversion or a mixture; how and in what ways do these emerge? In conceptualising the agency of the participants then I complement the macro-level governmental approach with a number of other approaches. The previous chapter outlined the autonomist refusal of work (Tronti 1966b) and Deleuze's 'lines of flight' (1995), while the benefits of a street-level perspective have been outlined earlier in this chapter. These are joined with the often hidden 'everyday resistance' (Scott 1985; de Certeau 1984) and situated within Lister's (2004) typology of agency. In this way the thesis can recognise and explore the practices of the active welfare subject even within existing relational constraints produced by policy, culture, politics and economics.

Lister's recognition of the welfare subject as always already active forms a counterpoint to the dominant conception of welfare recipients outlined primarily by right-wing thinkers and which animates the reasoning of active labour market policies. Within this dominant conception the welfare subject is situated as deficient and in need of raft of interventions in order to 'become' active (Wright 2016), where being active is increasingly associated with labour market participation (Brodkin 2013). The perceived passivity of individuals situates them as "dutiful, but defeated" to the extent that supposed financial rewards of work carry little motivational weight (Mead 1992:133). At more extreme ends the problem is defined as one of an acute moral irresponsibility through a prevalence of cultural values manifested in preference for welfare benefits over paid employment (Dunn 2014; Murray 1990). Le Grand (2003) has bound this economic maximiser to the possibilities of empowerment bestowed by work-related conditionality which supposedly channels the maximisation of economic self-interest into the formal labour market. However, the model

neglects the fact that unemployment benefits have always been mediated by criteria regarding eligibility and circumstance as well as requiring behavioural conditions of being available for and actively seeking. Moreover, the focus on 'inactivity' and 'deficiency' redefines the problem of unemployment as an individual one, eschewing structural issues while simultaneously facilitating moralising judgements regarding the deviant behaviour of non-workers (Wright 2016). In this way the model's emphasis on passivity not only elides the real lived experience of welfare subjects engaged in a multiplicity of non-work activities but actively shapes and penetrates it through stigmatisation, shame and othering.

Where the dominant model brackets socio-economic and cultural barriers Lister's (2004) typology recognises and contextualises agency as operating within the restraints of wider structural issues. One of the key strengths of Lister's typology (Figure 2) is its ability to capture a broad array of intersecting forms of agency spread across two axes: the everyday-strategic axis and the personal-political/citizenship axis. Each quadrant in the typology indicates a different type of agency. The personal-everyday 'getting by' refers to the mundane but fundamental material and psychological coping mechanisms deployed by individuals on welfare. The more personal-strategic agency of 'getting out' identifies the ways in which welfare recipients seek to get out of the welfare system, often through paid employment or education (Lister 2004). The political/citizenship-everyday 'getting back at' refers to the ways in which claimants' agency manifests in resistance, while this potentially points toward interactions within welfare offices it most commonly emerges in the literature through politicised interpretations of welfare fraud. While this represents a level of individualised agency, the political/citizenship-strategic 'getting organised' points toward both collectivised coping mechanisms through organic communities of self-help as well as to politicised collective mobilisations around issues (Lister 2004). In operating as a continuum

the typology permits an understanding of the fluidity of agency as participants may occupy

more than one position on the grid. In doing so it undermines a static view of the

homogenised passive and deficient welfare subject in favour of heterogeneity and the

recognition of an already existing multiplicity of activities (Wright 2016).

Figure 2: Lister's Typology of Agency

Source: Lister (2004; 2015)

That the typology allows for a board capture of forms of agency is both its strength

and weakness. Indeed, the typology emerged more as a heuristic device to capture forms of

agency across different studies of poverty and welfare. While Lister recognises the

importance of policy and structural issues in restraining agency one must come armed with

their own macro-level framework of how these operate. In pursuing an exploration of

individuals' agency as they experience, navigate and resist work-related conditionality

Lister's typology neatly complements the governmental framework. While the latter aids in illustrating policy objectives it also frames the possibilities of agency which Lister's typology then draws out. It elucidates the governing rationality which plays out in the lived experience of individuals whether through incorporation or rejection of its truths as well as the ways in which it may mobilise stigmatised othering of welfare claimants. Similarly its delineation of the attendant techniques situates the contact point for claimants' interaction with the government of unemployment attempting to shape and manoeuvre their behaviour. Moreover, this is set against a backdrop of recession, austerity, welfare cuts and reduced living standards (outlined in Chapter Five) which further restrain and inform decision-making related to agency. Although Lister (2004) recognises the possibility of negative agency there is a critique as to how well her typology captures the 'go away effect' in which individuals move off welfare into unknown destinations. Such an exit cannot adequately be thought of as holding the long-term strategic element of 'getting out' of welfare nor does it constitute action against the system which demarcates it as 'getting back at'. Indeed, it may partly explain why this research found little reference to the 'go away' effect beyond one drastic interpretation through attempted suicide. With this important qualification in mind, Lister's typology is nonetheless suited to complementing a governmentality approach. The limits of one approach are the strength of the other and the benefit of combining them here is that it provides an understanding of what the new mode of governing unemployment attempts to achieve but also what, if anything, it achieves at the concrete level of interaction with welfare recipients.

In exploring interactions with social welfare offices and caseworkers from the perspective of unemployed benefit claimants the research further nuances the conceptualisation of agency by drawing on literature regarding everyday resistance tactics.

In particular I make use of de Certeau's (1984) emphasis on bottom-up tactics, developed in response to Foucault's emphasis on power's ubiquity. Tactics denote the inventive possibilities that individuals can draw upon to navigate the assemblages of power. These 'guileful ruses' or 'trickery' (de Certeau 1984:52) are carried out across dominant power's own terrain, operating in its blind-spots to exploit cracks and chart out one's own trajectory as far as possible within the multiplicity of economic, cultural, political and policy constraints. In this sense the research explores interactions to document the often covert and hidden 'weapons of the weak' (Scott 1985) which may emerge across the different forms of participants' agency as they engage with work-related conditionality in its multiple guises. Within this research it emerges primarily in the dramaturgical performance of compliance; or the 'tactical mimicry' (de Certeau 1984) of the good jobseeker. For Scott (1985) such forms of everyday resistance operate in the space between mere acceptance and revolt as battles over autonomy and control in the immediate lived experience of individuals. Set within the context of welfare provision this space is one filled with the risk of losing income provision as individuals feel out acceptable boundaries in which resistance and pursuit of one's own needs and interests goes unnoticed or may even be tolerated (Trethewey 1997). Personal-political/citizenship therefore involves exploring the individualised nature of these interactions, whether they constitute politicised activities and their relation to collective political organising.

3:5 Conclusion

A governmentality approach to unemployment shifts the focal point from physical compliance per se to a more subtle and nuanced understanding of how power is productive and the process of subjectification toward particular ends. A focus on the rationality and

techniques used in governing unemployment highlights their convergence on the object of enforcing paid work on unemployed people. In this sense it also illustrates the socio-historically contingent nature of how unemployment is interpreted; one which is maintained through an active job-seeking rationality defined by and reinforcing the master narrative of work and which draws on techniques of power to ensure its reality as far as possible. However, there are a number of current limitations to the existing literature on the governmentality of unemployment. First, the literature is not extensive in terms of the number of national settings which have been studied as such our understanding of convergences and differences is under-researched. Little work has been done in the Irish context and the current work will provide an important addendum to existing literature. This research is of further benefit through its diverse range of participants, including jobseekers, discouraged jobseekers and lone parent jobseekers, while its focus on gender also ensures an analysis of how men and women experience the governmentality of their lives differently. The place of resistance in this process is under-researched and under-theorised, with agency and resistance potentially left stranded on an individual level where they draw on multiple discourses in their ethical self-formation. This approach is so broad as to tell us very little. This research draws on Lister's (2004) typology as a bottom up conceptualisation of agency as it interacts with the governmental rationality of active job-seeking and techniques of work-related conditionality. In doing so it draws out a nuanced experience at the 'street-level' which captures multiple and intersecting forms of agency including how participants manage the day to day experience of unemployment. As such it captures adherence to governmental rationalities, but also the tactics of resistance, possible points of refusal or lines of flight as well as possible longer-term strategies and goals which operate within and across the political, cultural, economic and policy constraints.

CHAPTER FOUR: CONDITIONALITY IN AN INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT

4:1 Introduction

Conditionality appears in a myriad of ways across different national contexts. Across these varying national settings, the types of conditions and the ways in which they interact is influenced by the broader institutional complexity of welfare states. Conditionality is further muddied by the diverging approaches to understanding welfare reforms as either representing an intensification of 'activation', with an emphasis on human capital development, or as an indication of a more punitive and work focused shift to 'workfare'. Underlying these approaches are a multiplicity of philosophical justifications: contractualism, mutualism and paternalism as well as a medley of these, which in different ways draw on and reinforce perceptions of welfare dependency. However, to lessen the burden on the reader the discussion of these justifications for the practice of conditionality can be found in Appendix 2. This chapter begins by delving straight into the debate regarding 'activation' and 'workfare'. In doing so, it highlights the emergence of a broadly similar "programmatic toolkit" (Brodkin 2013:7) most adequately captured under the theme of 'workfare' due to its emphasis on paid work, reduction in public assistance and use of conditionality and sanctions. In relation to this the section explores dominant trends in relation to the practice of work-related conditionality and sanctions. The subsequent section explores the gendered nature of labour markets, welfare and labour activation and how these policies have affected women. The review then moves on to discuss evidence of the effectiveness regarding conditionality and its related sanctions. From here, the chapter discusses a critical political economy literature which interprets moves toward 'workfare' as representing a broader shift in neo-liberal governance in which individuals are 're-commodified' to fulfil the needs of capital and economic competitiveness. Indeed, by looking to the past it is possible to

perceive historical antecedents to contemporary workfare's management of the poor and

unemployed. Finally, the chapter highlights the lack of attention extended to welfare

recipients' agency, and resistance, in relation to welfare reforms and conditionality in

particular.

4:2 Activation or Workfare?

Activation can be understood as a policy strategy in which benefit rules, employment or

training services are intended in such a way as to move unemployment income recipients into

work and in doing so utilise a diversity of interventions including fiscal policy, public

service, education/training, conditions and sanctions (Lodemel and Moreria 2014). Yet, it

often appears as a diffuse concept due to a heterogeneity of national policies which may

differ according to their extent, implementation and overall orientation (Bonoli 2010).

O'Connell (2017) attempts to capture this variety by identifying four dimensions of

activation systems (see Figure 3). Within this schema the *nature of the intervention* and the

scale of the implementation relates to ALMPs while the *level of support* and *conditionality*

points to the relationship between activation and the welfare state. How the different

dimensions interact can aid in accounting for variability across national approaches. Low

levels of intervention concomitant with strict conditionality suggests a work-first orientation

in which claimants are expected to take any job. On the other hand, high levels of

intervention allied to targeted implementation suggests an approach dedicated to human

capital development aimed at better quality and more sustainable employment. This cross-

national diversity of approaches is primarily the product of institutional and democratic path

dependency denoting a county's particular welfare policy legacy and organisational designs

and interests which informs and delimits political choices in this regard (Esping-Anderson

2000). Bonoli (2010) highlights the role of changing economic contexts in shaping national

variations as existing labour market policies must be adapted and/or replaced as economic and labour market needs dictate. As the following chapter will show the changed economic circumstances of post 2008 Ireland played an important role in not only ushering in new active labour market policies but in shaping their design also.

Figure 3: Four Key Dimensions of Activation Systems (O'Connell 2017)
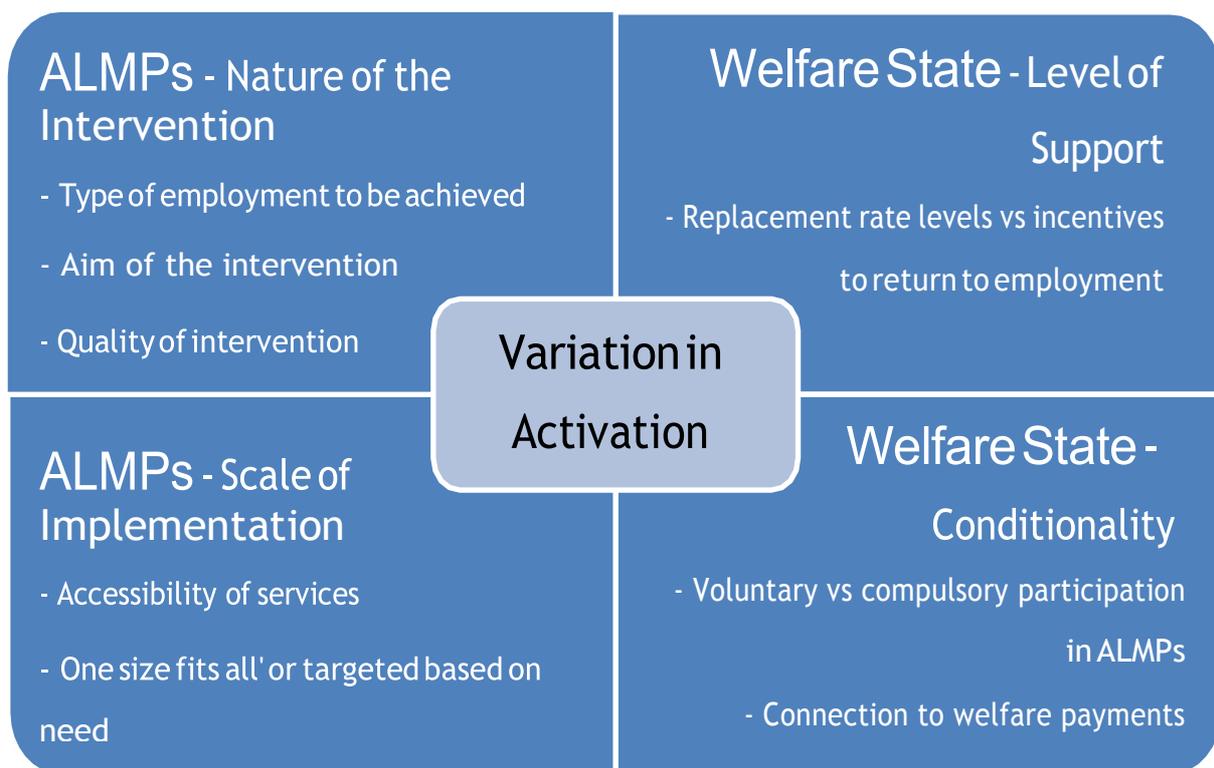
The distinction highlighted above mirrors an early analytical dichotomy between European activation policies emphasizing human capital as opposed to U.S 'work-first' or 'workfare' policies emphasizing self-reliance through paid employment (Murphy 2016). Similarly, Lodemel and Moreria (2014) differentiate workfare as the compulsory participation in paid employment from activation which they regard as the compulsory participation in other active labour market policies, such as education and training. Denmark

and the Nordic countries are often situated as exemplars of the latter in which training and education are central to a process of upskilling toward quality employment. The work-first approach is differentiated by a narrower and more strict focus on employment where any job is regarded as better than none, and the state rather than the individual dictates which job should be taken (Knotz and Nelson 2015). It therefore involves strong work incentives, high conditionality and the monitoring of job search activity underpinned by a use of sanctions. Bonoli's (2010) typology of activation strategies in the form of ALMPs (see Figure 4) is useful in teasing out the types of policies used by countries as well as their impact on the political economy. Within this framework Bonoli (2010) distinguishes between a *pro-market employment orientation* and an *emphasis on human capital development*. This initial demarcation is then developed by identifying four types of ALMPs: (1) *incentive reinforcement* denotes punitive approaches of benefit reductions, high conditionality and sanctions as well as positive in-work supports; (2) *employment assistance* attempts to remove obstacles to labour market participation through counselling, job search programmes and job placements as well as supports to overcome childcare issues and other barriers; (3) *occupation* aims at sustaining human capital through job creation and work experience programmes; and (4) *upskilling* which provides job related vocational training to those who did not profit from training systems or whose skills have become obsolete.

Figure 4: Four Types of Active Labour Market Policy (Bonoli 2010)

PROMARKET EMPLOYMENT ORIENTATION	INVESTMENT IN HUMAN CAPITAL		
	None	Weak	Strong
Weak	(passive benefits)	**Occupation** Job creation schemes in the public sector Non-employment related training programmes	(basic education)
Strong	**Incentive reinforcement** Tax credits, in work benefits Time limits on recipiency Benefit reductions Benefit Conditionality	**Employment Assistance** Placement services Job subsidies Counselling Job search programme	**Upskilling** Job-related vocational training

While most countries use a mix of ALMPs Bonoli (2010) does identify that particular ALMPs emerge and predominate as a response to changing economic contexts. For example, ALMPs originated in Sweden during the 1950s as a response to labour shortages which emphasized (re)training of unemployed individuals as a means of producing a steady supply of qualified labour. This emphasis on upskilling similarly underpinned ALMPs in Germany and Italy during the 1950s and 1960s, although in more limited versions. The economic crisis and resulting mass unemployment precipitated by the oil shocks of the 1970s re-orientated ALMPs in Sweden, Germany and France toward 'occupation' aimed at the maintenance of human capital rather than labour market (re)entry. Sweden, for example,

witnessed a shift from supply to demand side measures through the creation of training programs and temporary jobs in the public sector. A further re-orientation, Bonoli (2010) argues, occurs in the 1990s due to rising employment in most OECD countries meaning that most unemployment was the result of an excess supply of low-skill labour. The lower earning potential for these unemployed individuals provided work disincentives that needed correction through an 'activation turn' in the form ALMPs emphasizing stronger work incentives and employment assistance.

Evidence of this 'activation turn' suggesting a move toward a pro-market employment orientation in ALMPs is also provided in a recent study regarding the strictness of unemployment benefit conditions and use of sanctions in 21 countries between 1980 and 2012. It highlights that the strictness of conditionality and sanctions has increased over time since 1990 and is most evident in limitations placed on occupational mobility, job search activity and reporting of such (Knotz 2018). While there are caveats in that protective limitations around working parents or religious and ethnic minorities have generally increased there is nonetheless a trend towards enforcing the obligation to *actively seek work* that extends beyond traditionally 'work-first' regimes (Knotz 2018). For example, the Swedish system has seen a re-working toward pro-market employment measures including enforced occupational fluidity and the use of 'activity agreements' (Bonoli 2010). At the forefront of this turn are two countries, Denmark and UK, which were previously laggards in developing ALMPs. The Danish re-orientation saw the introduction of time-limits for claiming unemployment benefit, the strengthening of work-availability requirements and the introduction of personalized action plans. Similarly, the UK's approach increasingly adopted a mix of *employment assistance* such as intensive caseworker interventions and *incentive reinforcement* measures such as in-work benefits, benefit reductions, increasing

conditionality and sanctions (Dwyer 2010; Bonoli 2010). Importantly, while *incentive reinforcement and employment assistance* increased in both Denmark and the UK, in the former it was allied to generous welfare payments and continued high investment in human capital which was lacking in the UK (Bonoli 2010). Unemployed individuals in the UK are therefore prompted toward any job regardless of quality while in Denmark the continued focus on *upskilling* and generous payments suggests a provision of security to individuals as well as flexible labour transitions into better quality employment. As will be shown in the following chapter this is particularly important in the Irish context in which the relatively late 'activation turn' is marked by *employment assistance* and *incentive reinforcement* (although *Occupation and Upskilling* remain) and operates within a labour market predicated on low pay.

Approaches differ on the extent to which such policies are 'enabling', 'regulatory' or represent a 'social investment' and there appears a difficulty in drawing conceptual distinctions between these categories (Bonoli 2010). There is then a need to focus the analysis on the emerging assemblage of "financial incentives to work, integrating benefit and employment services and governance mechanisms associated with privatisation and marketisation" (Murphy 2016:5). Bonoli (2010) highlights how by middle of the 2000s the original focus on active labour market programmes and regulating the job-search behaviour of unemployed people had broadened to incorporate interactions between income systems, ALMPS, conditionality and governance of employment services with a focus on returning individuals to work. With this in mind, a deeply embedded 'global workfare project' can be identified which incorporates an assortment of enabling policies (education, training, public services), regulatory (sanctions and withdrawal of alternative forms of welfare) and compensation measures (supports to make work pay) (Brodkin 2013). This is not a single

path with a consistent or coherent implementation across activation regimes, yet there are composites of policies and practices drawn from a similar "programmatic toolkit" emphasizing labour market participation and a reduction in social assistance (Brodkin 2013:3-7). Threading the diversity of policies and their practical implementation is a tendency toward implementing work-related obligations as a condition of receiving benefits and investment in ALMPS or in work-benefits to expedite a return to the labour market (Murphy 2016). As such, the boundaries between work and welfare are blurring as the former becomes more central to the latter and create tensions in the lived experience of their intersection due to a privileging of paid work as central to individual and societal well-being. It is this under-researched space of the lived experience in the nexus between work and welfare which this project takes as its focus. Given this similar 'programmatic toolkit', and as we will see Ireland's dominant work-first approach, this thesis uses workfare and activation interchangeably throughout.

4:3 Workfare and Gender

Across western welfare states women have increasingly become a target for workfare programmes. As discussed in the next chapter Ireland has followed this lead through an extension of work-related conditionality to lone parents in 2015. The literature has so far overlooked the highly gendered nature of welfare which permeates into construction and implementation of workfare reforms (Ingold and Etherington 2013). The actors and institutional arrangements in which unemployment and labour activation policies are constructed are male dominated. As such, gender inequality is created, maintained and reproduced by the practices and processes of such institutions (Daly 2011). Workfare programmes stress formal paid employment as a primary requirement of citizenship. This interpretation of citizenship is built upon an individualised 'adult worker model' (Lewis 2001)

or a 'universal breadwinner model' (Fraser 1989). Orloff (1993) argues that men make claims based on entitlement as 'worker-citizens', while women make claims as both workers and family members. Sainsbury (1996) suggests women's visibility in welfare systems can be primarily attributed to the 'principle of care' derived from caring for both children and adults. Workfare's individualising of the problem of unemployment means that such responsibilities are ignored as interventions focus primarily on promoting labour market participation of the individuals targeted.

In the U.S for example there has long been an intersection of racial and gender stereotyping made manifest through tales regarding the welfare dependency of 'welfare queens' (Schram *et.al* 2010). Indeed, a key component of the PRWORA reforms during the 1990s was a re-interpretation of women's responsibility. This occurred through an emphasis on self-reliance through paid work in which the responsibility of motherhood was superseded by a responsibility to provide through participation in the labour market (Kortewag 2008). In Australia, stay at home mothers fell under the purview of a new 'active' line of welfare from 1990s into the 2000s through three particular reforms: Working Nation (1994), Australians Working Together (2003) and Welfare to Work (2006). Working Nation (1994) partially individualised benefits through its requirement that partnered women in Australia claim benefits in their own right (Ingold and Etherington 2013). The Australians Working Together (2003) intensified this work-related conditionality for partnered women and lone parents. Moreover, Welfare to Work (2006) required partnered parents to claim unemployment benefit while also introducing a requirement of 15 hours of paid work per week once the youngest child became six (*ibid.*). Indeed, this emphasis on work was arguably accelerated by Australia's reliance on private providers which lacked sufficient experience of

working with women and often place partnered women in short term or inappropriate work (*ibid.*).

Similarly, in the UK, mothers were 'activated' through a voluntary initiative, the New Deal for Partners, in 1999. The rationale for this programme was to recognise dependent partnered women as potential labour market participants (Ingold and Etherington 2013). This was further intensified in 2001 through the introduction of the Joint Claims for Jobseeker's Allowance in which both individuals in a relationship were expected to be available for work. A requirement which was further extended through the Welfare Reform Act to couples with children aged seven over (Ingold and Etherington 2013). Indeed, this move toward conditionality targeting women is intensified through the individualised conditionality of Universal Credit which nonetheless is only paid to one individual in the household. Universal Credit's focus on increased hours or wages increases lone parents' risk of income deprivation due to the lack of availability regarding longer-hours employment. A risk compounded by ignorance toward the domestic responsibilities and heightened barriers to employment faced by lone parents (Rafferty and Wiggan 2017). Moreover, the provider led delivery model within the UK tends toward short-term placements which neglect the potential of education or training in aiding women to form a career path (Ingold and Etherington 2013). While justifications of policy goals suggest employment as a route out of poverty the focus on short-term placements and the invisibility of both barriers and needs suggests a simultaneous interest in reconfiguring labour markets based on flexible employment. As argued in Chapter Two there emerges a political function of conditionality, operating in conjunction with and through the master narrative of work, to expanding and maintaining a labour supply suitable to the needs of capital.

Throughout these regimes there appears a characterisation of women as 'inactive' due to a lack of participation in the labour market. As a result, socially necessary work in the voluntary sector and care work in the home appears unappreciated and insufficient for substantive citizenship. As noted in the previous chapter, pronouncing everyone a worker amounts to equality with a vengeance as the assumptions inherent within such policies fail to capture the complexity of women's lived experience (Rubery 2014; Lewis 2001). Such an approach fails to acknowledge both the gender division of paid and unpaid work and the care responsibilities of women which make paid work infeasible or undesirable. In this sense it suggests a male breadwinner model of action (Murphy 2012). In this way, issues regarding poverty and women can be redrawn as a problem of 'economic inactivity' rather than a lack of suitable work and/or adequate pay while also paying little heed to the unequal distribution of caring responsibilities (Murphy 2012; Rafferty and Wiggan 2017). It also highlights the political construction of choice as policy utilises the master narrative of work to bind choice to trajectories into the labour market (Rafferty and Wiggan 2011). In this sense it can involve a re-organisation of gendered moral rationalities indicating how mothers negotiate motherhood, caring and their relationships to paid employment as they decide what is morally acceptable based on gendered socio-historical norms (Duncan and Edwards 1997). Mothers develop perceptions and self-understandings based on varying entwinements of these different aspects which produce subjectivities ranging from 'primarily mother' where primacy is given to caring for children; 'primarily worker' denoting self-identification as workers; and 'worker/mother integral' in which long hours of paid employment are perceived as crucial aspect of being a good mother both in terms of providing for family and setting an example to their children (Duncan and Irwin 2004). In reorganising the connection between welfare and work to accentuate the latter as a key social responsibility of citizens it

undermines the work of women and the notion of care itself, while simultaneously paying little attention to the needs of the women targeted.

4:4 The Effectiveness of Conditionality and Sanctions

Evidence for the effectiveness of conditionality and sanctions in activation policies is contested, at times contradictory and ultimately inconclusive (Watts and Fitzpatrick 2018). Some studies suggest stricter conditionality and activation policies correlate with lower levels of structural unemployment; similarly, a strict replacement criterion and more active labour market policies are seen to lead to lower levels of unemployment, while a higher replacement rate or longer duration correlates to higher actual and structural unemployment (Martin 2014; Hasselpflug 2005). Other meta-analyses suggest that what counts is the type of programme with direct employment subsidies and public job creation having little impact over the short-term (Vooren *et.al* 2018; Card *et.al* 2015; Kluve 2006). These studies point to enhanced services and sanctions through a combined use of conditions, monitoring and training as well as sanctions for non-compliance as more effective. To complicate the matter further, the evidence on the impact and effectiveness of sanctions is mixed. One international review of the evidence found that:

> ... sanctions for employment-related conditions (full-family sanctions in the case of
> the US welfare systems) strongly reduce benefit use and raise exits from benefits, but
> have a generally unfavourable effects on longer-term outcomes (earnings over time,
> child welfare, job quality) and spill-over effects (i.e. crime rates). (Griggs and Evans
> 2010:5).

Moreover, material hardship is frequently reported by sanctioned claimants, in particular, those claimants with dependents and/or no other source of income (Welfare Conditionality Project 2018; Griggs and Evans 2010). The intensification of welfare conditionality

supported by sanctions aims at directing behavioural change (Miscampbell 2014), yet

evidence from the UK and US suggests that although recipients know penalties are part of the

system they have little knowledge of how such penalties are imposed and how they could be

avoided or reversed (Watts and Fitzpatrick 2018; Welfare Conditionality Project 2018; Watts

et.al 2014; Griggs and Evans 2010). For some this suggests claimants do not make an active

decision to circumvent conditions but are effectively punished for a lack of understanding

(Griggs and Evans 2014). It is also possible that while claimants may not have full

knowledge of the sanctioning system they may nonetheless be involved in creative

manipulation of conditionality.

The extent to which sanctions are effective in securing compliance and directing

behaviour in the UK is also mixed. Studies suggest that the threat of sanctions do prompt

recipients to increase job search activity or to take up work programmes, particularly

following a penalty (Watts *et.al* 2014). On the other hand, some claimants are unwilling or

unable to comply regardless of the consequences with the result that sanctions are

counterproductive in producing negative feelings toward services and/or about work (Watts

et.al 2014). International evidence suggests that the privatisation of employment

programmes utilising performance-based contracts improves the short-term job prospects of

claimants (Finn 2008; Kluve 2006). However, there is also evidence of providers 'cherry

picking' cases most likely to succeed, further disadvantaging vulnerable claimants distant

from the labour market (Finn 2008). Furthermore, Watts *et.al* (2014) state that comparisons

between the claimant unemployment count and the official based unemployment measure in

the UK suggests indirect evidence that tightened sanctions and conditions provoke exits from

unemployment benefits into unknown destinations. This intensification of sanctions as a

means of directing people off welfare reflects the deliberate diversion from welfare through

'hassling' found within the US system (Mead 2014). The evidence suggests that when considering conditionality and sanctions the framing of the problem is important with studies predominantly focusing on the short-term effect of directing claimants off welfare. The approach taken here represents in some respects a reversal of this perspective as it begins from the assumption that claimants are always already active (Lister 2004; Wright 2016). From here it can then explore how these macro-level concerns play out in the experience of the welfare claimants as they interact with and navigate through welfare agencies and work-related conditionality.

4:5 The Political Economy of Work-Related Conditionality

The current literature on conditionality is limited due to its neglect of the strategic and structural concerns of capitalism in conceptualising conditionality (Grover 2012). Within much of the existing literature problems with conditionality are understood as administrative and technical in character while the role of wider state craft and capital in framing the dominance of economic imperatives goes unchallenged (*ibid.*). Indeed, even critics of activation are accepting of its ostensible role in increasing employment and restrict their criticisms to its effectiveness (Berry 2014). Moreover, while it is suggested that activation provides a particular solution to a particular labour market problem (Bonoli 2010; Clasen and Clegg 2006), this view neglects how its conjunction with other measures, underlined by the needs of capital, help to shape a particular labour market (Murphy 2017; Murphy and Loftus 2015; Wiggan 2015a; Berry 2014; Raffass 2017, 2016). Activation is animated by a 'supply side fundamentalism' (Peck and Theodore 2000) which not only emphasises the 'employability' of welfare recipients while simultaneously shifting responsibility for improving 'employability' onto recipients themselves, thus constructing them as the cause of their situation. This is reinforced by the dominant discourse which portrays unemployment

and poverty as caused by cultures of 'worklessness' and 'dependency' (Wiggan 2012). Activation ostensibly aims at increasing the amount of people in employment, yet without a focus on labour demand it instead only ensures a steady supply of people available for work (Raffass 2016; Wiggan 2015a; Berry 2014). Such policies amount to a new means of 'active proletarianisation' in which individuals are absorbed into the supply side of the labour market through an imperative to sell their labour (Offe 1984; Grover 2012; Wiggan 2015a). Active proletarianisation (see Appendix 1) is neither natural nor inevitable but requires the intervention of state policies (Offe 1984). As such, while the particular mix of supply and demand side measures along with the practical implementation of policies ensures a differentiated process across countries, there is nonetheless an acknowledgement of an emerging flexible and insecure reserve army of labour (Murphy and Loftus 2015; Bengtsson 2014).

Moreover, while conditionality is ignored in discussions on decommodification, it inevitably limits individuals' access to benefits and induces labour market entry. Esping-Anderson defines decommodification as "the degree to which individuals, or families, can uphold a socially acceptable standard of living independently of market participation" (1990:37). Workfare can be read as a process of recommodification as it foregrounds paid work, while limiting access to benefits and utilising work-related conditionality to prompt labour market participation (Wiggan 2015a; Darmon and Perez 2011). While the reserve army of labour holds a macroeconomic value, privatisation filters this economic value to the micro-level and renders individuals a commodity to agencies whose profitability is dependent upon successfully placing them in workplaces (Grover 2009). The erasure of the de-commodifying potential of social security amounts to a form of neo-liberal governance in which conditionality aids in subverting social policy to the goal of economic competitiveness

(Grover 2009). This research brings such concerns into the exploration of the lived experience of conditionality; by drawing on the conceptualisations of agency outlined in the previous chapter it can explore whether there is adherence to the governmental logic; intended rejections (refusals); unintended escapes (lines of flight) and/or practices of resistance which fall in between accommodation and rejection.

4:6 Antecedents of Workfare

Maintaining a focus on the political economy of work-related conditionality, a brief look to the past highlights how its modern incarnation draws on antecedent themes and practices in the management of the poor. Much of the literature on workfare tends to treat it as indicating a fundamental shift in the state's approach to long-term unemployment (Fletcher 2015). Many authors view workfare as representing a move away from a welfare state to a Schumpeterian workfare state (Jessop 1993; Peck 2000). Another approach argues that the advent of neo-liberalism, the decline of the Keynesian welfare state and post-Fordism gives rise to a 'double regulation of the poor' in which workfare and the expansion of the prison system operate as strategies for managing poverty (Wacquant 2009). The lack of an historical focus means such literature tends to overstate the extent to which conditionality represents a new occurrence (Fletcher 2015). Workless people have always had to sell their labour power, however, the ways in which this process has been framed in different historical periods has varied (Grover 2012). Grover (*ibid.*) identifies a lineage of managing the poor and unemployed in the UK from the treatment of vagabonds in the 16th century; the houses of correction for the idle and disorderly from the 16th to 19th century; and the workhouses and work-tests of the New Poor Law. Continuing into the 20th century through administrative tools, such as the 'genuinely seeking work test' of the 1920s; the interwar training camps to reinforce the moral benefit of work; the Wage Stop during the Second World War, to the

more recent introduction of the Jobseekers Allowance and New Deals. Paz-Fuchs' (2008a 2008b, 2008c) argues that workfare policies are underlined by four mutually supportive rationales: contractualism, deterrence of fraud, economic efficiency and social control through the paternalist moral correction of a faulty work ethic. Each rationale derives from the same idea borne in the New Poor Law era: that relief is conditional. In this regard, contemporary workfare with its focus on work as the necessary societal contribution and its policy emphasis on labour market preparation and participation represents a return to the New Poor Law in idea as well as in deed (2008c).

The following chapter will identify such antecedent themes of workfare in the Irish case yet one can also look to the interwar years in Britain for a precedent for contemporary manifestations of workfare. An economic crisis pervaded by a financial orthodoxy of balancing budgets ushered in reactionary, but relatively less expensive, social programmes (Fletcher 2015). Behavioural explanations for unemployment provoked a search for the scrounger; as claimants were called upon to prove their efforts to find work in front of a court referees (*ibid.*). Supply side measures predominated through training centres and the construction of labour camps targeting those unwilling to learn a new trade; which although ostensibly voluntary operated through the street-level threat of loss of benefit (Burnett 1994; Fletcher 2015). Neoliberalism's 'double regulation of the poor' (Wacquant 2009) there appears as a return to the past. Workfare is here stripped of its penal overtones but remains linked to criminality through a supposed deterrence of fraud which serves to reinforce shame and stigma. While acknowledging that the contemporary target population now extends to women, Fletcher (2015) nonetheless suggests that it is men who face 'the brunt of workfare'. However, the inclusion of women, and in particular, its extension to the female dominated category of lone parents, is significant due to their potential distance from the labour market

and/or their active choice to opt out of the labour market in order to provide care. The latter point is particularly acute in the case of lone parents who carry the double burden of care and domestic duties as well as ensuring economic survival. Therefore, a look to the past identifies antecedent themes in practice and idea which informs our contemporary understanding, however, it is important to recognize differences in practice and in relation to its targets. In this sense it is important to incorporate a gendered understanding of the experience of work-related conditionality in Ireland.

4:7 The Experience, Agency and Resistance of Welfare Subjects

The agency and resistance of welfare subjects are often neglected topics in the literature on welfare conditionality, sanctions and activation. This is partly since unemployment itself is seen as a 'transitory' category to which one is subjected to rather than one an individual claims. Moreover, the threat of sanctions related to conditionality presents material hardship as a very real possibility of non-compliance leading many to perhaps assume a lack of resistance. However, as noted above, increasing conditionality and sanctions suggests a deliberate diversion from welfare which may provoke claimant exits to often unknown destinations. This is compounded by a focus on critiquing policies and their effectiveness, with the result that discussions disregard both the lived experience of those impacted and the political economy of conditionality. As a means to a correction Lister (2004) identifies four responses of those in poverty to their situation: getting off (leaving poverty behind); getting by (managing poverty and feelings of shame); getting back (everyday resistance against the system) and getting organised (collective action). This approach is useful in conceptualising the active agency of welfare claimants and while all four responses will feature in this study, one of its aims is to illuminate a critical response to workfare through the overlooked everyday resistance.

In documenting the experience of welfare subjects' interaction with work-related conditionality agency appears as subdued and tightly restrained. Working from Lister's typology what emerges most frequently is the struggle of 'getting by' in terms of material survival in making ends meet. Research in the UK has detailed the hard work involved in 'getting by' where welfare claimants often struggle to meet basic needs (Wright 2016). Survival here often means daily struggles with debt, in-depth budgeting and strict time intensive routines to avoid unnecessary expenditure, while 'going without' is not uncommon among parents in order to ensure their children are fed (Patrick 2014). Research from the U.S has found similar mechanisms which are complemented by reciprocal practices among extended families (Monroe *at.al* 2007). While the dominant model of the welfare subject informing activation policies situates claimants as passive these studies not only highlight the agency and ingenuity involved in survival but explicate the 'responsibility' of claimants. Workfare's framing of work as the primary societal contribution (Levitas 2001; Patrick 2014) structures responsibility as engagement in formal paid employment. However, this 'responsibility' is a privileged one as affluent citizens with greater economic and social capital inevitably have the resources to better prepare for labour market entry (Dwyer 2004). The counter-model of the welfare subject exhibited in Lister's (2004) typology helps to uncover how notions of responsibility are always already operating in individuals' lived experience. Yet perceived failure to live up to the dominant model's articulation of the responsible work may require a psychological 'getting by' to manage the resulting shame and stigma (Lister 2004; Wright 2016).

As discussed in the previous chapter, there is an increasing literature in the UK regarding the weaponising of stigma and shame in targeting marginalized groups (Tyler and

Slater 2018). Goffman (1990) demonstrates the relational nature of stigma in which identities, characteristics or behaviours deemed to be deviant prompt social rejection and exclusion in order to demarcate them from what is considered 'normal'. Social stigma marks unemployment as a 'spoiled identity' (Goffman 1990) which 'others' its bearer; a process which is arguably even more acute in a governmental rationality which individualizes and moralizes the issue of unemployment. Research from both the UK, USA and Australia illustrates the ways in which encounters with work-related conditionality shapes experiences of stigma as individuals accept it as personal failure; deflect it through the process 'othering'; or at times reject the dominant framing of unemployment (Patrick 2016; Wright 2016; Luna 2009; Monroe *et.al* 2008; Marston 2008). Baumberg (2016; 2012) suggests that individuals can experience three categories of welfare benefit-related stigma: personal stigma, claims stigma and stigmatisation. Personal stigma points to the internalisation of stigma since it refers to an individual's own personal feelings that there is something shameful about claiming welfare benefits. Claims stigma refers to the shame and stigma attached to the process of claiming welfare benefits and related interactions with staff, while stigmatisation incorporates wider social relations through the recognition that others see claiming benefits as shameful. This approach is useful in highlighting distinct categories which might apply in different ways to participants, but which can also be understood as interrelated dimensions of an overarching experience of stigma (Patrick 2016).   With this in mind, research further highlights how desires of 'getting out' of welfare are routinely tied to the struggles of 'getting by'. Research in the UK highlights the importance of participation in formal employment based on responsibility and citizenship as well hopes of better living standards (Patrick 2016), while research in the US articulates similar motivations underpinned by a rhetoric of self-sufficiency (Monroe *et.al* 2007).

Articulations of more resistance-based forms of agency are rare in the literature. Where such agency is captured it often takes the form of resistance through subjectivity in which discursive articulations in interviews with researchers are taken as practices of resistance. These articulations can take the form of complaints from individuals' regarding their perceptions of interactions with agencies and caseworkers (Trethewey 1997), but also with the wider framing of unemployed people (Tennant 2018; Casey 2018; Marston 2008). Such studies are important in highlighting that governmental attempts to shape subjectivity are never totalizing; individuals can and do challenge the dominant rationality of power. The previous chapter illustrated how welfare recipients in Marston's (2008) study were critical of the public discourse regarding unemployment and the narrow definition of work, with parents actively reframing the status of care work by prioritising their role as a parent as their job and contribution. However, despite this they nonetheless felt it important to 'give something back' while a lack of work also engenders suspicions of 'cheating' regarding others (*ibid*). This points to the enduring governmental power of the master narrative of work. As pointed out in the previous chapter, it suggests that one may be critical of work-related conditionality while simultaneously maintaining adherence to the social and cultural eulogisation of work.

Yet, in doing so they also imply something important which remains absent in the purely discursive focus; do such subjective resistances translate into actions, and if so, in what ways? Indeed, the findings of the Welfare Conditionality Project (2018:18) in the UK makes brief mention of those "superficially compliant with compulsory work-related requirements" but does not pursue the matter any further. Similarly, Caswell *et.al* (2010) suggest that despite the risk of not disclosing information, clients do engage in strategies of concealment which effects how they are categorised. In the US, Kingfisher (1996)

recognises how welfare subjects attempted discursive manipulations in interactions with caseworkers as a form of impression management as they pursued their own ends. More recently, research on the Norwegian system has highlighted the agency of claimants in performing 'impression management' in relations with caseworkers as well as adopting the role of the knowledgeable bureaucrat in asserting their rights (Lundberg 2018). Such actions are situated within 'street-level' interactions as front-line workers at times aid claimants in minor subversion, such as soliciting medical certificates on their behalf, to navigate through the system (*ibid.*). Despite these examples the literature is marked by the limited engagement with what participants actually do in their interactions with agencies and caseworkers, which serves to portray them as passive. In drawing on the often-hidden tactics of everyday resistances (Scott 1985; de Certeau 1984) with Lister's typology of agency this research explores the ways in which 'superficial compliance' may play out as well as the underlying reasons and motivations for these practices.

There is also arguably a reluctance to research alternative lifestyles of welfare recipients for fear that it may reinforce dominant behavioural and cultural discourses regarding poverty and unemployment. Moreover, Dunn (2014) argues there is a tendency to ask the wrong questions. Rather than asking whether unemployed respondents are more likely than employed counterparts to prefer unemployment to unattractive jobs, surveys tend to focus on whether they would continue to work if they won the lottery or utilising the Protestant Work Ethic scales incorporating work values, gratification, views on economic fairness (Dunn *et.al* 2014:908). In one sense, this absence loses sight of possible points of refusal (Tronti 1966a) or lines of flight (Deleuze 1995). However, for Dunn (2014), this neglect points to a failure within left dominated social policy studies to adequately respond to conservative authors' (e.g. Mead 1986) concerns regarding responsibility and motivation of

welfare recipients. These concerns find some support in evidence that highly educated unemployed individuals are more likely to reject rhetoric about obligations to work (Dunn 2010, 2014). Moreover, research has indicated a satisfaction among some unemployed men with a life on social welfare, which resulted in an active refusal of work due to a lack of skills and potentially precarious employment (Giazitzoglu 2014), although this does remain a rarity.

Such views can be read as labour power's rejection of capital's state facilitated demand that they make themselves available for all job vacancies without consideration of its quality or wage (Wiggan 2015a). Moreover, paid employment as the primary responsibility of citizenship undermines unwaged work and caring responsibilities performed in the home and/or in the voluntary sector, and with it the choice of those, overwhelmingly women, carrying out such work (Patrick 2014). Indeed, the Work Experience programme in the UK required recipients to apply for placements, while receiving Jobseeker's Allowance along with childcare and/or travel expenses. The Right to Work group campaigned against the programme's use of sanctions, while demanding 'real jobs' which pay at least the minimum wage (Grover and Piggott 2013). However, such a campaign thrusts the left into the paradoxical position of reinforcing the exploitative tendencies of capital's 'wage slavery' while articulating demands for better wages and conditions (Grover and Piggott 2013; Tronti 1966b). This approach considers capitalism as problematic only when its costs are socialised rather than privatised, and forfeits working toward an alternative which rejects the socialisation of capitalist accumulation (Grover and Piggott 2013) in pursuit of a more socially equitable distribution of societal labour and self-determined activity.

4:8 Conclusion

Studying conditionality is a cumbersome task due to its labyrinthine existence in a myriad of different guises across national contexts. However, some ground has been made as analyses of welfare reforms and their use of conditionality move beyond the dichotomy of human capital or work-first approaches to an understanding of an emerging global workfare project. While there remain national variances, there is nonetheless a focus on work-related conditionality as part of a toolkit orientated towards labour market participation, including an extensive targeting of women. The evidence related to the effectiveness of conditionality and sanctions is inconclusive but tends to suggest its ineffectiveness in terms of sustaining long-term employment. These issues regarding its efficacy further reinforce the argument from Chapter Two that conditionality serves a political function which derives from and reinforces the master narrative of work while ensuring a surplus labour supply to the needs of capital. Indeed, in discussing work-related conditionality it is important to keep sight of its political economy. The focus on labour market participation irrespective of demand side issues combined with the lack of sustained long-term employment suggest a process of active proletarianisation. This process is not a new occurrence, but rather it is the contemporary manifestation of strategies managing the poor whose concrete and ideational origins belong to the New Poor Laws. Such macro-level issues structure the experience of individuals navigating work-related conditionality in social welfare offices. Research on this experience is limited but what emerges is the material and psychological struggle of survival. Articulations of resistance remain rare within the literature and often appear in a weak discursive form. This research aims to capture these forms agency in the lived experience of unemployed individuals on welfare, but also to articulate individuals' practices of everyday resistance, refusals or lines of flight as well as the potential for a collective response. In this

way it allows for a more overarching yet nuanced understanding of welfare subjects

interactions within the avenues of governmental power. In anticipation of exploring this

lived experience of participants I now turn to discussing work-related conditionality in the

Irish context.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONDITIONALITY IN IRELAND

5:1 Introduction

As the previous chapter demonstrated the practice of work-related conditionality and sanctions is well embedded internationally. Ireland has been characterised as traditionally light in its use of conditionality and sanctions (Grubb *et.al* 2009). *Pathways to Work* (DEASP 2012, 2014, 2016) constitutes a new mode of governing unemployed people through increased use, and extension of, behavioural conditionality and sanctions. Yet, similar to the UK, there are antecedent themes which emerge and situate both the practice and its rationale in the broader historical management of unemployment and the poor more generally. This chapter explores the recent emergence of conditionality and sanctions through *Pathways to Work*. Before doing so, however, it briefly provides examples of antecedent iterations of these themes in Ireland, ranging from the Poor Law to mid-20th Century and then the 1980s. The chapter then moves into setting the context for the emergence of conditionality and sanctions through an overview of post-2008 austerity in Ireland. From here it discusses how the reforms implemented under *Pathways to Work* reconfigured social welfare provision. This has intensified through the privatisation of employment services via JobPath's payment-by-results model. This is followed by a brief outline of localised welfare provision in County Kildare. Next, the chapter explores how the reconfiguration of the unemployment landscape has altered the experience for claimants. The changes include not only an intensification of conditionality but also its extension, which invites a discussion regarding its application to the previously exempt category of lone parents. The chapter ends with a discussion about the lack of resistance among unemployed individuals in the face of both austerity and reforms which increase governmental intervention in their lives.

5:2 Antecedents of Workfare in Ireland

As noted in the previous chapter, while activation and its use of work-related conditionality often appear as contemporary solutions to contemporary problems a number of antecedent themes in relation to the management of the poor are observable (Fletcher 2015; Paz-Fuchs 2008c). As far back as 1634 one can find the meticulously titled 'Act for the Erecting of Houses of Correction and for Punishment of all Rogues, Vagabonds, Sturdy Beggars and other Lewd and Idle Persons'. The act included an extensive list of undesirables such as fraudulent beggars, gypsies and able-bodied labourers refusing 'reasonable' wages to work. Contemporary concerns about work-shy skivers finds further similar themes in the establishment 1838 Poor Law in Ireland. It foregrounded the principle of 'less eligibility' where the deplorable conditions of workhouses acted as a test of destitution (Paz-Fuchs 2008c). The treatment of the family as a unit which must be admitted collectively reinforced notions of self-help and the state as provider of last resort. As such, the workhouse was organised around a deterrent function which served to shape labourers for the market (Paz-Fuchs 2008c; Powell 1992). The stigma of poverty itself was weaponised as a means of deterrence through the public display of the names receiving indoor and outdoor relief. The practice operated until the 1920s ostensibly to inform the ratepayers who were funding relief, but the list also sought to encourage 'all trustworthy persons … [to give information] … on circumstances of persons receiving relief' (quoted in Dukelow and Considine 2009). The ubiquity of poverty during the Great Famine (1845-52) undermined the deterrence principle of the workhouse, prompting the use of public works, the introduction of external assistance and state sponsored emigration to cope. Women in particular became the object of this state sponsored scheme since they occupied a greater proportion of the workhouse population and were seen as an unproductive burden and "permanent deadweight" (Moran 2004:123).

Yet, one cannot cast blame solely upon the British colonial administration since antecedent themes of activation emerge in post-independence Ireland. Stimulated by high levels of unemployment following the War of Independence, the Free State initiated public works schemes to repair roads and bridges damaged during the war, while also instigating the spread of electrification throughout Ireland via the Shannon Scheme in 1925. This scheme operated under a laissez fair economic logic as roadmen were discharged and replaced at lower rates by former soldiers unemployed since the end of hostilities. Antecedents of modern workfare practices are also evident through a compulsory and punitive approach to the scheme in which able-bodied men were coerced to work in exchange for their benefits, with the number of days' servitude dependent on the amount of assistance received (Powell 1992). Moreover, public works schemes were underscored by a patriarchal male breadwinner model as they were available for males only.

By the 1930s the proper extraction of turf had become an economic and national imperative as the then Taoiseach (Prime Minister) de Valera hastened to develop the bogs as an alternative fuel source in pursuit of national self-sufficiency. Unemployed people therefore had a national role to play when offered work cutting turf at Clonsast Camp in County Offaly during the early 1940s. While officially a voluntary scheme, young men were induced with possible weekly earnings along with the provision of football pitches. Coercion was exerted at street-level as compulsion assumed an informal character in labour exchanges where a disqualification of one's claim was threatened for refusal to attend the camp (Powell 1992). A list of grievances drawn up by the men in the camp identifies compulsion as a central issue among others, including a resident chaplain proselytizing not on behalf of God

but government[4]. The camp experience proved unpopular with low levels of uptake;

nonetheless, de Valera persevered with the establishment of similar Army Labour Corps after

receiving implicit consent from the Labour Party and the Trade Union movement (Cousins

2003). Again, while ostensibly based on voluntary participation informal compulsion

assumed a central tenet as the Minister for Industry and Commerce, Sean Lemass, advocated

that a refusal to participate should result in the loss of one's claim. As such, managers of the

local labour exchanges were instructed to suspend claims of those refusing to participate.

The camps provided a chimerical rather than a practical solution to unemployment with 7,500

disallowed claims reducing the live register during its period of operation (*ibid.*).

Moreover, concerns about state expenditure motivated the enactment of Employment

Period Orders which excluded particular categories from claiming unemployment assistance

for set durations. In 1940 50,000 claimants were excluded as all claimants apart from

married men with dependents on land valued below £4 were disallowed. EPOs in the

following years saw 40,000 and 21,400 claimants disallowed respectively. One government

minister, Sean McEntee (quoted in Cousins 2003:95), provided a novel solution in pushing

tropes of self-industry and personal responsibility to their limit:

> In a country surrounded by sea and abounding rivers, many districts of which
> are overrun by rabbits, an excellent food to be had for the taking, a man with
> holding of land and sufficient industry to till it should be able to make ample
> provision against want.

The Irishman was expected to fish for his (and his wife's) dinner. As the figure above

indicates the application of EPOs relaxed from 1942. However, Lemass, as Minister of

Commerce and Industry, used an Emergency Powers Order to enforce legislation that any

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[4] He is reported to have said that the men "had not come there for wages but to do work of national importance and that the Bible said that a man must earn his living by the sweat of his brow' (quoted in Powell 1992).

person refusing or failing to seek employment in agricultural or turf industries or who left such employment voluntarily without good cause or through misconduct would be disqualified for Unemployment Assistance for the remainder of the year. The use of public work schemes, camps and EPOs overwhelmingly targeted unemployed males. This was derived from and reinforced a male breadwinner model of social security legislation which situated the male as head of the household and the primary wage earner. Women were largely relegated to the home as dependents on their husbands or families (Dukelow and Considine 2009; McCashin 2004). Moreover, although workhouses began disappearing from the landscape during the 1920s institutionalisation took on an openly gendered dimension. Catholic social teaching permeated state solutions to unmarried mothers through their categorisation and institutionalisation. First 'lapse' women were condemned to 'Mother and Baby Homes' run by religious orders, while women who were on their second or more pregnancy would be sent to a special workhouse in Dublin or Magdalene Laundries (McCashin 2004).

Ireland's outward turn regarding economic development during the 1950s brought with it a greater receptivity to international ideas regarding education and human capital as the engine of economic growth. The state's limited appropriation of the strategic importance of active labour market policy manifested in the creation of the Department of Labour, and more significantly, in the Industrial Training Authority, *An Chomhairle Oiliuna* (AnCo) in 1966. The purpose of the latter was to train manpower as a means of attracting industry. This approach was laid out in its 1973 discussion document *Apprenticeship: a new approach* which emphasized training toward jobs which might exist rather than those which already existed (Boyle 2005). The European Social Fund following Ireland's entry to the EEC provided AnCo with the resources to implement a network of training centres and advisors

along with its own in-house apprenticeship geared towards addressing weaknesses in Ireland's educational and training services. Simultaneously, the National Manpower Services developed a network of local offices with placement and occupational advisors while also playing a role in developing a work experience programme. However, it was not until the 1980s that the state developed a sustained approach underpinned by compulsion.

This was in the context of rising social welfare expenditure as the state attempted to cope with a sharp rise in unemployment. Attacks on social welfare from economists and employer groups failed to translate into a large-scale assault on the system via government policy. However, the mode of governing unemployment did undergo change. For example, increases to contribution requirements for benefits further linked entitlement with participation in the labour market and forced those with insufficient contributions to rely on means-tested social assistance (Cousins 1995). The punitive workfare model in the U.S inspired Fianna Fail's introduction of the JobSearch programme emphasizing compulsion through interview attendance, work schemes and training programmes. This model was reinforced by the 'policing of the welfare system' due to 'widespread allegations of fraud' (Bond 1988:200) with surveillance of claimants becoming such a priority that the Joint Inspection Unit increased personnel at a time of widespread cuts in public service recruitment (Powell 1992). The government of unemployment positioned unemployed people as blameworthy and in need of government intervention.

The issue of activation during the 1990s was largely confined to an ideational battle in which the National Economic and Social Forum's (NESF) voluntary labour activation approach opposed a more punitive mutual obligations approach of business groups and the Department of Finance (Murphy 2012). In supporting the former the Irish National

Organisation of the Unemployed (INOU) led an advocacy coalition emphasizing a more structural understanding of unemployment, an approach aided by EU Delors White Paper on Social Policy and civil servants within Departments of An Taoiseach and An Tánaiste (*ibid.*). On the contrary, while emphasizing the punitive approach, the Irish Small and Medium Employer's Association repeated the discourse of the 1980s characterising unemployed people as 'course junkies' and 'social misfits'. This discourse found its way into the social partnership governance model through Clause 3.3 of the *Partnership 2000 for inclusion, employment and competitiveness* where it emphasized the 'reciprocal obligation of the unemployed' to take up job opportunities (*ibid*.). By 1998 the EU Open Method of Coordination (OMC) provided the paradigmatic discourse of labour activation with emphasis on systematic engagement and targeted interventions while requiring all members to report on a National Employment Action Plan (*ibid.*). The declining unemployment of a roaring Celtic Tiger diminished the necessity to intensely govern unemployed people; as a result, labour shortages were managed through migration policy rather than activation (*ibid.*). The Commission on Social Welfare had set in motion the consolidation of payments for lone parents that began in 1989 and would culminate in the OPFP in 1997 (McCashin 2004). This reflected a shift in social norms and traditional assumptions about the role of Irish mothers during the 1990s, as labour market participation became a reality for more women, ALMPs extended to include lone parents for the first time through the Community Employment Scheme[5], although this was on a voluntary basis.

The ideational discussions around activation re-emerged in the early 21st Century with publication of the National Economic Social Council's (NESC) (2005) *Developmental Welfare State* arguing for increased conditionality as a means for synergising income

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[5] Part-time and temporary job placements in the local community for people who are long-term unemployed

supports and active labour market measures. Similarly, the 2006 report on *Proposals for Supporting Lone Parents* was cautiously welcomed by women's' groups as a potential positive extension of activation measures to lone parents (Murphy 2012). However, a lack of policy ambition around activation emerged out of a combination of factors; institutional path dependency; absence of political leadership; suspicion among claimant representatives; and a successful economy unburdened by any significant social unrest. Saris *et.al* (2002) identified a revival of a 'culture of poverty' in early 21st century Ireland. In the context of low unemployment and economic success the problem of unemployment is reduced to individual responsibility as unhappy social and market outcomes are perceived as deficits of individuals the state is content to leave behind. In the 'good times' it seems that the societal losers have no productive capacity worth activating, particularly when immigration increasingly met the needs of low wage employment. As a result, by 2008 the Irish welfare state was facing into a crisis armed with an activation policy largely unreformed since the 1980s (Murphy 2012).

5:3 Austerity

As highlighted above, there had been much internal debate regarding the reform of activation services and their use of conditionality and sanctions in the years preceding the economic crash in 2008. The crisis precipitated the Irish state's inclination toward adopting such policies due to high unemployment and the necessity of re-training individuals. With fiscal policies overly enamoured with an indigenous property sector, the collapse of that apotheosized sector exposed the folly of laissez faire lending practices within the banking sector (Murphy 2016). State finances assumed the role of expiatory sacrifice as the 2008 'blanket' guarantee of banking sector debts hastened Ireland into a sovereign debt crisis. From 0.01 percent of GDP in 2007 the fiscal deficit increased to -30.8 percent in 2010, while

government debt increased from 25.1 percent of GDP to 92.1 percent (Dukelow and Considine 2014a). By November 2010 Irish economic sovereignty had been surrendered to the Troika, comprised of the European Commission, European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund, in exchange for an €85 billion loan. Conditionalities within an accompanying Memo of Understanding (MoU) paved the way for a further liberalisation of the economy through fiscal consolidation and structural reforms with the state also subjected to quarterly reviews until December 2013 (Dukelow and Considine 2014a; Murphy 2016). A succession of austerity budgets from 2008 to 2015 initiated a €30 billion fiscal consolidation with an emphasis expenditure cuts (Murphy 2016). The social cost of these accumulative crises and the subsequent fiscal consolidation was significant with unemployment rising from 4 percent in 2007 to 15 percent by 2012. The concomitant increase in social welfare payments placed further strain on a state income already undermined by a 33 percent decrease in tax revenue from 2007 to 2010 (Dukelow and Considine 2014b; Boland and Griffin 2015a). In an act of social protection cost-containment all working age payments suffered cuts while social insurance was undermined as Jobseekers Benefit's qualifying conditions were tightened and its duration shortened.

The difficult job of welfare retrenchment was mollified by a curious mixture of blame avoidance and credit claiming among political elites (Dukelow and Considine 2014b). Central to this was the successful reframing of the crisis as a debt crisis provoked by irresponsible and excessive social spending (*ibid.*); an irresponsibility supposedly mirrored by individuals' personal spending gone wild on the spoils of economic success (Enda Kenny quoted in Irish Independent 2012). Despite Ireland's relatively stable and comparatively low social expenditure in the years preceding the crisis the supposed generosity of social protection became a malleable justification for retrenchment (Considine and Dukelow

2014b). On the one hand, comparisons to the less generous UK system fortified accusations

of an irresponsibly profligate welfare system, while an alternative approach suggested

welfare cuts as a gift; a necessary evil to "safeguard the generous system we have" by

ensuring a fiscal stability and sustainability that could prevent the need for more excessive

cuts (then Minister of Finance, Brian Lenihan, quoted in Considine and Dukelow 2014b:16).

The term 'fiscal' permeated post-2008 public discourse accompanied by a flurry of nouns;

fiscal consolidation; fiscal sustainability; fiscal space; and fiscal responsibility. However,

responsibility was not to be restrained to state expenditure, but rather would extend to

behaviour of those individuals not in formal employment.

Despite Ireland's comparatively high spending on ALMPs (Figure 5, page 109) the

programmes nonetheless faced criticism for underwhelming performances (McGuinness

2011). The limited use of sanctions and conditionality underpinned a system where

unemployed individuals had little engagement with Public Employment Services (Grubb *et.al*

2009; Martin 2014). Such criticism combined with the necessity of structural reforms under

the terms of the MoU instigated a reform of the activation services' institutional framework

to coincide with a move from a passive to an active policy approach. If recession was the

fault of irresponsibly exuberant state spending and citizens happy to party excessively,

activation can be read as part of the cure through attempts to ensure labour supply to any job

by closing off routes of de-commodification. Indeed, the need for austerity along with the

debt and deficit parameters imposed by the EU Stability and Growth Pact were accepted by

every major party in the state. Moreover, a weak left with a post-social partnership trade

union movement in disarray failed to establish a coherent alternative to social expenditure

cuts. Austerity appeared as sole remedy to the crisis serenaded by the Thatcherite refrain that

There is No Alternative (TINA).

5:4 Pathways to Work

From the quagmire of economic recession, escalating unemployment and a passive and disengaged welfare system emerges a new definitive activation policy trajectory aimed at developing attachment to the labour market (Murphy 2016). This new robust activation strategy encapsulated within *Pathways to Work* appears as a core priority of the Department of Social Protection alongside income provision and fraud control (Murphy and Collins 2016). Staff from the defunct national training agency FAS and community welfare officers from Health Service Executive were subsumed into the DEASP in an institutional overhaul creating *Intreo*; a 'one stop shop' for income support provision and Public Employment Services. Institutional reform is buttressed by *Intreo's* service delivery focus on increased engagement with and monitoring of clients; increased targeting of activation; incentivising take up of employment or training opportunities and incentivising employers to hire unemployed individuals (Collins and Murphy 2016). This new service delivery model is permeated by a New Public Management approach emphasizing achieving designated targets and quarterly reviews of performance (Collins and Murphy 2016).

Welfare rolls appear as a key issue with this NPM approach with targets concerned with reducing numbers on the live register[6]. Also subsumed within *Intreo* is the Local Employment Service; what was once a locally delivered and client-based service aimed at enabling long-term unemployed and other hard to reach groups now implements the rigid systems driven approach on short-term outcomes (Collins and Murphy 2016). Yet despite this emphasis and an increase in institutional capability the *Intreo* claimant ratio remains comparatively high (NESC 2011; Collins and Murphy 2016). This problem has found a

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[6] Provides a monthly capture of the numbers registering for Jobseeker Benefit and Jobseeker Allowance payments. Not intended as a measure of unemployment *per se* as it includes casual, part-time and seasonal workers in receipt of the above payments.

possible solution in the privatisation of a new activation service, JobPath; discussed in more detail below. Moreover, within this new approach to activation the Irish Youth Guarantee specifically targets those under 25 years of age. An evaluation of its pilot project in Ballymun highlighted an enabling and guidance led approach at odds with *Intreo's* work first emphasis, it has been suggested that resource deficits will potentially undermine this ethos in the national programme (Collins and Murphy 2016). With the collapse of the training agency FAS under the weight of administrative scandals and criticisms of Ireland's light activation regime a new national training agency emerged in 2013 in the form of *SOLAS*. The amalgamation of Vocational Educational Committees and local FAS Training Centres produced 16 regional Education Training Boards. Again, a work-first approached underpinned by NPM pervades the approach with only three narrowly defined outcomes possible: progression to employment, higher education, or further FET. This marks a turn from the collective emancipatory and transformative ideals traditionally emphasized in Irish adult education and further education (Murray *et.al* 2014). As such, work as the primary social contribution permeates all activation measures.

As shown in Figure 5 the relatively high spending on ALMPs continued through the austerity budgets until receding below the OECD average in 2016 as unemployment levels decreased. This has been supplemented by a focus on enticing employers to employ unemployed individuals through the 2011 national internship programmer, JobBridge, along with the 2013 JobPlus employer subsidy. Both the privatised delivery of training programmes and the continued use of employer subsidies signal a turn toward open market activation (Collins and Murphy 2016). Simultaneously, the state occupies the role as the employer of last resort within old programmes such as the Community Employment scheme and the new programmes Gateway and Tús, a feature Wiggan (2015b) observes as consistent

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with a more social democratic kind of welfare approach. Gateway provides short-term

employment and training opportunities for long-term unemployed on the live register for

more than 2 years, while Tús provides short-term employment opportunities to all long-term

unemployed people. While Tús uses community-based work Gateway provides work

through local authorities with the underlying rationale for both schemes being that they

should benefit the local area. These schemes run alongside the existing Community

Employment scheme of which the voluntary sector is the main beneficiary with 25,000 places

currently active (Collins and Murphy 2016). Evaluating the success of these ALMPS is

dependent on the criteria used to measure success; the question asked largely predetermines

the possible outcome. For example, one study focusing on exit from the live register into

employment suggests failure on the part of ALMPs since their progression rates into

employment do not outperform overall exit rates (IGESS 2014).

Figure 5: Public expenditure on ALMPs in Ireland and OECD as a percentage of GDP, 2004 -2016.
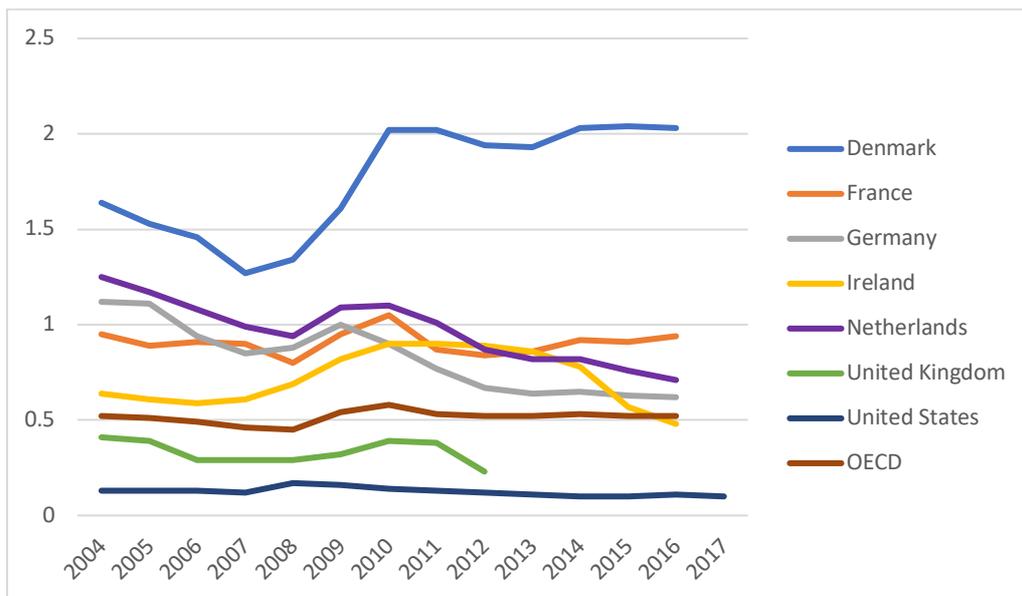
Source: OECD 2018a

The emerging architecture of activation policy is based upon a bolstering of work-related conditionality buttressed by a revised system of sanctions. Two main features emerge in the use of sanctions in Ireland. First, there is the nuclear option of disqualifying a client's payment due to their leaving work voluntarily without good reason, due to misconduct, failure to engage in activation measures and failure to engage with DEASP identity checking procedures. Prior to the 2010 Social Welfare Miscellaneous Act this nuclear option was the only sanction available to DEASP staff, providing a plausible reasoning for the underuse of sanctions. Secondly, the act has embedded sanctions as a practical instrument within the social welfare architecture through a new penalty mechanism providing the ability to reduce claimants' payments. Reductions in payment can occur due to a failure to adhere to the 'Record of Mutual Commitments' including failure to attend appointments with DSP; being late for appointments; failure to participate in an employment support scheme, training or work experience. These sanctions include a reduction of €44 to the weekly standard rate of €203 with the possibility of the payment being suspended for up to nine weeks. Receipt of social welfare has always been conditional; however, this revised system of penalties signals a turn toward modifying behaviour through punishment of those not *actively seeking work.*

There is some ambiguity around the calculation of the incidence of sanctions. This is compounded by a hesitancy to release data in relation to sanctions meaning one is often reliant on information from parliamentary questions. Further it is not always clear whether calculations are based on the annual claimant count or the annual claimant flow, so while some have argued that the percentage of jobseekers sanctioned was over 5 percent in 2016 (NESC 2018; WUERC 2016), government statistics suggest the percentage is as low as 0.5 percent (Kildarestreet 2018; Rogers 2017). Moreover, while 19,000 cases of non-

engagement have arisen in JobPath these have resulted in sanctions in only 4,000 cases suggesting some flexibility in practice if not in discourse. What is clear, as evidenced in Figure 6 below, is that sanctions have risen annually since *PTW*'s introduction, increasing from 359 in 2011 to 16,451 in 2017 (Kildarestreet 2018). Despite this the Irish incidence of sanctions still remains relatively low within an international context (WUERC 2016). Whatever one's interpretation regarding the use of sanctions it is important to recognize that the threat of sanctions nonetheless invades the experience of jobseekers since all are potentially subjected to them. It thereby performs a governmental function in attempting to shape and guide claimants conduct. It is currently unclear whether the rise in sanctions is related to claimant behaviour, increased institutional capacity, a broadening of sanctionable offenses, or changing institutional culture. Research suggests that despite resentment among claimants about threats of sanction, they are increasingly recognised as a useful tool by caseworkers and other stakeholders (Whelan 2017; NESC 2018). This research provides much needed additional insight into how sanctions and/or their threat are experienced by claimants in their interactions with agencies and caseworkers.

Figure 6: Rate of Penalty Sanctions in Ireland (2011-2017)

Year	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Sanctions	359	1,519	3,395	5,325	6,743	10,867	16,451

Source: Kildarestreet 2018

5:5 JobPath

The reform of activation within the Irish welfare system encapsulates a brave new turn towards the privatisation of employment services in the form of JobPath targeting long-term unemployed people. The model is influenced by the prime contractor model of the UK's Work Programme where payments are based on outcomes. Contracts have been awarded to two external organisations and demarcated by geography with Seetec Business Technology Ltd delivering services in Border areas, Midlands, West and Dublin; while Turas Nua, a joint venture of Working Links and FRS Recruitment, service the south of the country. Again, the influence of the UK example within a welfare landscape unused to privatised employment services emerges with both Seetec and Working Links being experienced Work Programme operators (Wiggan 2015b). The rationale for privatisation emerges through the related goals of providing tailored employment services to individuals and the reduction of the caseworker-client ratio. High levels of unemployment and its concentration in particular sectors such as construction meant that job creation must be supplemented by retraining. Public expenditure cuts further undermined the ability of state resources to meet the needs of unemployed individuals with the caseworker-jobseeker ratio remaining comparatively high; reaching 1000:1 during the recession (Lowe 2014). As such, cost cutting emerges as an underlying rationale in order to reduce state expenditure in a changed economic landscape. The shift toward the marketisation of employment services potentially favours punitive conditionality and sanctions over enabling measures (Brodkin and Marston 2013; Murphy 2016). Private providers paid by outcomes and underpinned by NPM performance indicators are more likely to hassle claimants with strict conditionality and threat or use of sanctions (Brodkin and Marston 2013; Wiggan 2015b). In the Irish case a Minimum Service Guarantee ensures that providers must at the very least conduct one-to-one meetings within the first 20

days; and then on a monthly basis thereafter; draw up a personal progression plan; conduct review meetings every 13 weeks and offer in work support to new users. A registration fee is paid once the provider has drawn up a personal progression plan, while outcomes are paid periodically after three, six, nine and twelve months of sustained employment.

Van Berkel *et.al* (2012) point out that the shift to market-led governance occurs at different speeds across countries, with differentiated modernisers, slow modernisers and committed modernisers. The adolescence of the reforms renders Ireland a slow moderniser (Wiggan 2015b); while the Irish approach to privatisation of employment services eschews the pure market rationality of its UK counterpart and is underpinned by a greater regulation of standards; moderation of provider power and increased obligation on providers with payment tied to performance (Lowe 2014; Wiggan 2015b). Yet the privatised payment by results model nonetheless reinforces the work-first approach to Irish welfare by further eroding its de-commodifying aspects.   Participation in formal paid employment is prioritised as the necessary societal contribution with private operators reaping rewards via the successful insertion of individuals into jobs. In other words, the reserve army of labour's macroeconomic value filters to the individual level as unemployed people emerge as a commodity whose value lies in their being placed into work (Grover 2009). With international evidence on conditionality and sanctions pointing to short-term results but long-term problems (Watts and Fitzpatrick 2018; Watts *et.al* 2014; Griggs and Evans 2010), questions are inevitably raised about Ireland's nascent privatisation regarding the type of work along with its duration, quality, desirability and suitability for claimants. This research's focus on the lived experience of claimants and their stories illuminates these issues in the process of illustrating their experiences of and interactions with private providers, and how these experiences and interactions compare and differ with other agencies.

5:6 Local Welfare in County Kildare

The main *Intreo* office in Kildare is situated in the south of the county in the most populated town, Newbridge, and serves the surrounding populations of Naas, Sallins, Kildare Town, Kilcullen, Rathangan and Prosperous. A social welfare branch in Maynooth serves the north of the county (Kilcock, Leixlip, Celbridge, Straffan and parts of neighboring south Meath). Another social welfare branch in Athy serves the south west of the county including Castledermot, Moone, Ballylinan and Ballytore. If individuals have an issue with their claim, they must attend the main office which performs the role of judicator. Jobseeker payments are collected through local post-offices, although people attend their local office once a month to 'sign on'; a declaration that they are unemployed and actively seeking work. Through the partial privatisation of employment services under the JobPath programme, *Intreo* caseworkers can refer recipients to private contractors Turas Nua or Seetec depending on their geographical location. Turas Nua operates two offices in south Kildare, with an office in Naas and another in the 'unemployment blackspot' of Athy. Seetec operates out of Maynooth and serves the north of the county. Long-term unemployed individuals can be referred by *Intreo* to Obair, the Local Employment Service Network (LESN) in Kildare. There are five Obair offices operating in Kildare with four spread across the south of the county (Naas, Kildare Town, Newbridge, Athy), while the north of Kildare is served by a sole office in Leixlip. Whereas privatised employment services tend toward work-first models in which any job will do, the LESN have traditionally operated on a human capital approach attending to needs and developing skills.

Human capital development in education and training becomes increasingly entwined to labour market activity and the pursuit of employment. The Mid-East Regional Skills

Forum involves intimate relationships between local welfare offices, educational institutions and employers in identifying and addressing the needs of the local economy. *Intreo* can refer recipients to any post-second level courses along with adult and further education and training courses operated by the Kildare-Wicklow Education and Training Board. Similarly, claimants can apply to tertiary level courses. Recipients attending these courses continue to receive their payment as a Back to Education Allowance (BTEA) and are not required to sign on or attend caseworker meetings during it. JobPath caseworkers lack the power to refer claimants to education and training courses, thus they remain contractually constrained to a work-first approach. Also operating in tandem with this service is the national Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) which targets long-term unemployment, poverty and social exclusion on a community development basis. Procurement is operated through a tendering process at the local level. In Kildare SICAP is implemented by the County Kildare Leader Partnership and operates several training programmes to develop skills, such as 'Career Skills', 'Youth Leadership Certificate Course' and 'Community Development and Leadership'. It also focuses on personal development and confidence building courses such as 'Finding Your Feet' for those distant from the labour market for long periods or with limited skills.

Figure 7: Generic Activation Trajectory in Ireland
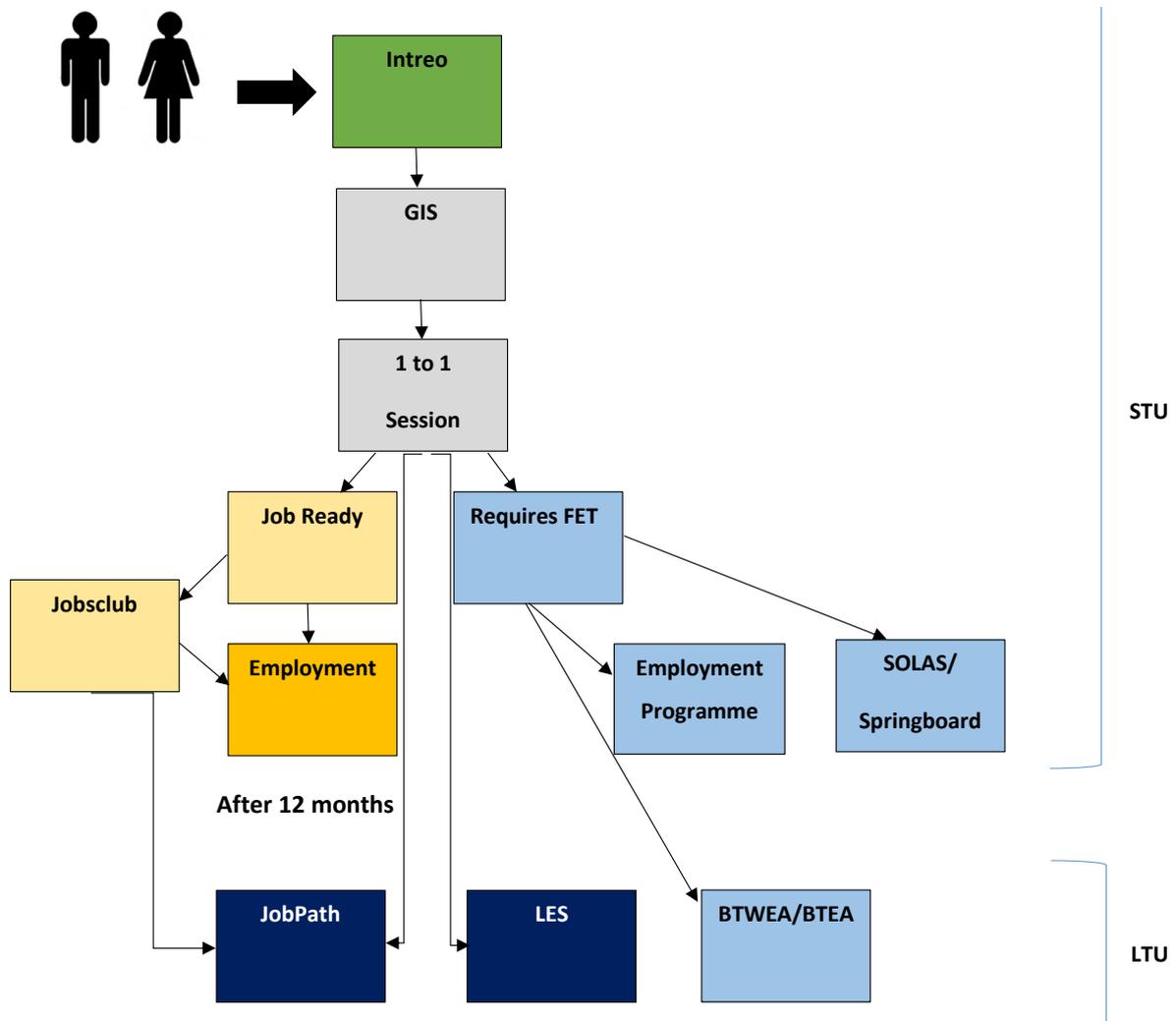
Source: Lavelle and Callaghan (2018)

Note: A more detailed outline of activation schemes is found in Appendix 3

5:7 Experience of Unemployment in Ireland

In his first-hand account of the 1980s Irish 'job famine' Mike Allen (1998) identifies a perception of unemployment as a natural phenomenon in Ireland. Perhaps this historical near ubiquity of joblessness punctuated by intermittent periods of high employment goes some

way to explaining the dearth of research on the experience of unemployment in Ireland. When unemployment historically constitutes a pervasive national experience, the focus tends toward macroeconomic studies orientated to potential remedies rather than the exploration of an experience that is common and unwelcome. Most studies of this experience are of course a footnote to Jahoda *et.al's* (1979, 1981, 1982) deprivation model which identified unemployment as a deprivation associated with the disintegration of social networks, loss of identity, mental health issues, breakdown of one's time structure, financial deprivation and lack of self-worth. Indeed, the research which has elaborated the lived experience of unemployment in Ireland documents similar adverse material and psycho-social experiences (Boland and Griffin 2015a; Delaney *et.al* 2011; Kinsella and Kinsella 2011). Long term unemployment is a 'scarring event' which disrupts one's previous employment history and negatively impacts future labour market participation in terms of likelihood of employment and possible earnings (Kinsella and Kinsella 2011). It is necessary to traverse and research what lies in the wake of the financial crash, particularly in light of collapsed sectors and possibly redundant skills as well reduced as incomes and living standards which may inform responses to the intensified use of conditionality and sanctions.

Allen's (1998) observation is doubly perceptive as it at once points to a perception of unemployment as a common phenomenon in Ireland due to its historical pervasiveness, yet a corollary of this is to obscure how the experience of unemployment is also shaped by policy. Governmentality disrupts this naturality by identifying policies as social artefacts aimed at governing human conduct in particular ways and toward particular ends (McKee 2009). Contemporary welfare states have witnessed the death of unemployment and emergence of job-seeking from its ashes (Boland and Griffin 2015b). During the early years of the 21st Century the Irish welfare state underwent a semantic change with the disappearance of 'old

age' from state policy lexicon; 'unemployment' became 'job-seeking'; 'disability' became 'illness'. Impediments to formal paid employment seemingly dissolve in this shift to an active vocabulary (Dukelow and Considine 2009). The intensification of conditionality and sanctions in *Pathways to Work* goes beyond a lexical alteration to a shift in how joblessness is governed and subsequently experienced (Boland and Griffin 2015a, 2015b). As Chapter Three discussed, while the loss of one's job previously entailed a loss of identity job-seeking now bestows one with the identity of jobseeker; defining them in terms of what they are not, a worker (Boland and Griffin 2015b). This identity emerges as liminal space where the jobseeker is always in a state of becoming, indeed, it also points toward the ambiguous space implied in 'standby-ability' literature (Bentgsson 2014). For the jobseeker it is a space filled with the unseen and unvalued work of job applications, caseworker meetings, group meetings and training courses, which provide the means of becoming a worker again.

Research on this experience identifies strong normative understandings of work among jobseekers which renders claiming welfare payments an arduous task (Moran 2016; Boland and Griffin 2015a). Life without work is experienced as unsatisfactory idleness where time becomes a burden devoid of the pleasure of leisure activities (Boland and Griffin 2015b). Ambitions for decent work sit alongside a willingness to take contract work or part-time work as a temporary measure (Moran 2016). Longitudinal research highlights intermittent unemployment among all participants over a four-year period (2012-2016) rather than consistent long-term unemployment (WUERC 2016). It also suggests an increase in the negative experience of welfare services over this period with once high levels of trust eroded over the period as decisions to accept work are motivated more by pressure from caseworkers utilising the threat of sanctions than by rational economic interests or feasibility (WUERC 2016). These findings raise questions of how claimants respond to pressures and engage with

conditionality, welfare agencies and caseworkers. As highlighted in the previous chapter the literature tends to portray conditionality and sanctions merely as something which happens *to* individuals. By focusing on the strategies of negotiation and resistance employed by these groups this research foregrounds the agency of individuals in order to illustrate how power relations might operate at the street-level, as well as possible routes of claimant agency.

Despite the 'naturalisation' of unemployment in Ireland the historical distinction between the deserving and undeserving poor continues to bubble beneath the surface of welfare and poverty politics. As noted in previous chapters, while not as prominent in Ireland as it is in the neighbouring UK, such rhetoric has nonetheless come to the fore in post-crisis Ireland. This is not least in our own poverty porn such as *Better off on the Dole*, but also in the assertions of politicians and the media. Current Taoiseach Leo Varadkar has been vocal in his desire to lead a country for "people who get up early in the morning" (quoted in Bardon 2017).   The former Tánaiste and Labour Party leader, Eamon Gilmore, justified reducing jobseeker payments to under 25s on the basis that "young people should not be permanently in front of flat screen TVs" (quoted in Brennan 2013). His party colleague, the former Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection, Joan Burton, championed the use of sanctions in convincing the same cohort of the remedial benefits of work. She further expounds: "what we are getting at the moment is people who come into the system straight after school as a lifestyle choice" (quoted in McConnell *et.al* 2011). Not to be out done by the brave and fiery rhetoric spouted by politicians of the left and right, the media too chime in with the moral chastisement of irresponsible behaviour about "deadbeat dads … who expect the social welfare system to support them" (Drennan 2011). We are regaled about the good times on the dole life where a "Family can earn up to €42,500 in a 'welfare bonanza'" (Irish Independent 2011). The Irish state is seemingly infused with an

anti-work ethic since: "Such is the range and generosity of payments made to unemployed families... that it can pay to stay out of the workforce" (Weston 2011).

This brief expedition across the current elite-level politics of welfare illustrates the strength of the dominant political consensus regarding the necessity of work. It is a consensus which serves to promote individualised cultural and behavioural framings of unemployed people as irresponsible and defunct moral agents lacking any semblance of a work ethic. As intimated by Joan Burton, work-related conditionality and sanctions provide a means to eliciting the 'responsibilisation' of non-workers; by way of enforcing their best interests through participation in work in order to remedy the ills of poverty and social exclusion (DEASP 2012, 2014, 2016). This juxtaposition of responsible taxpaying workers versus irresponsible welfare dependents found its clearest expression in the 2017 government campaign 'Welfare Cheats Cheat Us All'. The vagueness of the slogan allied to an invitation to anonymously report suspected welfare fraud via a free telephone hotline means that all welfare recipients stand accused as potential cheats, demarcated from the citizenry of taxpayers implied within 'us all'. Despite this focus welfare fraud plateaued at a rate of 2 percent, of which 1.6 percent were departmental errors (Ó'Connaith 2017). When some concerned citizens dialled to report large scale tax evasion of corporations and their legal enablers, they received scant interest. As outlined in Chapter Two it appears work-related conditionality is performing a political function, allied to wider discursive framings of unemployed people, in enforcing the master narrative of work as well as a supply of labour.

5:8 Lone Parents

Increasing the supply of labour also operates through work-related conditionality's extension to previously exempt groups (e.g. lone parents). This change must be viewed in the context

of recession and the subsequent austerity budgets which included an array of cuts significantly impacting women. Beyond the 8 percent cut to all working age payments in 2010 women have been particularly affected by cuts to Respite Care Grant and the extension of means-testing to social welfare payments and on income earned as home help (Murphy 2014). Lone parents have been disproportionately affected by changes to Rent Supplement paid to low income tenants renting in the private market with increases in tenants' minimum contributions, imposition of maximum rent allowances and its restriction in 2009 to people eligible for social housing or already renting for six months (*ibid.*). Moreover, the curtailment of social housing potentially ghettoises vulnerable tenants needing low rent accommodation; a situation exacerbated by increasing homelessness (Dukelow and Kennett 2018). Budget 2013 witnessed a lone parent tax credit amounting to an annual €1650 previously available to both parents restricted to the main carer. This blanket approach disincentivises co-parenting through its application to all fathers regardless of the amount of their involvement in their children's lives and which amounts to loss of €30 per week (Barry and Conroy 2013). The Universal Early Childcare Supplement for children under six was abolished in 2009; this was somewhat ameliorated by the introduction of the universal Early Childhood Care and Education providing free half-time pre-school for the school year (Murphy 2014). However, the cumulative cuts to Child Benefit since 2009 have reached 22 percent for small families and a third for larger families, along with the phasing out of the benefit for children aged 18 (*ibid.*). As argued in Chapter Two then there is a partial removal of the gendered social wage which permits de-commodification, which exposes the female dominated category of lone parents to the labour market.

Prior to the crisis, income maintenance was provided through the One Parent Family Payment for lone parents living with children up to the age of 18, or 21 if in full time

education. Reform of OPFP had been mooted in these years with both the *Proposals for Supporting Lone Parents* (DEASP 2006) report and the 2010 proposals for a single social assistance payment emphasizing greater labour activation for lone parents. Although cautiously welcomed with a caveat regarding concerns about the state's capacity to integrate service delivery or to develop appropriate childcare the extension of conditionality ultimately floundered upon such hesitations and a lack of political will (Murphy 2012). In the context of austerity, public expenditure cuts and the Troika imposed MoU activation underpinned by work-related conditionality and sanctions has been extended to lone parents. This was done through two key structural forms. First, the 2012 budget initiated phased reductions of the higher earnings income disregard for OPFP bringing it in line with Jobseekers Allowance. It was argued that such disregards were benefitting individuals not actually paying for childcare and further that they incentivised part-time work and limited gains from full-time employment (Murphy 2014). Implemented without accompanying policies to address childcare issues for those lone parents returning to work, the reforms operate along a dual rationale of cost-cutting and shifting lone parents from part-time to full-time work patterns. While ostensibly redressing the imbalance regarding full-time work, the reform has reduced the overall financial returns of work with, for example, a lone parent earning €300 a week standing to lose €74 before childcare is considered (*ibid.*).

Secondly, there has been a tightening of eligibility criteria combined with increased behavioural conditions. In 2011 the age threshold of the youngest child was reduced from 18 to 14; with a further reduction to 7 in 2014. Parents whose youngest child is between 7 and 13 were moved to Jobseekers Transition payment in 2015. While not required to actively seek work, under the threat of sanction these parents must meet with a DEASP caseworker where they are informed of supports such as possible training or education courses. Parents

whose youngest child is 14 are now required to actively and genuinely seek work under the same conditions as 'mainstream' jobseekers. One justification for these reforms is the high rate of jobless households and low work intensity in Irish households (ECEC 2015). Yet, such regulatory and punitive measures have not been extended to qualified adults (unemployed partners of unemployed or disabled claimants) indicating a lack of political protection for lone parents as central to reforms (Collins and Murphy 2015; Murphy 2014). Moreover, beyond the financial implications a return to work inevitably involves considerations regarding care and domestic work, considerations heightened in the case of lone parents. As such, work-centric activation policy underpinned by conditionality and sanctions places lone parents in a particularly precarious situation in which choice is limited and where obligations to work may overlook and actively worsen their situation.

5:9 Political Economy of Work-Related Conditionality in Ireland

Governmentality studies are often a reaction to Marxist inspired critiques of capitalism, and the emphasis on the diffusion of power relations throughout the social body potentially cloaks the unique power of capital within the multitude of relations. This entails a necessary cognisance of the continuity between state and economic power in a context where participation in the labour market is now compulsory for unemployed individuals, including a significant portion of lone parents. Here the balance of power is firmly in favour of employers as jobseekers search for work under threat of destitution irrespective of job quality, pay or conditions (Boland and Griffin 2015b). As noted earlier, included within the architecture of activation are attempts to incentivise employers to recruit unemployed individuals. Until its discontinuation in 2016 JobBridge constituted the most visible manifestation of this with jobseekers working and training for 6-9 months in positions advertised by employers for their social welfare payment and a €50 per week bonus, all paid

by the state. The scheme has been accused of undermining labour power with internships ranging from unskilled work to positions requiring PhD positions (Boland and Griffin 2015a). Similarly, through JobPlus the state provides a direct wage subsidy of €7,500 to employers who employ a long-term unemployed individual. The state itself has not shied away from using cheap labour with Gateway offering 3,000 part-time positions with local councils since 2014. The DEASP's review of expenditure in 2013 highlighted that employer subsidies amount to €700m; almost two-thirds of all expenditure on activation supports (Murphy and Collins 2015). Moreover, income disregards available to jobseekers, lone parents, qualified adults and those with disabilities can operate as a form of corporate welfare since they facilitate participation in precarious low pay employment. The potential accumulative cost to the state could reach €250million; bringing the total figure spent on corporate welfare to €950 million when added to employer subsidies (*ibid.*). While ALMPs have the highest progression outcomes in open market economies they also tend to displace entry level jobs; a tendency exacerbated by free or heavily subsidised labour which can displace paid employment through abuse of internships which also serves to undermine working conditions and pay (*ibid*). This points toward the politics of activation as capital benefits from subsidies and a supply of labour coerced through conditionality.

With this in mind there is concern that in ensuring a steady supply of workers conditionality and sanctions may reinforce or deepen existing reliance on precarious and low pay employment in the labour market. In Ireland, the employment relationships most at risk of precariousness are part-time, zero-hour / 'if and when' work, temporary work and solo self-employment (Pembroke 2018). Figure 8 below outlines the incidence of employment relationships at risk of precariousness in Ireland:

Figure 8: Employment relationships as a percentage of total employment. * Solo self-employment is a percentage of overall self-employment

	Part-time	Temporary	Temp Agency Work
	Self-Employment	Solo Self-Employment	

GERMANY: 26.6, 11.5, 2.6, 9.1, 54.9

IRELAND: 19.7, 8.4, 2.4, 13.3, 68.5

UNITED KINGDOM: 24.8, 4.8, 0, 14, 84
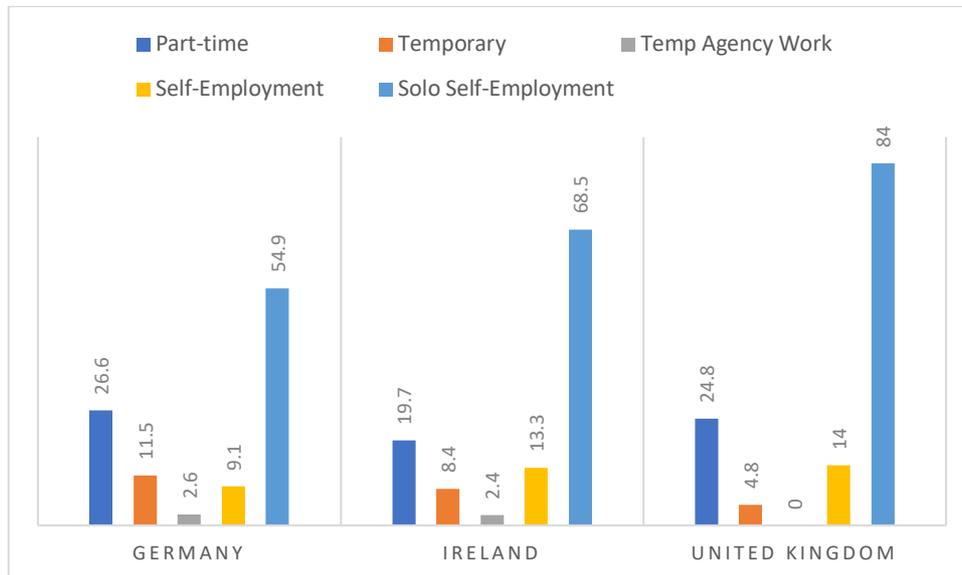
Source: Pembroke 2018

Yet, precariousness in Ireland is intimately sectoral with various sectors congregating an above-average proportion of precarious workers while also demonstrating different experiences of precarious work (Bobek et.al 2018). The variations of precarity are captured in the chart below:

Figure 9: (Percentage of) Non-Standard Employment in Selected Sectors

Sectors	Part-time	Temp	Solo Self-Employment*	Overall Self-Employment
Construction	16.3	11.5	72	35
Wholesale and Retail	33.3	8	42	12
Accommodation	38.5	11.2	35	11
Transportation and Storage	15.5	4.8	80	15
Admin and Support	35.2	9.2	72	12
Human Health	32.3	7.2	65	5
Education	23.5	12	81	5
Other	38.7	11.3	76	26
National Average	24	7.7	72	16

Source: Bobek *et.al* 2018

Note: Highlighted cells indicate where non-standard employment is higher than the national average. Darker shades indicate very high rates.

Although the categories of part-time, temporary or solo self-employment do not in themselves denote low quality work the above analysis from Bobek *et.al* (2018) found evidence of 'bad' jobs across sectors, while earlier research suggests that "flexibility is now enforced on workers" (Wickham and Bobek 2016:7). Similarly, while the rate of non-standard employment in Ireland is low precarious work is also facilitated through standard employment relationships due to an abundance of cheap labour (Pembroke 2018). Ireland has a high incidence of low pay rendering it an outlier in relation to other Small Open Economies (SOE); at 22.50 percent it is double the rate in SOE countries and 10 percent above the EU-15 average (TASC 2018).

Figure 10: Incidence of Low Pay
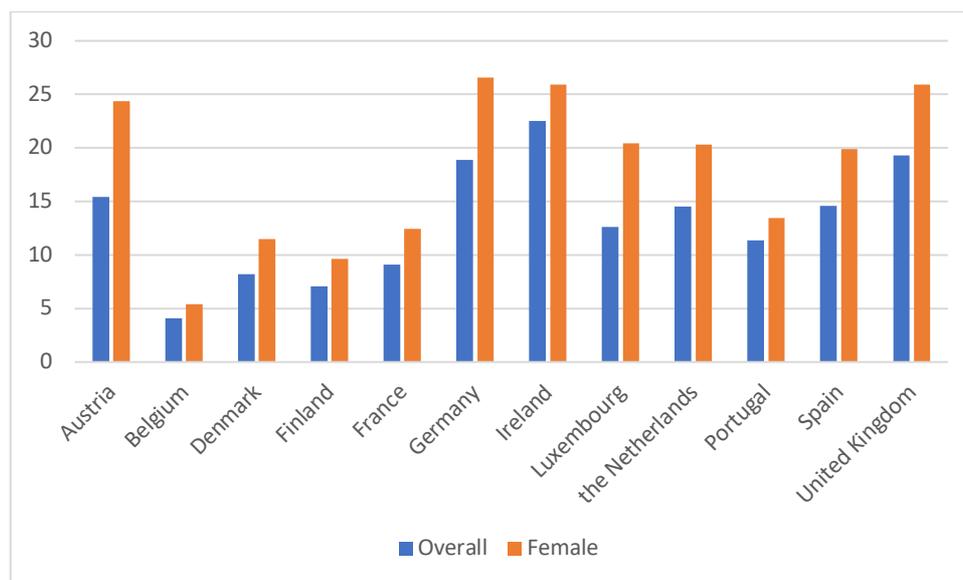
Source: OECD 2018b

Note: France, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and Spain based on 2014 figures. Otherwise figures are from 2016.

There is also a high rate of low pay among women with over a quarter in low paying jobs (Sweeney 2019; Pembroke 2018). Although 44 percent of the low paid work 35 hours or over, low-pay is entwined with low-hours work with 25 percent employed for less than 20 hours per week while they are also more likely to be on temporary contracts (16.3 percent) compared to overall employment (8.4 percent) (Collins 2015). Although low pay reaches across the life-cycle workers in Ireland they are more likely to be young with one-third aged under 30 and 65 percent of low paid under 40 (Murphy 2017). Educational attainment is also an indicator with 22 percent not having completed secondary education. This suggests that significant proportions of the population are caught within a precarious assemblage of low working hours, part-time variable and temporary contracts exacerbated by low pay (Murphy 2017). It is also exacerbated by weak collective bargaining and employment protection

legislation (Bobek *et.al* 2018). The reach of non-standard employment across sectors along with the high incidence of low pay means that jobseekers are being activated into a potentially precarious labour market. The compulsion implicit within work-related conditionality and sanctions may serve to override the choice, interest and need of jobseekers while ensuring a steady supply into the labour market (Wiggan 2015a). As such, there is a timely need to capture not only individual experiences of welfare interaction, but also their perceptions and motivations regarding work, along with how these two strands intersect as they develop strategies for negotiating and resisting the government of their lives.

5:10 Resistance

The preceding decade has witnessed recession and the subsequent imposition of austerity with cuts to social welfare payments along with intensification and extension of conditionality and sanctions; yet there has been little collective organisation around unemployment in response. The INOU had formed as an organisation *of* the unemployed *for* the unemployed during the 1980s and campaigned on macro-level concerns as well as against everyday indignities such as queuing in the rain to sign on (Allen 1998). The previously active INOU's response to the contemporary situation has been ambiguous with mobilisations largely restricted to participation in protest marches organised by the Irish Congress of Trade Unions, as in 2013 (Royall 2016). Civil society resistance to austerity is evident across the preceding decade (Hearne 2015; O'Flynn *et.al* 2013; Cox 2012) in, for example, grassroots campaigns against debt, household and water taxation policies as well as public sector transport strikes. Given such resistance it seems intuitively perplexing that INOU has not played a more pronounced role in anti-austerity mobilisations; an absence which is mirrored by pro-unemployed organisations across Europe (Royall 2016).

Explanations for the INOU's absence fall into two categories: general problems of organising

unemployed people, and secondly issues more specific to the Irish context. The first appears as obvious but fundamental; unemployment is viewed as an unwanted and transitory category even by unemployed people themselves. Whereas movements centred around race, gender and ethnicity inspire pride in claiming one's identity, the stigma of unemployment marks it as an unwanted category (Lister 2004; Allen 1998). This is compounded by the effects of unemployment such as the loss of an identity, erosion of time structure, disconnection of social networks and financial deprivation which engender a depletion of resources from which to construct political demands (Giugni 2010; Royall 2000; Allen 1998). Moreover, the difficulty of collective organisation is exacerbated by the transitory nature of unemployment as claimants either move into employment or live in hope of doing so.

More specific to the Irish context is the strength of the state and its ability to see off challenges. The INOU emerged in the late 1980s in a changing political climate underpinned by accommodation, consensus and conflict avoidance as a means of overcoming the industrial unrest of the preceding decade (Royall 2016). This political climate crystallized into social partnership; a neo-corporatist style triennial agreements (1987-2008) on national pay originally consisting of the state, employer organisations and trade unions. With the expansion of Social Partnership's remit through the incorporation of the community and volunteer sector the INOU itself became part of the process. Consensus was imposed under the threat of funding being withdrawn and serves to undermine agitation against, or criticism of, the state (Meade 2005). Social partnership therefore narrowed the field of action by producing a neo-corporatist consensus building model. The INOU's strategy during social partnership sought access to the corridors of power by establishing its own policy expertise which translated into a service delivery model to welfare queries and complaints. Moreover, since its foundation the organisation has been ambiguously linked to the mainstream Trade

Union movement with it often relying on trade unions for support in its early years (Royall 2016). Faced with exclusion from decision-making, trade unions pushed toward service delivery models focused on the needs and interests of members rather than equality goals of wider society. One result of this was the infrastructure cuts to unemployed organisations funded by the Irish Council of Trade Unions (ICTU) during the 1980s and 1990s. As such, by the time austerity policies arrived the landscape had been depleted of possible points of political organizing for unemployed people.

There has been some evidence of resistance related to activation with one protest group successfully infiltrating the national discourse on internships with their ScamBridge campaign highlighting exploitation in the JobBridge programme. Opposition to JobBridge exploitation also mobilised a broad left response as Impact and other trade unions as well as left-leaning political parties campaigned against it. Similarly, We're Not Leaving organised against low pay, poor working conditions, internships and temporary contracts which made emigration a necessity for many young people by undermining employment and life opportunities. As noted in the previous chapter such campaigns nonetheless espouse a form of Right to Work politics which forces proponents into the paradoxical position of supporting the exploitative tendencies of capital's 'wage slavery' via their demands for improved pay and conditions (Grover and Piggot 2013; Tronti 1966b). As such it forgoes the possibility of alternatives to capitalist exploitation based on a more equitable redistribution of resources and societal labour underpinned by self-determined activity. On a more individual level, Boland and Griffin (2015a, 2013) identify claimants' anecdotes as a means of resistance. The stories and experiences shared by claimants in welfare queues suggest some resistance to the government of their lives by highlighting partial rejections of the governmental logic and its individualising blame. Despite their brief recognition of such agency it nonetheless

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remains critically under-researched in Ireland and there remains little on the actual practices employed by claimants as they engage with work-related conditionality. This is the gap that the current research explores through the lives of 'mainstream' jobseekers, lone parents and discouraged jobseekers to investigate hidden strategies of negotiation and resistance as well as their relationship to collective organisation.

5:11 Conclusion

Neither the rationale nor the practice of activation are unique to the contemporary moment in Ireland. Throughout history we see antecedent themes to today's configuration of activation policies and their deployment of conditionality and sanctions. The moralisation and valorisation of work permeated the workhouses which combined deterrence through 'less eligibility' with a paternalist enforcing of 'correct behaviour' emphasizing work as the solution to personal and social ills. They are themes which are exemplified in the current burgeoning activation regime encapsulated in *Pathways to Work* of post-crisis Ireland. It carries with it an explicit use of individualist and behavioural framings regarding the problem of unemployment, heightened by an intensification of rhetoric castigating the welfare recipient as irresponsible, feckless and warranting suspicion. As earlier chapters have argued, and which is reiterated here in the Irish context, conditionality is situated in a particular set of political relations where it performs a function amenable to capital and the labour market. The introduction of JobPath's payment-by-results model potentially intensifies the commodification of claimants. Another new practice in Ireland is the extension of work-related conditionality to lone parents, increasing the possible labour supply with little regard for circumstances or needs (e.g. childcare). The lack of collective organisation in response makes the investigation of individual strategies deployed within the changing context of Irish social welfare even more pressing. In doing so, I explore how

jobseekers, discouraged jobseekers and lone parents negotiate and/or resist work-related

conditionality in their own lives, but also how these relate to, substitute for and/or inhibit

collective strategies. Before turning to the exploration and analysis of these possible tactics

and strategies I next outline the methodological approach taken in thesis.

CHAPTER SIX: METHODOLOGY

> "Goodbye benediction
> Goodbye gasoline
> Goodbye paranoia
> Goodbye sleaze"
>
> -   Butthole Surfers, *Let's Talk about Cars*

6:1 Introduction

In the first episode of the sitcom Black Books we find the hapless and cantankerous proprietor, Bernard Black, arched across his desk wrestling with the phantasma of tax returns. The inscrutable idiosyncratic perplexity provokes Bernard into a muddled rage: 'WHAT DOES THAT MEAN?!?! If you live in a council flat beside a river but are not blind … WHAT!?'. Architects of methodological textbooks are my taxmen. It is an odd and peculiar sensation to punch a book, to scream profanities at inanimate objects acting as proxies for their seemingly savant architects. It is a tyranny of ideal types as my worldview and research approach seemingly fits within multiple paradigms, and therefore does not wish to belong to any in particular. These academic consternations with opacity are also compounded by a struggle throughout the process with the proper role of academia and its relation to social change. This calls forth a fundamental introspection since this is a thesis which is not content with mere accumulation of knowledge, nor with simple apolitical articulation of voice into a void. It therefore includes a discussion concerned with both the purpose of research and its efficacy in terms of subverting existing structures of power and inequality. To reduce the burden on the reader the chapter is divided into two sections. Before addressing the practical elements of conducting research (Sampling and Engagement with Participants; Ethics; Data

Analysis; Credibility and Generalisability) the chapter first pursues a personal and philosophical engagement with the:

- Research Question and Key Debates

- Philosophical Approach

- Qualitative Research and Social Change

- Interviews

6:2 Section One: Personal and Philosophical Meanderings

- 6:2.1 Research Question and Key Debates

This research emerges out of my own peculiar dexterity for inciting annoyance; a stubborn recalcitrance in tolerating the normality of work and its trappings, as numerous retail managers will no doubt attest. Embedded assumptions of everyday life always appear as peculiar oddities ripe for intellectual poking and ridicule. A university education has not helped. A self-styled Foucauldian agitator problematizing taken-for-granted assumptions – such is now my lot. It is with such lofty and irascible convictions that I turn my gaze upon work-related conditionality and sanctions in Ireland's welfare system. That is to say, this research is about the experience of the lives targeted by it, how it impacts them and how they negotiate and resist this government of their lives. Yet through this it is also about something more fundamental; it is about what infuses work-related conditionality with such moral legitimacy, it is about work, in its narrowest sense as paid employment and the unquestioned certainty of its underlying normativity. It is about how, as Bifo Berardi puts it, 'the superstition that in order to have bread one must work … is stupid' (2016). Yet this stupidity abounds, its rhizomatic intrusion on everyday life constructing a lodestar around which all

social life is arranged; those without it are defined by their lack as unemployed 'jobseeker' while often those with it agonize over the proper harmonisation of the work-life balance. However, this is not a critique of the worker or unemployed individuals desiring work, but rather of the system and its logic which encapsulates us.

From the starting point of such seemingly boundless interests one must delineate general parameters to contrive a research design; from the kernel of an idea it becomes a workable research question implementable with methodological rigor (Silverman 2005). The research question which this research seeks to answer is:

- How do individuals experience, negotiate and/or resist work-related conditionality and sanctions in the Irish welfare system?

The dominant model of agency permeating activation and conditionality perceives unemployed individuals as deficient and in need of intervention to enforce work or develop human capital. Agency is neglected or pushed to the margins and negatively characterised as immoral economic maximisers content on benefits and/or engaged in fraud. Critiques of conditionality tend to focus on details of efficacy as well as macro-level outcomes, where experience is studied it is limited to 'getting by' or subjective resistance. It is the wager of this thesis that a more nuanced approach to agency will capture a diverse range of agency including the street-level practices participants perform in interactions with welfare agencies and caseworkers. This research is therefore rooted in the lived experience of individuals on jobseeker payments, those impacted by the imposition of work-related conditionality and sanctions and the ways in which they respond. The importance of the research question derives from the intensification and extension of work-related conditionality and sanctions within a social welfare system previously perceived as light on implementation of such

measures (Grubb *et.al* 2009; Martin 2014). As such, it marks the emergence of a brave new world in the government of unemployment in Ireland based on increased interventions into the everyday lives of individuals. While conditions of category and circumstance have always existed, these changes signal a shift to concerns about behaviour; taking as their focus the actions, motivations and perceptions of claimants in order to regulate their behaviour to the rhythm of the labour market.

The current fledgling research reflects the adolescence of policy implementation and accords multiple apertures for this research to explore. Most apparent here is how these interventions impact different categories of jobseekers along with how strategies of negotiation and resistance converge or diverge. Principal within this is investigating the gendered experience, negotiation and resistance of work-related conditionality and sanctions; a task energized by the extension of the web of obligated work-related conditionality to the formerly exempt category of lone parents. In doing so it aims to sidestep a tendency toward disempowerment of participants as passive casualties of policy change by marking out the importance of agency, and by extension, the possibility of change in responses to work-related conditionality and sanctions. At the core of all of this is decommodification and the issue of social inclusion when the lines between welfare and work blur as participation within the labour market becomes a de facto prerequisite obligation for substantive citizenship (Patrick 2012). Beyond this, the work-centric focus of welfare interventions buttressed by threat of sanction is saturated with implications for the labour market with the possible reinforcement and perpetuation of precarious work and 'low pay, no pay' cycles (Murphy 2016; Boland and Griffin 2015b). The empirical focus of this study is on how 'mainstream' jobseekers, discouraged jobseekers, and lone parent jobseekers interpret their experience as they negotiate and resist work-related conditionality and sanctions. As discussed below it

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uses semi-structured interviews with jobseekers in County Kildare, allowing a community-focused exploration of the experience of work-related conditionality and drawing out both similarities and differences. Moreover, it permits comparisons with studies conducted in other areas of the country as well as national and international studies. While focusing on work-related conditionality a number of other important debates are reflected upon, including:

- The master narrative of work and its influence

- The place of care and social reproductive labour in society

- Social and economic power in the relationship between welfare and labour market policies.

- 6:2.2 Philosophical Approach

- Ontological Perspective

As indicated above, fraught by the tyranny of ideal types, philosophical meanderings inculcated a game of postgraduate paradigmatic hopscotch. At various times I was taken by the feminist ethic of care and experiential knowledge; critical theory's dismantling of taken-for-granted assumptions in pursuit of social change; constructionist emphasis on meaning-making in our social world - all providing sturdy and appealing paradigm scaffolding on which to build research. My own worldview seemed to encapsulate substantial elements of these paradigmatic possibilities, and because it does, it seemingly could not be neatly packaged for methodological purposes. In finding my research-self I become defined by what I am not; that is to say, I did not know what I was, but I knew what I was not, and I was not a positivist. Our philosophical worldview impacts our political orientation and influences

our choice of methods in research; in research articulating the voice of a marginalized population whose lives are intensely governed by the state, the positivist bedfellows of universality and singularity manifested in an exaltation of objectivity and expertise are unpalatable. Indeed, the complexity of articulating voices, attendant as it must be to context, stands against the 'naïve rationalism' (Feyerabend 1975) of positivism which posits the unpeeling of the knowable 'onion world'. As such, the research agrees with Lynch's (1999) and Baker *et.al*'s (2004) critique of positivism's false apolitical objectivity which ostensibly neutralizes researcher bias by interpreting the researcher as an instrument in the application of technical procedures.

My ontological position holds that there is no objective reality 'out there' to be discovered, but rather that social reality is constructed through the lived experience of individuals. Further, individuals hold ideas, beliefs, perceptions and attitudes derived from their experiences, which are meaningful elements of the social world. I hold that these subjective meanings are not simply the articulation of individuals but are negotiated socially and historically through interaction with others and underlined by cultural and historical norms within a society (Creswell 2007). This construction of reality is always embedded in power relations. Truth is always socially constructed through the interrelations of power and knowledge which at their nexus constitute discourse, the socially and historically determined rules governing what can and cannot be said, wrote about, and thought within knowledge disciplines (Foucault 1981). Discourses are not simply a linguistic concept but gain materiality by going beyond what one says to incorporate practice; what one does (Hall 2010). We are shaped by this delimiting of the possible; a dissemination of the norms and standards which shape our behaviour. One must be careful in relation to Foucauldian notions of power here. While power is productive of subjectivity and dominant actors and

institutions deploy governmental power in order to form subjects in particular ways, power is never totalising but rather subjectivity emerges from multiple historically contingent and contested sources. Subjects are never formed perfectly in the image of dominant power's desires, but rather use their agency to adopt, contest and reject possibilities. It is through this epochal enabling and constraining of the possibilities of what we can say, write and think that individual subjectivity is produced (Foucault 1981).

There is no essence of human nature, but rather finite, historical and empirical subjects whose existence is based on contingent and historical conditions. These contingent and historical conditions imply the absence of ubiquity regarding truth, and thus permit the possibility of transformation. There exist multiple competing truths, these exist within a cultural-historical context in which a particular truth dominates. It does not point to the solipsism of subjectivity that posits a cacophony of individual meaning as all there is. Truths are wrested from shared experiences, worldviews situated within social, cultural, economic and political power relations. existing power relations can find succour in the singularity and universality of positivism's emphasis on expertise, objectivity and technical procedure. This technocratic paradigm situates knowledge as external implying an already given reality in which inequality appears as a natural course of events rather than the result of socio-political structures. Institutions form a pivotal point in the interplay of power and knowledge by transmitting the discourses, values and norms of a given society in the government of particular populations. As such, I wish to investigate how people experience, negotiate, and resist work-related conditionality and sanctions in the Irish welfare system.

- Epistemological Perspective

It is therefore guided by my belief that in order to understand something one must allow for those affected by it to speak on their own behalf (Foucault 1977). I rely on the views of the participants in articulating their experiences, strategies of negotiation and resistance as well as their perceptions, motivations and ideas in relation to work, welfare and their intersection as the main foundation for this research. To speak about marginalized individuals is to play the part of a colonizer, where through the collection of data the 'expert' comes to own and control part of the groups involved (Lynch 1989).[7] I believe that the ideas, beliefs, perceptions and attitudes of those involved can provide meaningful understandings of social processes and provide evidence through an elaboration of a shared lived experience. These understandings, and my own interpretation of the data, are influenced by the particular social, cultural and historical context we are situated in, and our individual experiences of this context. As Berger and Luckmann (1966:15) state:

> … in so far as all human 'knowledge' is developed, transmitted and maintained in social situations, the sociology of knowledge must seek to understand the process by which a taken-for-granted 'reality' congeals for the man in the street. In other words, we contend that the sociology of knowledge is concerned with the analysis of the social construction of reality.

As outlined above I come to the research with my own perceptions and assumptions which I see as an inevitable part of making sense of any aspect of the social world. My perceptions and assumptions based on my own experiences of unemployment and job-seeking in Kildare often bristle at the decontextualised pronouncements of political elites. This experiential knowledge is of course supplemented by knowledge of relevant literatures and buttressed by theoretical compositions endowed through the privilege of a university education and

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[7] Although in providing an interpretation of participants' experiences I have not escaped this role completely.

doctoral research. My perceptions and assumptions are just one set within a multiplicity of experiences and interpretations producing numerous understandings of the social world. It is in this collision of experiences and interpretations set within shared contextual boundaries of our experiences of culture and history that meaning can arise in our social world (Creswell 2003). As a researcher I know that I occupy a privileged role as I decide how the research is conducted, it is my questions that participants answer, and most significantly, the data produced is filtered through my 'personal lens'. However, as Creswell (2007:182) notes: 'The personal-self becomes the researcher-self. It ... represents honesty and openness to research, acknowledging that all inquiry is laden with values'. I too am caught up in and shaped by the multitude of social processes which inevitably entail developing normative values, such values cannot be cast aside in the pursuit of scientific 'objectivity' in social science. I aim to account for this privileged role in the research design outlined below.

- 6:2.3 Qualitative Research and Social Change

This research is concerned with social change. This is rather routine. Leafing through completed theses one finds the qualitative methodological terrain resplendent with desires for, and an accompanying commitment to, social change. Such laudatory desires and commitments appear too in the musings of established scholars in the methodological textbooks and deliberations that the postgraduate researcher suffers through in search of their researcher-self. The emancipatory and transformative credentials of qualitative research derive from its emphasis on empowerment for participants through amplifying their voice and telling their stories (Denzin *et.al 2006*). That is not to say of course that qualitative research is inherently transformative or immune from abuses to power (Lather 2004). Indeed, the internal process can be wrought with more subtle manipulation than quantitative research. The emancipatory and transformative potential of qualitative approaches depends

on the researcher's worldview along with how this is implemented through their methodological praxis and dissemination (Kvale 2006; Lather 2004; Burman 1997). It involves contemplating how best it can be used, including an evaluation of its purpose and values in relation to specific interventions. In qualitative research orientated toward social change one must be wary of producing research which fails to breach the confines of obtuse and blunt academia. Such solipsism elevates the role of researcher by mobilising and sustaining inequalities through perception that the voice of the poor and marginalised requires mediation (Lather 2004).

I have found the privileged world of academia induces a recurring disillusionment heightened and encapsulated by the 'talking shops' of conferences. Life, issues and problems interpreted and debated, problems highlighted, solutions proffered and critiqued. Papers presented, articles written, life goes on. Real world problems walled off. Of course, research and conferences bring insight and clarity through theoretical and conceptual development, produce important knowledges and increase our understanding of social issues and dynamics. Yet, despite the abundance of research structural inequalities persist and often worsen. There is a sense here of research as spectacle (Debord 1967); a conglomeration of mere appearances failing to ever adequately punctuate material life in any meaningful way. An aesthetic showpiece exhibiting an alluring theoretical and methodological medley pronounced in exalted argument. Since the beginning of this chapter the reader is no doubt perplexed by the question of what the seemingly irrelevant lyrics of a 1990s psychedelic experimental band have to do with qualitative research and its place in social change; some explanation is required about why we should talk about cars. As Paul Leary's guitar marks the song with a spectre of undefinable loss hitherto unknown to the listener, Gibby Haynes whispers nuances of pseudo-profundity across a backdrop of French dialogue on the

superiority of high art over popular culture. Winding toward its climax these facetious contemplations contort into the repetition of a question most mundane: 'do you want to talk about cars?'. While a reading of the song may suggest sympathy with the veneration of art, yet again context matters, set within the band's irreverent back catalogue it becomes a turning away into the ordinary. Here the intellectual becomes the pointless; sabotaged by its own introverted obscurity. Yet, this alone is not the crux of the problem. Research deploys and maintains structural inequalities within its very process (Burman 1997), while in doing so it benefits from the social problems it seeks to address. Symbolic and material benefits are accrued; more bluntly: careers are built and maintained on poverty, marginalisation, and oppression (Ranciere 2004). No amount of reflexivity on one's role can alter the fact.

This is of course an exaggerated, unkind and unsympathetic reflection upon academic research and researchers. It is one which admittedly ignores undoubtedly numerous cases where research has contributed to making a difference. Indeed, sociology often performs the important role of what Bourdieu (2010) termed a 'martial arts: a means of self-defence' for marginalised groups and victims of inequality. Yet, perhaps it reflects my own trepidation regarding the usefulness of the research. There may be an aspect of working-class angst at play here. While watching family, friends and wider community live through job loss and interactions with social welfare to write, and worse, to theorise and think about such issues seems perverse. This is not an appeal for the abdication of research but more a contemplation on its effectiveness in supporting social change. What use is research if nobody reads it? What use is it if people only read it? How do we produce knowledge that plays a genuine role in supporting progressive change? In particular, I am pessimistic concerning the potential of research to influence policy. Indeed, speaking truth to power through such avenues appears naïvely optimistic regarding the propensity of political elites 'to do the right

thing'. It obeys a logic of a research-practice nexus implying a certain degree of formulaic objectivity whereby the veracity of research is sufficient for policy implementation. Yet, an abundance of research induces little redress. As Cox (2010:3) notes "inequality is no accident", it is constructed, maintained and reinforced by entwined economic, cultural and political interests.

As such, this research is unashamedly political. That is politics in a broad sense, beyond party and policy. It is a politics which attempts to make an impact, however small, in challenging the historically evident stigma and shame of welfare and poverty by articulating the counter-truth of its lived experience. It is politics run through with hope and pessimism. No hope of changing policy, an exaggeration of course, but one containing more than a kernel of truth. The vicissitudes of piecemeal non-linear incrementalism within trudging state policy trajectories is unlikely to give way to radical change anytime soon. This thesis is partly a struggle of understanding and accepting the role of research in social change; if research cannot change the world then what is the point; beyond maintaining one's place in the relatively privileged life of academia. It is clinging to hope and resistance, even if it is resistance for resistance's sake; to keep swinging so as to bloody the nose of elites. It accepts Cannella and Lincoln's (2009:68) assertion that research should be "grounded in critical ethical challenges to the social system" while acknowledging the limitations of academic research situated in socio-political capitalist power relations. In this sense, it recognises that the master's tools will not dismantle the master's house (Lorde 1984), yet it hopes to perhaps disrupt it.

- **6:2.4 Interviews**

The interview is promiscuous; it is ubiquitously embedded across society and deployed as a means of securing knowledge within an array of fields: employment interviews, law enforcement, radio and television with the great and good of public affairs and celebrity, and in social research, to name but a few. The interview is the most popular method for the collection of empirical data within qualitative research (Holstein and Gubrium 1995), developed and refined "both as practice and as a methodological term" (Platt 2001:63) within the evolutionary contours of social research. Despite the historical development of interviews in social research they can be broadly classified within a dichotomous categorisation. On one side of this dichotomy is the 'canonical' approach (Luker 2008) to interviews as a tool of data extraction, and on the other, an understanding of interviews as an active relationship between researcher and participant in which they construct meaning potentially leading to empowerment (Mishler 1986). Kvale's (1996) metaphorical distinction between the 'miner' and the 'traveller' captures these alternative perspectives to qualitative interviews. The miner metaphor treats the respondent as a repository of untapped information which the objective researcher skilfully mines with neutral tools. It reflects the positivist tendency toward a hygienic stimuli-response model whereby the researcher digs for and uncovers "nuggets of data or meanings out of the subject's pure experiences" (Kvale 1996:3). Carefully defined questions within a standardised and structured interview filter the transmission of information through the supposedly unreliable and messy mediation of interviewees (Creswell 2007).

On the other hand, the 'traveller' metaphor works from a constructionist perspective which embraces social research's mirroring of the messy complexity of social life. It

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emphasizes flexibility of interviews, the integral role of researchers and their values, along with the knowledge mediation of interviewees. Here, the participant joins the researcher as active in the co-production of meaning with cooperation allowing more space for the insights, experiences, feelings and subjective meanings of participants. This approach mirrors feminist perspectives on qualitative interviews, most persuasively articulated in Oakley's (1981) arresting critique of the 'hygienic' model of conducting interviews. Similar, to Kvale's (1996) 'miner', the hygienic model derives from the positivist desire for a calculable universe and positions interviews as a standardised technical device extracting data from respondents. Oakley's (1981) critique provides an ethical challenge to the focus on objectivity, detachment and asymmetrical power relationships. This is done through accentuating the role of the researcher in arguing for personal investment in the interview process through self-disclosure in order to develop relationships in an empathetic and care-centred manner. Such approaches underscore qualitative interviews as egalitarian and reciprocal meaning-making enterprises rather than the sterile collection of data from subjects.

Yet, in one's haste to condemn the positivist sterility they may potentially fall into a qualitative progressivity myth of alleged ethical superiority in which emancipatory and transformative outcomes are perceived as inherent within the method. While ostensibly delineating greater power to participants in shaping the interview process, one should be tentative in not aggrandizing the extent of such empowerment. Methods are apolitical and lack inherent emancipatory and transformative elements. Rather, one's politics informs the research question and the methodological design and may imbue their construction with emancipatory and transformative elements which require continuous oversight and reinforcement by the researcher. However, the construction of egalitarian dialogue between researcher and participant is misleading since the invitation to interview establishes a

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hierarchy as the former constructs and utilises the process to extract knowledge from the participant. Whatever insights, realisations or empowerment the participant takes from the process is done so within the terms circumscribed by the researcher. Ignorance to this asymmetry of power relations leads one onto ethically treacherous terrain where self-disclosure becomes a social lubricant in developing rapport and trust to elicit loquaciously uninhibited revelations (Kvale 2006). Interviews then appear neither as clinical extraction of information nor totally egalitarian meaning-making events through conversation. Yet to limit self-disclosure and personal investment not only leads to an ethically troublesome diminishing of empathy but also undermines the agency of participants involved. While interviews have been identified as replicating elements of a natural conversation (Savin-Baden and Major 2013), others have interpreted them as a particular kind of conversation, albeit one with a purpose (Burgess 1984) of yielding a narrative (Rossman and Rallis 2003) or making meaning around a topic (Esterberg 2002). While acknowledging the asymmetrical power relations inherent within interviews, those conducted here speak to the latter category; emerging as ephemeral fragments in space and time where participants unfold their lives.

While maintaining an ethical position accentuating responsibility and care toward participants, they nonetheless unfurled and laid bare their experiences: stories of home repossession, borrowing, fraud, suicide attempts, and shame permeate. Within these stories, participants have guided the conversation through emphasizing the ideas and issues important to them; along with, at times, rejecting my interpretations of their experienced situations. Over the course of these interviews most insisted upon hearing my own interpretation of welfare activation, conditionality and sanctions, almost all of whom openly but good-naturedly debated my views – somewhat giving lie to the spectral fear of researcher cum puppet master. The researcher must therefore fulfil the precarious task of neither under-

estimating nor over-estimating their influence within the context of each interview. It suggests a fragmentary openness delimited by the length of the interview, despite the intimate revelations of the interview none of the participants appeared discomforted and indeed most politely laughed and declined my perhaps over-zealous commitment to forward a transcript for them to suggest alterations. It was over and they did not care beyond the (re)telling of their story; a willingness to give an hour and two of their time melding with lack of expectations regarding change as the post-interview status quo of normality reappeared.

6:3 Section Two: The Practicalities of Research

Having expounded the methodological angst of research and its unresolved relation to social change the chapter now turns to look more directly at how the practicalities of the research were carried out. There are of course no clear demarcations between the two sections; as this section is obviously guided by and underpinned by the first. In discussing the approach taken in the research this section is broken into four main headings:

- Sampling and Engagement with Participants

- Ethics

- Data Analysis

- Credibility and Generalisation

- 6:3.1 Sampling and Engaging with Participants

Within canonical textbooks, sampling occupies a key role in certifying quantitative research's 'scientific' superiority over qualitative research. The former utilises probability sampling in which the sample is randomly drawn from a population where each unit has a statistically equal chance of being chosen. It is therefore concerned with statistics, large numeric cohorts

pursuing the representativeness of the population; as Luker (2008:101) puts it: "canonicals sample so that they can generalize". On the contrary, the qualitative approach to sampling is often defined in terms of what it is not; non-probability sampling (Sarantakos 2005; Bryman 2012). Indeed, qualitative use of sampling is regarded as "less desirable" (Cresswell 2003:156), "less structured … less strict [than quantitative techniques]" and therefore "biased by nature" (Sarantakos 2005:140). The inference of course being that qualitative research lacks the scientific basis of its quantitative counterpart and is therefore less valuable and inherently questionable since it does not provide a measurable and accurate representation of the population (Moran 2016). Yet despite this bias for random probability sampling is problematic on its own terms since researchers often perform secondary analysis on datasets gathered by large organisations due to cost and feasibility issues involved with constructing large datasets. This limits these researchers to working from questions that those organisations asked (Luker 2008).

Moreover, quite often qualitative research is asking a different type of question which cannot be adequately answered within the canonical repertoire; rather than seeking the mathematically driven distribution of a population across the categories, qualitative approaches are concerned with the *"relevant categories at work"* (Luker 2008:102, italics in original). While not interested in representation of the population and generalisability *per se,* this approach seeks to represent the larger "*phenomenon"* (Luker 2008:103, italics in original). It is about seeking out social processes which are important in themselves but from which we can also tease out some generalities about our wider society. With this in mind, recourse to population distributions is unnecessary since our saturation in society imbues us with prior knowledge of where a phenomenon is most likely to be found; or at least to where it is unlikely to be found. The process involves a strategy of data outcropping in order to

narrow the field of possibilities onto a particular set of experiences which can be researched (Luker 2008). This approach is important since it legitimates qualitative research and its approach to sampling on its own terms rather than in reference to quantitative research and its attendant sampling methods (Cannela and Lincoln 2009; Luker 2008; Burman 1997).

Once legitimation of the approach is at least fortified against the methodological hostilities of canonical ideals the researcher is left with the practical and altogether more difficult task of finding participants willing to share their experiences, strategies, insights and perspectives. In doing so, this project utilises non-probability methods of purposive sampling complemented by snowballing. Luker (2008:108-109) outlines three key features of non-probability sampling'; first, that it should ensure a variation of representation; secondly, while not seeking to statistically prove that the experiences of individuals are representative of the wider population, we can logically infer wider experiences; and finally, our own theory building and knowledge of existing theory on the subject can guide us in selecting the individuals needed to answer the research question. With this in mind, it was incumbent upon me to ensure that the purposive sampling used here ensured a multiplicity of experiences of welfare conditionality and sanctions. Beyond the research on jobseekers in general, the international literature highlights an attendant focus on long-term unemployment, youth unemployment, lone parents and those on disability payments (Watts and Fitzpatrick 2018; Welfare Conditionality Project 2018; Patrick 2014).

With an adolescent workfare regime burgeoning in Ireland the concomitant nascent research into its impact has not yet captured the nuanced experiences of different groups there, providing much scope for capturing the diversity of lived experience. While disability payments are not yet subject to work-related conditionality in Ireland, it was decided to

research three broad cohorts: jobseekers, discouraged jobseekers, and lone parents. One of the initial preliminary hopes of this research was to explore the experience of work-related conditionality among recipients of jobseeker payments who chose not to seek work. The difficulty in finding those with 'anti-work' subjectivities willing to speak to me appeared quite early in the research. While there seemed little rejection of the work ethic, what was emerging, as we shall see later, were qualifications and caveats on the type of work regarded as acceptable, sophisticated understandings of one's labour market potentiality and a frustration or 'discouragement' with welfare agencies due to the perceived inadequacy of engagement. This 'discouragement' was further identifiable in the limited research at the time which suggested conditionality and sanctions in Ireland had provoked a worsening of claimant relationships with caseworkers and agencies over time (Boland and Griffin 2015a). While 'anti-work' subjectivities faded from view it was replaced by a category of 'discouraged jobseekers' whose experiences may compare or contrast with 'mainstream' jobseekers.

The extension of conditionality and sanctions to lone parents incorporates a previously exempt group within the governmental logic of work and work-related conditionality. Lone parents whose youngest child is aged between 7 and 13 years of age were migrated from One Parent Family Payment (OPFP) to the Jobseeker Transitional payment (JST) which necessitated engagement with *Intreo*. Lone parents within this category can access supports in terms of training, education and employment schemes while remaining exempt from the obligation to obtain full-time employment. Lone parents whose youngest child is aged 14 years of age or above are now regarded as jobseekers and subject to work-related conditionality and sanctions. That the category is overwhelmingly female signifies an important gender dimension of the experience of conditionality in Ireland. There

is a high-level of occupational segregation in the Irish labour market, both vertically and horizontally, with women often found in low-status, low paying and highly feminized sectors. Previous research (Murphy 2012) suggests a gendered dimension to activation policy since it posits an undifferentiated and careless approach to activation predicated on the male breadwinner; rendering female experiences invisible. The research therefore maintains gender as a constant variable of analysis in order to uncover and explore all potential gender dimensions. As such it is believed that these cohorts provide a multiplicity of experiences based on the different barriers faced, along with perspectives on welfare and work which inform strategies of negotiation and resistance to welfare conditionality and sanctions. The identification of lone parent jobseekers is relatively straight forward based on family structure and/or their specific payment. Distinguishing the more subjective categories of 'jobseeker' and 'discouraged jobseeker' appears somewhat more arduous. The former refers to the 'good jobseekers' of governmental power committed and engaged to the activation process, while 'discouraged jobseekers' captures individuals frustrated by and hostile to ongoing governmental interventions into their lives. It was therefore a cyclical process of identification via organisational and personal contact strategies of recruitment and verification via the interview process itself.

- **Participants in the study**

I conducted semi-structured interviews with 42 participants from County Kildare in the east of Ireland between January 2017 and April 2018. These 42 interviews are made up of 14 jobseekers, 17 discouraged jobseekers and 11 lone parent jobseekers (information regarding participants is found in Appendix 4). Posters for each cohort were developed to recruit participants and placed in post offices, charity shops, community centres, and credit unions

around the county. However, this strategy only furnished 6 interviews. Likewise, I contacted local employment offices, education and training centres, migrant advocacy groups, addiction centres, mental health support groups, men's sheds groups and organisations representing lone parents. Of these, education and training centres were the most useful, providing 12 of the total group of participants. A gatekeeper in an education and training institution attended by jobseekers was provided with information sheets containing a description of the research project and the researcher's contact details which were distributed to potential participants. These centres were particularly useful for lone parents, while my representations to lone parent organisations provided only a single interview. Moreover, it is the group that I was most socially distant from, which limited the effectiveness of utilizing personal contacts. However, one cannot over-estimate the importance of local contacts in recruiting participants for this research. Access to the education and training centre was based on a mutual acquaintance shared with administrative staff and who could vouch for me. Likewise, my repeated attempts to contact the coordinator of mental health support group for unemployed men only bore fruit after another mutual acquaintance (local politician) made representations on my behalf. This resulted in a group meeting with 5 of the participants. The same contact made also made representations on my behalf to a local Travellers' Rights Advocacy group which resulted in a group interview with 4 lone parents.

Personal contacts were instrumental in recruiting the other participants by passing information sheets about the research to potential participants. In all, 13 potential participants contacted me with 9 interviews emerging from this; 4 individuals decided to decline participation and cancelled planned interviews. The final 5 interviews emerged from snowballing since I provided each participant with information sheets that they could pass to friends, family or colleagues who might be interested. At the beginning of each interview

participants were asked to fill out a short survey to give some indication of their background (Appendix 4). All were of white working-class backgrounds, including the 4 lone parents from the Traveller community and one lone parent originally from Germany. Attempts were made to include more ethnically diverse groups but communications to migrant advocacy groups did not result in any interviews. As noted above, the two group interviews accounted for 9 participants and these were carried out at the participants' usual respective meeting places. The other 33 interviews were conducted in one-to-one at settings and times decided by participants; settings alternated between participant's homes, cafes and an education and training centre.

Recruitment diverged along category distinctions in order to identify possible 'jobseeker' and 'discouraged jobseeker' participants. Recruitment for 'jobseekers' focused on welfare agencies where committed jobseekers might be embedded within 'client journeys' via organisations such as the LESN and local education and training board. While it was expected that 'discouraged' jobseekers might emerge through these organisations, recruitment for this cohort was also extended to organisations regarded as external to typical welfare journey, such as local men's sheds and a mental health support group for unemployed men. Similarly, personal contacts were provided with outlines of each category definition. While the men's shed and the mental health support group provided participants who certainly fit the category of 'discouraged' the boundaries of the categories nonetheless appear porous as they permeate one another. It was rarely the case that a participant was either committed or discouraged but rather there was fluidity within the experience such that they were both at once. As later chapters explore what we find is a frustration and discouragement in relation to engagement but also a continued commitment to finding paid employment. In this sense the experience permeates the category of lone parent jobseeker also. Despite

variances in circumstances and nuances within the stories there is a commonality of experience diminishing the analytical potential and use of the categories and the in-depth articulation of difference, a problem reflected in research elsewhere (Welfare Conditionality Project 2018).

These stories were taped and later transcribed and anonymised. While using a list of topics to cover, the interviews nonetheless took on a more conversational tone with the result that most interviews range from one and a half hours to two and half hours long. As such, interviews are in a sense partly confessional, and at times an articulation of the 'chronicles of pain' (bell hooks 1991:59) that often animate marginalised experiences of social processes and power relations. It is also a reflexive process as the interview takes on more than a stimuli-response interaction to become a space for conversational meaning-making between researcher and participant. With this in mind, I used three prompts across the interviews. The first was to use the Record of Mutual Commitments (Appendix 7), which all jobseekers must sign, to open up reflections on participants' own interactions based on the supposed promises and obligations that the document delineates. This was presented early in the interviews as we discussed participants interactions with welfare agencies and caseworkers. Given the space to take their time in studying the mutual obligations participants' often drew on the document as a source of criticism toward social welfare agencies and the perceived lack of support. The second and third prompts (Appendix 5) were quotes from political elites representing the dominant rationality and view of jobseekers. The first from current Taoiseach (Prime Minister) Leo Varadkar expounded a view of welfare 'job snobs' while the second from former Taoiseach Enda Kenny was concerned with 'welfare dependency'. These were used in the latter half of the interviews in order to prompt wider socio-political reflection on social welfare as well as to capture feelings and attitudes toward other

jobseekers, and the strategies that this might imply. The use of these quotes illuminated psychological coping mechanisms in dealing with unemployment and welfare as participants engaged in rejection of the ideas articulated or, often, the use of othering through agreement in its application to others.

Only two participants were known to me prior to the research and both were attending an education and training institution. As such rapport and trust was necessarily built from scratch in each interview. I was aided by two factors: I was from the same county and shared a working-class background with all participants; I also had some experience of long-term unemployment and had some interaction with work-related conditionality. As such, I shared a similar *argot* with participants and broadly relatable experiences in terms of welfare interactions, which along with my usual mundane and unrefined attire removed the mien of academia. Moreover, throughout the interviews I was willing to articulate my own thoughts and perspective on the issues we talked about. While to the canonicals this amounts to anti-scientific unprofessionalism, within the context of the interviews I found this willingness towards self-disclosure a necessary step in developing rapport and empathy with their position, and one which produced disagreements with me. At times my contributions did articulate academic perspectives, often prompted by the participant, regarding ideas or evidence related to topics. My recourse to academic knowledge was useful when some participants repeated racist and xenophobic cultural tropes regarding the entitlements of minorities and migrants. These were always articulated in terms of 'othering' coping mechanisms in which participants tried to express their own deservingness through both legal citizenship and a broader substantive citizenship enabled by long-term work histories. Within this awkward atmosphere, prompting participants to reflect as to whether they had experience of such stories at times produced a self-reflection regarding the wider

stigmatisation of welfare recipients. As such, interaction with participants necessarily requires traversing an ethical terrain which respects their humanity and agency without eradicating your own.

- **6:3.2 Ethics**

A great interview is a hell to live. The stories which imbue qualitative interviews with an evocative and incisive vibrancy of lived experience are often sculpted from the day-to-day survival and management of harsh realities. Throughout my conversations with participants I listened to numerous individual tales about home repossessions, dealing with money lenders, and the unrelenting Sisyphean task of making ends meet. As stress, anxiety and worry became tangible and filled the space between us, participants guided me through their daily lives increasingly permeated and structured by social welfare interactions and conditionality. Such revelations underscore the danger in treating ethics as merely a one-off institutionalised process necessary to carry out research. On this view of ethics, one is concerned with the formal requirements of meeting the standards of an institutional ethical review committee. One must complete the required application form, dissecting their methodological approach and showing due care and thought for the consideration of vulnerabilities. It involves providing drafts of information leaflets, consent forms and interview topic guidelines. Here one can call upon the canonical methodological textbook literature to discharge the proper requirements and commitments: privacy; confidentiality; anonymity and consent (Sarantakos 2005). Moreover, the researcher – participant relationship must be adequately accounted for through an understanding of hierarchical power relations and their implications; the 'do no harm' principle and an articulation of concern for the welfare of the participant (*ibid.*). Prior to beginning each interview, I explained the purpose and nature of the research as I wanted to ensure that all participants understood their involvement fully before they read and agreed to

the details of the consent form. The consent form reminded participants of the nature of the research, while detailing what their participation involved, how the data would be stored, for how long, and who had access to it. It made participants aware of the extent of confidentiality and anonymity and their legal limitations under the Data Protection Act 1988 (2003 Amendment) and Maynooth University's Ethics Policy (2016). Moreover, the consent form guaranteed that all participants received a copy of their interview transcript which they could request changes to. It also informed participants that their participation could be withdrawn at any stage; however, no participant requested changes to transcripts or to withdraw from the research.

Yet such applications emerge as a technical process of satisfying generalised precautions and the often-methodological idiosyncrasies of individual members of a review panel in pursuit of the crucial letter of approval. The procedural aspect of ethical approval for this study was obtained without difficulty yet limiting ethics to the technical satisfaction of procedure ignores the unique context of each interview which may produce fluctuating needs and issues or impact the participant-researcher relationship in different ways. I have already noted the delicacy of traversing the racist and xenophobic othering of fellow welfare claimants. At other times participants spoke of distressing personal stories regarding job loss, debt, loss of their home and other possessions, feelings of diminished status in the home, and in one case, a suicide attempt. Despite the distressing nature of these stories there were never any visible suggestions of distress on behalf of participants. Stories were told in their own time without interruption. Sensitivity was further required in handling the admissions of welfare fraud in order to properly capture the reasoning and motivations behind such decisions in a way which respects the agency of those involved yet does not appear saccharine. While some participants spoke openly about it, where I questioned participants in

relation to the topic, I prefaced it with a reiteration of guaranteed anonymity, confidentiality and their legal limits, a reminder of the right to withdraw at any stage and provided an option to skip over the topic. At other times participants laughed about their welfare interactions; took joy in small victories or found the funny side of seemingly absurd interactions. However, I felt it necessary to ensure interviews finished on an openly positive note which involved a discussion of hopes for the future; a discussion which overwhelmingly centred on a positive belief in finding employment.

As May (2001) points out ethical decisions within research do not denote what is advantageous to the researcher or their project, but rather they refer to the responsibility of doing what is right and just. There is of course the responsibility of ensuring the integrity of one's work in addressing social issues. Yet these concerns are necessarily subordinated to ensuring harm avoidance toward participants along with the proper representation of their views. The latter concomitantly provides the underlying necessity of honesty in research which aims to genuinely explore the social world. These considerations also acknowledge the innate power imbalance within the researcher-participant relationship; where the former potentially shapes the behaviour and responses of the latter through a myriad of factors ranging from the construction and phrasing of questions to the use of academic jargon and subtle indications of superiority draped in clothing attire (Chambers 1997). A particularly difficult aspect of ethical research which impinges upon the concept of Informed Consent is how a researcher ought to deal with their own bias. I hold that all social research is in a broad sense political, as it "sets out with specific purposes from a particular position, and aims to persuade readers of the significance of its claims" (Clough and Nutbrown 2007:4). It is important then to not only be aware of one's own viewpoint, but to state it openly so that it may be subject to challenge and revision. However, returning to the issue of power in

research, we know that in openly stating one's position it runs the risk of dictating participants' answers, as it may encourage responses conducive to the researcher's point of view. Here one must call upon their reflexivity to avoid easy consensus and encourage participants to elaborate their views in order to see if differences emerge. At times participants were only too willing for discussion and without prompting invited my input. This often took the shape of discussions regarding the role of conditionality in which my preference for unconditional welfare found little favour, much scandal and willing combatants.

- **6:3.3 Data Analysis**

Much of the textbook literature on methodological approaches refers to data *collection*. It is, returning to Kvale's (1996) metaphor, the story of the researcher-miner out in the world collecting nuggets of information which are then transfigured through interpretation into insightful explanations of phenomena in the social world (see for example Denscombe 2010). It is an approach which clings to notions of objectivity and neutrality; of the dispassionate researcher observing the social world. This project begins from an epistemological standpoint in which all knowledge is positioned (Hammack 2011) and that "data are not collected, but produced" through an interaction of positions (May 2001:28). The qualitative approach emphasizes subjective meaning, the ways in which participants experience, interpret and assign meaning to what is happening. It is therefore focused on interpretation; both the participants' interpretations of their social world and the researcher's subsequent interpretation of that interpretation. This second occurs in attempting to make sense of participants' interviews within the broader social and political context, which is not to say that participants do not interpret their experiences in this manner, only that the privileged position of the researcher allows the time and space for sustained engagement in this sense.

With an emphasis on participant voice there is a temptation to eschew coding into thematic segments in order to preserve as much of participants' stories as completely intact as possible. Given the relatively large sample size here of 42 participants such an approach would be unwieldy. I therefore take a thematic analysis approach in which patterns are interpreted across the data at group and sub-group levels, but which constantly refer back to the context of participants' individual lived experience.

Data analysis within the qualitative approach is a process with few *a priori* principles or rules, but rather the process is custom built where "you learn as you go" (Rossman and Rallis 2003:264; Sarantakos 2005; Creswell 2003). This does not make the process and practice of research any less important or systematic; the systematic approach emerges organically in direct relation with the particularities of research in order to contextualise the stories within it. It is a circular or spiral process of immersion, analysis and interpretation which produces on-going and emergent understandings (Rossman and Rallis 2003). Familiarisation through immersing oneself in the data begins with transcription. All 42 interviews were transcribed in their entirety and remained 'unclean' in order to capture participants' modes of speech, expressions and thought processes. 34 interviews were transcribed by me while a further 8 were carried out by a professional transcription company. Listening back to the interviews provided insight into not only the interview process, regarding the structure and/or usefulness of questions, but also possible emergent themes which were explored in subsequent interviews. These were noted in comments on the transcription as well as in my own accompanying fieldwork notebook. The 8 transcriptions carried out by the private company were similarly listened to in their entirety by me in order to ensure accuracy and to note necessary changes and emergent themes. Following the transcription process, I was confronted with a voluminous amount of data; what Miles (1979)

refers to as an 'attractive nuisance'. Managing and reducing the data required multiple readings of each individual transcript while making annotations to categorise and re-categorise relevant passages. These multiple iterations of categories were recorded in a notebook to chart the evolution of the process. Lister's (2004) typology of agency was used to code the data. The identified categories were grouped according to their relation to four quadrants of agency: personal-everyday of 'getting by'; personal-strategic of 'getting out'; political/citizenship-everyday of 'getting back at'; and the political/citizenship-strategic of 'getting organised'. Linkages and relationships between the different quadrants were recorded in the field notebook along with anonymized contextualizing details regarding particular forms of agency.

The transcripts were also uploaded to MAXQDA, and while the coding was primarily performed manually, they were documented through MAXQDA as well as in my written notebook. In this sense the software provided easy access to particular segments, categories and codes. These first readings and the initial coding were performed on the cohort as a whole, while later after categories had been refined, I read through each cohort looking for sub-group specific categories. Again, these were noted in my fieldwork notebook. This early descriptive work formed the basis for identifying and exploring themes across the transcripts; the patterns emerging across the research in relation to the strategies in the group as a whole and those more specific to sub-groups. This was conjoined with listening back to the recordings for a second time, maintaining immersion within the data, and allowing the on-tape conversation to prompt lines of thought and linkages that may not appear obvious in the texts of transcripts. As noted, the early tentative coding of themes emerged by grouping categories prefigured through the conceptual framework and emergent categories under classifications based on patterned linkages between them. These themes were reviewed by

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returning to the conceptual framework to see how they fell within it or whether they required a deeper conceptualisation of strategies and their relationships. It is an iterative process in which I continually returned to the individual experience captured within the transcriptions and annotated notes. In doing so the research has attempted to capture not only similarities within an emerging typology of tactics and strategies but differences and outliers. Included in this is a shift over time from a focus on anti-work subjectivities to how people present caveats and qualifications of work.

- **6:3.4 Credibility and Generalisability**

Underlying the issues and differences regarding qualitative and quantitative research approaches discussed throughout this chapter is the problem of credibility. The canonical approach within standard textbooks emphasises the supposed scientific superiority of quantitative research with its recourse to reliability, validity, objectivity and generalisability underpinned by probability sampling and statistical measurement (see Sarantakos 2005; Denscombe 2010). Finding solace in the authority of mathematics, canonicals point to qualitative approaches as less strict, less rigorous and inherently biased (Sarantakos 2005; Creswell 2003). During a presentation of initial findings during my third year of research I was confronted by an established practitioner of the 'dismal science' who insisted that as troubling as the stories I recounted were they lacked the credibility of representation and generalisability. This confrontation underlines the ontological and epistemological differences between quantitative and qualitative approaches which inform the politics of research. The former focuses on the performance indicators rather than the performance itself in its pursuit of statistical normality which abandons the complexity of lived

experience; it does not capture the life-story behind the figure (Denzin, Lincoln and Giardina 2006).

Mishler (1986:109) questions the belief that canonicals have successfully resolved issues of "reliability, validity and replicability" in quantitative research. Indeed, as noted earlier, the confined perspicacity of the hygienic model is often further constricted by a necessity to 'make do' with secondary analysis on pre-designed datasets. Sidel's (1986:xi) assertion that "statistics are people with the tears washed away" infuses this project; it is committed to an articulation of lived experience as both individually and collectively important for empowerment, transformation and emancipation. This is not to say that qualitative research and the stories they articulate are to be extolled as self-evidently worthwhile, nor that qualitative research should escape exacting scrutiny or rigorous standards. If qualitative research should be aimed at social change then it must offer a diligent documentation and analysis of social reality. Yet in carrying out scrupulous and rigorous research it is important to avoid smuggling qualitative research in as a variant of quantitative research and its fixation on measurement, rendering it as a mere extension of the methodological armoury which 'finds out more' (Burman 1997). As neither inherently complementary nor competing with its quantitative counterpart, qualitative research finds legitimacy in its own right on the basis that it makes different claims for its research outcomes. It is precisely its complexity and messiness which is its virtue since it reflects the social relations in which we are inherently enmeshed; it invokes the necessity of reflexivity to eschew disclaimers and embrace the messiness of data. This reflexivity 'puts objectivity in its place' by escaping recuperation within the positivist empirical paradigm in pursuit of articulating the limits, abuses and absences of the latter (Burman 1997).

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At the core of concerns regarding credibility is the issue of truth; of what it is and how we come to know it. Positivism assumes that there exists one truth, one proper interpretation of the data which is disinterred through the application of standardised and universal technical procedures (Mishler 1986). Qualitative approaches reject the notion of a singular universal truth in order to communicate multiple truths which together produce a precarious, truncated and contingent truth about a social reality. It gives regard to the contingent malleability of truths which shift in response to particular events. Here we have the politics of truth implicit within social research; the quantitative reduction of humans to numbers devoid of contextualised experience underpins claims of transparency and objectivity, yet one may ask transparency and objectivity for whom? (Denzin *et.al* 2006). Its universality and reducibility to statistical simplicity afford effortless recuperation by power as the handmaiden of technocracy (*ibid.*). The multiplicity and diversity of truths within qualitative research pursues a right to participation; it insists upon voice as right amplifies it in all its inconvenient complexity.

Ensuring credibility for the articulation of these truths is complicated by their socially situated inter-active performance for a specific audience at a particular space and time with subsequent interpretations by the researcher and the reader. One mechanism for ensuring credibility is the internal consistency and logical coherence (Luker 2008) of participant stories as multiple and intersecting forms of agency emerge and are contextualised within the research. A second related mechanism for enhancing credibility within this research is the coherence of stories and experiences articulated by different research participants, which nonetheless accounts for and respects often nuanced and subtle differences across cohorts and social characteristics. These stories go beyond their personal aspect toward the production of a collective truth regarding the experience, negotiation and resistance of welfare

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conditionality situated within broader social, political and economic dimensions (Ewick and Silbey 1995; Moran 2016). This provides the answer to positivist charges that subjective meanings central to qualitative research produces unattached personal stories; mere vignettes of the personal (Sarantakos 2005). Here stories are contextualized; similarities drawn out to capture the social reality within their experiences and actions, but also looking to articulate differences and nuances where they emerge. It therefore suggests plausibility through coherence of the internal stories of the research which project similarity, but are not identical, contextualised and crisscrossed with nuance and difference. As one of the participants, Nick, remarked toward the end of our conversation:

> … the chances are if people are actively lying to you they seem to have gotten together to make a tremendous conspiracy, like wow those people are good the way they all got together and came up with the same general story like … and they sneakily all know [laughing] … **Nick**

This armoury of credibility is augmented by a third strategy of fortification by situating the stories of research participants articulated here within both the neophyte scientific literature on welfare conditionality and sanctions in Ireland and in the international literature. As later chapters demonstrate, the stories of participants not only concur with the thrust of existing fledgling studies within Ireland along with the more comprehensive international literature, but also add to it through infusion of difference to illuminate the similarities and contrasts in people's experience. As such, personal stories do not drown within the solipsism of subjectivity, self–contented by the cocooned individuality of a story told, but rather weave their connections into broader frames of power relations. The meanings individuals give to their experiences, which so troubles canonicals into dismissive pronouncements implying nugatory outcomes, can coalesce and produce evidence regarding

understandings of intersubjective meanings shared across a community (Elliot 2005). This armoury of credibility is augmented by a fourth strategy of fortification through conceptual and theoretical coherence. The stories are explored here through a conceptual and theoretical framework which make logical sense of the agency, tactics and strategies deployed by a diverse range of jobseekers. Through a focus on contextualising individuals' lived experience the research is attendant to the possibility of romanticizing agency as well as possible lines of resistance and seeks to give a holistic presentation of experiences, negative and positive, of cultivated tactics and strategies as well as their effects.

Finally, in opposition to the protagonist of the 'dismal science' mentioned earlier I do make a claim to generalisability of this qualitative research. This claim is based on the diverse set of participants presented within the research. The project involves in-depth interviews with 42 people across three internal groups: 'mainstream' jobseekers, discouraged jobseekers, and lone parent jobseekers. The diversity is enriched by an inclusion of a gender dimension and a wide age range of between 25 years of age and 61 years of age. Moreover, participants were spread across different social welfare agencies and often had experience of multiple agencies. There is also a diversity of locations across County Kildare which includes participants in both deprived areas and more provincial (and often well-off) towns. As such, the research encapsulates a broad range of experiences and interactions as well as the possibility of capturing differences. A benefit which is only enhanced by Lister's typology of agency which permits exploration of a multi-set of interrelated forms of agency, including negative exhibitions, across different spheres of life on welfare. Through the sample size and its diversity across age, gender, geographical location and interactions with welfare agencies underpinned by a conceptualisation of multi-set agency the research

provides a localized account of County Kildare which is nonetheless robust enough for generalisability to the national level.

6:4 Conclusion

It is hoped that this chapter has done more than coerce the Butthole Surfers into an academic context. Conducting a research project is a challenging and frustrating experience. Indeed, research is inevitably a struggle, imbued as it is with the personal experience of the researcher. As researchers, we occupy the privileged position of choosing a topic to study, frequently these topics are chosen because of our own deep interest in them. We bring our own bias to the research; it is from the outset guided by our own experiences and thoughts along with a motivation to delve into a particular aspect of our social world. The point is not to hide them away, but to make them explicit in order to expose them to critique and challenge. This underlines the importance of reflexivity in qualitative research; it must not set out to prove a point, but rather to construct an understanding of a phenomenon based on the lived experiences of participants. In doing so, the researcher must deal with the logistical problems of engaging with people in research and ensure that all ethical requirements are accounted for so that the research is underlined by an integrity that can lead to it being a worthwhile contribution to understanding and changing the social world. This project seeks to provide a space for the outpourings of real lived experiences through semi-structured interviews in order to challenge existing social, political and economic power relations. The burden now is to do justice to these lived experiences, as it is their richness and value in understanding the social world which makes research an ultimately satisfying experience.

CHAPTER SEVEN: 'GETTING BY' and 'GETTING OFF'

7:1 Introduction

This chapter is the first of two which draw on Lister's (2004) conceptualisation of agency to explore the lived experience of participants as they navigate work-related conditionality in the Irish welfare system. Broadly speaking there are two conflicting currents in conceptualising the welfare subject. The dominant model positions welfare claimants as 'deficient' and inactive subjects in need of intervention. This permeates right through the national variations of activation policies which operate supply-side solutions situating unemployed individuals as a problem to be worked on, shaped and coerced. It speaks of the moral irresponsibility of the economic maximiser's preference for benefits over paid work (Murray 1990); the "dutiful but defeated" claimants (Mead 1992:133) who must be 'hassled' into paid employment; or defunct human capital in need of development. In doing so it defines welfare claimants as passive agents in need of 'activation', a definition which informs othering discourses, ignores existing conditions on entitlement and narrows the range of policy options toward coercion into paid employment. Binding agency to paid employment devalues non-work activities or pushes them to the margins as illegitimate tactics in gaming the system. Its influence is visible in the new mode governing unemployment in Ireland which intensifies the use of behavioural conditionality buttressed by sanctions to insist upon participation in paid employment. Moreover, the attribution of responsibility permeating the 'deficient model' is found within the Irish political and media rhetoric accompanying the reforms. The counter-model of the 'active' welfare subject emphasizes claimants' agency through recognition that individuals are always already active in their lives, thereby acknowledging the possibility of constrained agency which may be positive or negative. While the dominant 'deficient model' of activation brackets socio-economic barriers the

counter-model of agency explores claimants' agency while contextualising it within and in relation to these structural constraints.

This work is situated in the counter-model conceptualisation of the welfare subject through its application and development of Lister's (2004) 'types of agency'. Lister's typology attempts to capture the multiple and intersecting forms of agency which fall across two axes of agency: the everyday-strategic dimension; and the personal-political/citizenship dimension. Each quadrant of the typology (Figure 11) identifies a different form of agency. On one side, the personal-everyday ('getting by') points to the informal coping mechanisms developed in order to survive on welfare while the personal-strategic ('getting out') refers to leaving welfare through paid employment and/or education. On the other, the political/citizenship-everyday ('getting back at') refers to tactics of resistance claimants carry out and the political/citizenship-strategic involves 'getting organised' through collective campaigning or other political action. The typology operates as a continuum where individuals may be involved in multiple forms of agency and occupy more than one position. This approach allows for a heterogeneity of experiences and agency rather than an assumption of unemployed people as one homogenous group (Wright 2016). In doing so, it situates agency in relation to existing structural, cultural and policy constraints and permits exploration of how agency interacts with and navigates such restraints. In this way, the approach supplements and informs the Foucauldian governmental approach which situates techniques of conditionality as practical instruments governing unemployed people according to a rationality of 'active job-seeking'. While Foucault (1977) insists that there is always resistance to power this tells us little about how individuals interact with and respond to power. In utilising Lister's typology in relation to how participants experience, navigate and resist the governmental techniques of work-related conditionality it is possible to draw out

the various activities they are involved in; both the Foucauldian (2007) 'conduct of conduct'
and also 'counter-conduct'. In this way it allows for examination of the relation between
types of agency and whether they may aid in the reproduction of the system as it is, enable
resistance or a mixture of both.

Figure 11: Lister's Typology of Agency
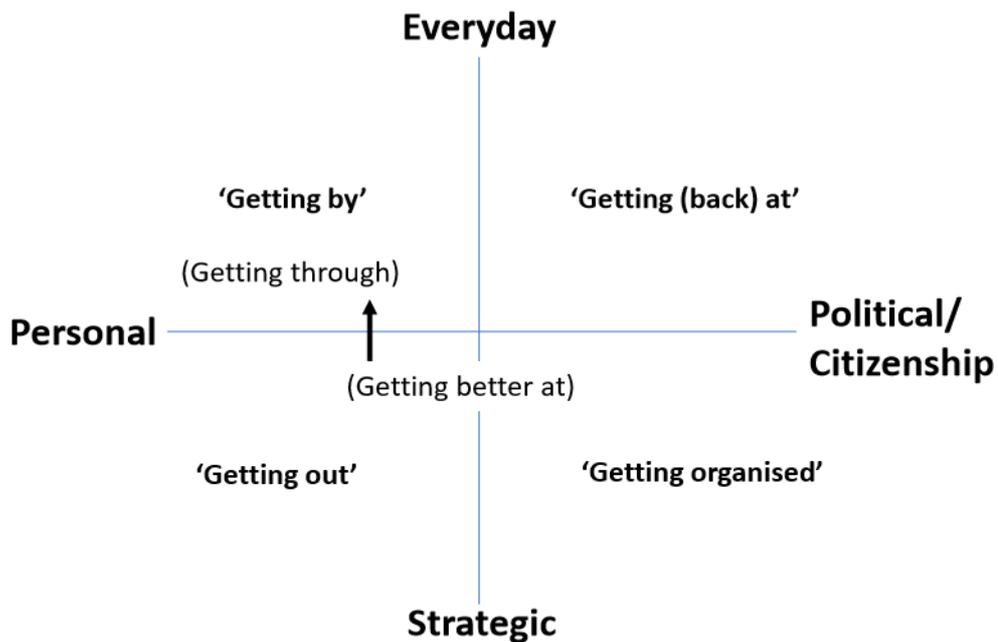
Source: Lister (2004; 2015)

This chapter details and explores the two personal quadrants of Lister's (2004) taxonomy of
forms of agency: 'getting by' and 'getting out'. Section one explores the mechanisms
employed by participants in the everyday work of surviving on welfare, including both
making ends meet and responses to stigma. Section two moves on to discuss the longer-term
strategies employed by participants to 'get out' of welfare. This begins with an exploration
of work strategies before moving on to discuss the more predominant use of educational
strategies among participants.

7:2 SECTION ONE: GETTING BY ON WELFARE

Figure 12: Forms of 'Getting By' on Welfare

Managing Material Resources	Psychological Coping
• Budgeting • Borrowing • Household and Family	• Stigma (Claims; Personal; Stigmatisation) • Avoidance • Othering

'Getting by' refers to the everyday survival mechanisms employed by participants as they navigate life on welfare. On the face of it, it might appear that this management of life on welfare is not directly relevant to exploring how participants navigate and resist conditionality. Such thinking would be wrong for two reasons. Firstly, in capturing the experience of the participants one is ethically bound to do so as holistically as possible in order to contextualise their stories; in order to tell them as truthfully as possible. Secondly, and relatedly, the lived experience detailed here, the tactics that participants deploy at a material and psychological level provide a basis which inform and bleed over into their tactics and strategies for negotiating and/or resisting conditionality. While the next section and later chapters explore what it is participants do in their interactions with welfare agencies and caseworkers, this section aids in helping to understand why they do what they do. The tactics and strategies outlined here may impede or enable the possibility of resistance. The section is divided into two parts. It first explores participants' management of material resources through tactics of budgeting, borrowing and reliance on household, family and extended networks. It then moves on to the psychological coping mechanisms utilised to survive on welfare benefits through an exploration of stigma, shame and how participants respond.

- **7:2.1 Managing Resources – Budgeting, Borrowing and Household and Family**

- **Budgeting**

The ostensible generosity of the Irish welfare state has been suggested as an impediment to jobseekers' labour market participation (Dukelow and Considine 2014). As Chapter Five demonstrated, Irish political and media rhetoric has been to quick expound this supposed benevolence of welfare payments. Despite welfare cuts, the continued generosity of the system irked current Taoiseach, Leo Varadkar,[8] enough to suggest that he knew "people who go off to Florida every year yet they're on the dole" (quoted in O'Reilly 2016). The stories articulated by participants in this research present a different picture; it is one very much of survival in which individuals and families manage their resources in order to 'make ends meet' from week to week, and which permits little luxury. This is captured in a discussion among a group of Traveller lone parents on how they spend their income:

> **Jane:** Ya wouldn't be eating steak every day of the week or have the heating on twenty-four hours … you'd get no luxury out of it
>
> **Anne:** By the time you pay your rent and ya get your bit of shopping in, and your electric and gas, sure you're left with nothing …
>
> **Elaine:** Just the bare limit for the food … and ya've to go to Aldi and that and Tescos for half price ones, ya won't be putting yer hands in the fridge for dearer items or anything, it is very hard being honest with ya on social welfare

While each of the women worked two days a week in a Traveller advocacy group it provided them with little financial gain due to corresponding deductions in their welfare payments. Despite being marginally better off in work it did not alleviate the hardship of life on welfare; rather they spoke of continuing in work due to the psychological benefits.

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[8] Who was Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection at the time of this comment.

The women's discussion underlies the struggles of life on welfare and points toward the skill and hard work that is required in 'getting by' (Lister 2004; Canvin *et.al* 2009). The juggling carried out by participants in order to survive is reflective of the everyday coping methods captured in the literature elsewhere (Shildrick *et.al* 2012). As Lister (2004) points out such forms of agency are often unrecognised since the necessity of 'getting by' renders them as taken for granted. Yet, their exercise involved continual intricate performances of intellectual, emotional and physical labour. Central to this is the management of limited finances through budgeting which is controlled and monitored at least as closely and more so than wealthier families (Keohane and Shorthouse 2012). During the course of my conversation with Sarah she described herself as living "like a pauper" since almost all her money went on bills. To prove her point Sarah opened her wallet to count her remaining 73 cents after bills and food, before providing a little red book detailing her weekly budgeting:

> This is how I work it out. I put fifty a week towards my mortgage, twenty on bills and car, I have a payable meter with the electricity because I owe them money and they wouldn't allow me to pay them every week, they insisted I put in a meter, which costs me more than I … twenty euro for petrol, ten euro for medical devices that I have, because I don't get a medical card … I get two TV license stamps, every week … so when I pay everything, with the five euro increase [in Jobseeker payment], I have thirty-five euro [a week] to live on. That sounds like a lot, but that's to feed me…
> **Sarah**

After 20 years in her job Sarah had taken redundancy five years previously due to her emotionally stressful role involving home repossessions at the height of Ireland's crisis. Despite her best efforts Sarah found her savings depleted as she slipped into debt with the electricity company and faced her own home being repossessed due to mounting arrears. Sarah had continually sought to reduce her costs even going so far as to tell me "I don't turn

on the gas, I wear three or four jumpers in my house". 'Getting by' often involves the need to make strategic decisions about essential needs such as food and heating (Monroe *et.al* 2007).

For Sinead, a single mother of two teenagers, this meant "pinching every penny until it screams", a process evident in her story of shopping for groceries

> You're walking and picking up coffee and you're going, "Okay that's €1.69 and then there's bread and that's another 89 cents" and as you're going around the supermarket, you're adding it up and you're literally standing with bananas in one hand and grapes in the other and you're going, "Well we can't have both" so it really does come down to that … **Sinead**

Our conversation took place in the cold weather of an Irish winter, which Sinead used to underline the drastic choices that can arise:

> We have no heating, you might have noticed … it was a choice between paying rent, making sure there was food on the table, and we have no heating since April because we haven't had gas because I just couldn't afford it, can't afford it … Yes, those are decisions that I have made. I'm not a stupid person, there's no way around it … **Sinead**

Sinead's insistence that she is "not a stupid person" underlines her position as a responsible parent who must make decisions within the constraints she finds herself. At times this involves choosing between food, housing and heating. While Sinead's circumstances situate her at the more extreme end of decisions that needed to be made, cutting back and cutting out were common across the interviews. For Harry it involved getting rid of his television in order to cut down on electricity bills, while for Bob it affected recreational time with his family:

… we don't go to the pictures anymore, we don't get to eat, and we used to go out eating a lot with the kids … if you went for the Sunday drive you'd stop at a hotel for a few drinks and whatever, a few sandwiches, that doesn't happen now at all, I miss that a lot … **Bob**

The budgeting, tight management of finances and cutting back bound up in the participants' decision-making detailed here underlines poverty as a practice performed through the everyday coping mechanisms of individuals. The routinised management of coping with and 'getting by' with life on welfare is set within a context of precarity and insecurity (Bobek *et.al* 2018; Parker and Pharoah 2008). Without the buffer of savings to call on even minor shocks can interrupt the routinized management of life on welfare and cause distress (Lister 2004). During our conversation Emily, a single mother of 4, spoke about having her payment unexpectedly suspended after being five minutes late for her appointment at *Intreo*. Emily had talked to her caseworker and rescheduled her appointment; she was unaware that she would be sanctioned which caused distress when she attempted to collect her money at the Post Office:

> I went to get my payment on Thursday like … didn't receive the payment, so luckily enough I had a few bits left over from the week before when I did shopping to have dinner … em to make the dinner, so luckily enough that way, but I had to wait over twenty-four hours to get the payment… **Emily**

While her payment was reinstated after returning again to *Intreo* to explain the matter, this simple journey nonetheless disrupted her management routine, child minding practices and increased expenditure through travel to and from the *Intreo* office.

The literature on the experience of unemployment is filled with evidence on how it increases isolation through the breakdown of social networks, depletion of material resources and low-self-esteem (Jahoda *et.al* 1979, 1981, 1982; Thomas *et.al* 2005; Daly and Delaney 2013). At times participants reported that cutting back engendered isolation as social interactions with friends often involved costs that could be ill-afforded. For participants here these social engagement activities were often the first to be cut as the payment of bills and shopping were prioritised, underlining the responsible agency of participants which counters tales of irresponsible spending among the poor and welfare claimants (Lister 2015; Patrick 2014). The result was often less contact or even loss of contact with friends and social networks. Alexia colourfully portrays this sense of isolation:

> You cannot go to the pub and get into a round system, in fact, you can't go to the pub really ... so join a book club then that's free yes? Not if you have to buy the fucking book, you want to join the exercise class with your friend because they're all doing yoga? No. Fucking anything … **Alexia**

She goes on to reject as patronizing the notion that the best things in life are free:

> Go for a walk? That's okay for someone who has disposable income to say - you go for a fucking walk then, give up your gym membership and your yoga, your wine club and then tell me the best things in life are free … **Alexia**

Yet, in a world organized according to principles of worker-consumer cutting back can at times have limits. The purchase of small pleasures can lead to accusations of imprudent budgeting which prove the moral and behavioural deficiency of welfare claimants, yet such pleasures are also an important part of survival (Tirado 2014). Louise spoke of her joy at being able to afford new socks and recalled how she had cried previously when she had been unable to afford the socks she needed. For Tina, it varied from a chocolate-bar to a

take-away to new coat from the low-price store *Penneys* afforded through the extra income of her occasional unreported work. Similarly, Sarah told me that:

> … my biggest indulgence is, once a month I treat myself, it's four euro for a Tesco word search, and I do bit of the puzzles. **Sarah**

These indulgences, although often small and never too costly**,** were important to participants in retaining dignity such that life was not always about mere survival. In societies structured by the worker-consumer dynamic unemployed individuals often suffer from a spoiled identity (Goffman 1990), these small pleasures were therefore important in allowing participants retain part of that identity.

- **Borrowing**

As noted earlier there is a danger in romanticizing the everyday coping mechanisms of 'getting by' as the resilience of the poor which overlooks the material and psychological limits of resourcefulness. As Harrison (2013) reminds us personal resourcefulness is not a bottomless pit that can be endlessly returned to, nor are the outcomes of such decision-making always desirable since they often entail responsible choices about the 'least bad options', as in the case of Sinead's choice between housing, food and heat. The agency of those on welfare is situated within a context of social relations; it is this understanding which permits a focus on how people on welfare think and act despite operating within tightly constrained limits. The process of 'getting by' involves augmenting internally directed mechanisms with utilizing external networks for support in making ends meet (Dagg and Gray 2016; Monroe *et.al* 2007; Lister 2004). All participants drew on some form of material and/or psychological external support. For some this involved contacting the local Community Welfare Officer for exceptional payments to meet basic needs:

Money was starting to dry up. [Wife] was out of work. She was on maternity leave, and [Baby] was seven weeks early … She [Community Welfare Officer] said, 'you're getting what you're getting', basically, 'unless your circumstances change, between now and then, give me a ring back' … **Matt**

… I couldn't afford to pay for the electricity, and I went to the Welfare Officer - 'ah no you should be able to manage', but I can't, do the figures like it doesn't add up … so I actually stopped paying for electricity for over a year … **Jimmy**

For participants the decision to contact Community Welfare Officers was not taken lightly, but rather a last resort, one akin to 'begging' that was nonetheless borne out of the necessity of making ends meet. The experience of Matt and Jimmy is reflective of all participants who sought aid from Community Welfare Officers and this difficulty in obtaining exceptional aid reflects findings on the experiences of low-income households reported elsewhere (Dagg and Gray 2016).

Despite their best efforts to budget and manage their finances from week to week for some participants' debt was a fact of life. Some had lost their homes while for others it remained an ongoing possibility, yet the need to make ends meet could also result in taking out personal credit loans:

… you're borrowing off the, the lads call to the house … and you're paying them back twice as much … there literally hasn't been a Christmas where I can afford to get anything that I need like or going back to school, getting them ready for school, or d'you know just paying bills like, just paying the rent like, I had to get a loan off them one month just to pay my rent that month and I'm still paying that back now like, I still owe them like 300 quid, so it just feels like no matter what you do, you can't dig your way out of it, once you're in the system … **Kathi**

Kathi's experience of survival, as a single parent holding down two jobs while in education and also drawing on risk-filled short-term personal loans does not fit easily within

romanticizing notions of resilience and resourcefulness. While utilising such loans may ostensibly suggest a negative use of agency which supports critiques of the supposed irresponsible behaviour of those on welfare suggested by the likes of Charles Murray (1990), a relational understanding of agency situates actions within structural limitations. Sometimes there is no good choice. Trapped in low pay work which results in the reduction of her social welfare payment Kathi described herself as constantly "robbing Peter to pay Paul" in order for her and her child to survive while undertaking education that she hopes will improve her situation. Kathi's experience underlines the struggles of 'getting by' as making use of multiple survival mechanisms which suggests endurance and adaption in a constant battle not to be overcome (CRESR 2011).

- **Household and Family**

It will not have escaped the reader's attention that the majority of quotes thus far informing this chapter come from female participants. This is reflective of wider literature identifying the hard work of 'getting by' on welfare or in poverty as highly gendered (Lister 2015; Gillies 2007; Monroe *et.al* 2007). The task of 'making ends meet' dovetails with the care-giving and domestic duties that remains primarily carried out by women. For couples, weekly budgeting and control of the finances were carried out by women:

> [Laughing] He's [Husband] useless, … my old bank account, that's for all the household bills and I make sure to keep an eye on that, ya know, make sure there's always enough in it to hit what bill, I know what standing order goes out when, what date it's due **…** he wouldn't have a clue … **Jenny**

The responsibility of managing the household finances in ensuring there is enough money to pay bills, budgeting for shopping and saving for potential unexpected expenditures falls to primarily to women (Murphy 2018). While partnered men interviewed asserted some

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involvement in the budgeting and bill paying they attested that primary responsibility rested with their female partners:

> I would normally look after the credit union loan, I also have the gas and electricity, and the refuse as well … [Wife] looks after everything else, mortgage, kid's clothes, food, tax on the cars …[she's] always really payed the bills or managed the house budget, which is fine with me … **Bob**

All of the mothers I spoke to describe the varying formations of emotional, physical and mental labour involved in social reproduction that they were called upon to perform. In the following extract Louise speaks about the difficulty of job-seeking while also being a mother and a wife. While her husband pursued a PhD, which she felt was crucial to their prospects of a better future, she performed the role of primary caregiver and carried out all duties in the home, a role she would continue even after finding part-time work:

> … you're trying to keep everyone happy, you're trying to be a mother, you're trying to take care of your kids, you're tryna be there to support your husband for what he's doing and … it just feels like you're in a vicious circle going around and around like when am I going to get out of this… you get up, you never stop cleaning, cooking, washing … **Louise**

The issues above are compounded for lone parents who remain a disadvantaged group in Irish society (Millar and Crosse 2016). While explanations for high levels of poverty among lone parents include often either having no adult in paid employment or being stuck in low skilled and low paying employment (Watson *et.al* 2011), participants also pointed toward the issue of obtaining maintenance from former partners:

> … the only occasion when he gives me money, he gives it to me long enough in succession that I get used to it, start to rely on it and then it stops, and then he pays the internet. He does that for the last 3 or 4 years now and that's it. **Nadine**

For Nadine, a single parent of two teenagers, the volatility of the limited payments from her former partner ensures that they cannot be relied on and do little to alleviate her situation. Moreover, the accumulated costs of living and raising children not only fall on the shoulders of a single parent, but also intersect with welfare regulations as women felt positioned as responsible for pursuing former partner's maintenance payments while also losing out on state welfare when they do pay:

> … they refer you to the Maintenance Recovery Unit, who take forever to write out, assuming you have an address for them … in the meantime you've no money … 50 percent of your Lone Parent, because they take a percent out, it's just a nightmare … **Alexia**

> … the government had said last year that unless you could show that you're actively pursuing the other parent for maintenance they stop your money, I was like "how the hell am I supposed to do that? He lives in Singapore, really?" I got so scared I went, and I borrowed the money and I went to Singapore. It was just a disaster because I'm still paying back the money. **Sinead**

Sinead acknowledged receiving material support from friends, while situating this in the context of an absence of a supportive and trusting familial network. This reliance on family is reflected in research conducted elsewhere (Daly and Kelly 2015; CRESR 2011; Monroe *et.al* 2007) and corresponds to the limited research on coping mechanisms in Ireland (Dagg and Gray 2016; Community Platform n.d; Daly and Leonard 2002). For Jessica, a single parent, borrowing from multiple family members was part of her weekly management of her finances as she attempted to meet her and her family's needs throughout the week:

> … my brother now he helps me out on a Monday keeps me going 'til probably Thursday but then cos I don't get paid on a Thursday now, I get paid on a Friday so I'm getting money off my daughter again on the Thursday 'til the Friday … it's just a

vicious circle, like my money will never ever last me from Friday to Friday …

Jessica

For others borrowing from family was a necessity in order to cover the cost of bills. Over the course of our conversation Eamonn, who was temporarily unemployed, told me how he accumulated a debt of €900 over a number of years to various family members in order to pay his bills. Most recently:

> … three weeks before Christmas I had to go and borrow 50 quid to go and get gas, I basically didn't fucking even clock it in my head. "Oh, bollocks, I've no gas." Bless him to God, my cousin was here …

Pathways to Work (DEASP 2012, 2014, 2016**)** positions work as the vehicle of social inclusion and the route out of poverty with welfare agencies ensuring jobseekers' labour market participation. Throughout the interviews participants often spoke of how the agencies they interacted with emphasized the importance of presentation and dress code in interviews. Yet, living on welfare and/or in poverty presents material obstacles to job-searching and finding employment. Sarah whose tight budgeting is outlined above highlighted how her depleted financial resources meant that she was reliant on family members:

> I can't even afford to buy shoes, my poor mother, twice a year sending a pair of shoes to me, and say "look, those yokes are falling apart, if you're going for an interview …", if I say I'm going for an interview, my sister will ring the hairdressers and then ring me and say "you're getting your hair done", they are so good to me … **Sarah**

Returning to the issue of unexpected expenditures, it was again family that provided the financial resources to cover the cost. Matt highlighted how he needed to rely on his father due to an administrative error which meant he had been overpaid by the social welfare. The *Intreo* office contacted him to insist on a lump sum repayment without negotiation:

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I didn't know what to do to be honest and I had very little money at the time as well so first thing I did I rang my dad and said money is being taking off me … 400 euro and he said do you have it and I said I do but then I've nothing he said right we'll give ya some money as well …. **Matt**

Within families there was a need to pool financial resources in order to get by. While some of the single participants in their twenties without children and living at home were relatively comfortable in the context of the research participants as a whole they all spoke about providing parents with rent while also taking care of some bills in the house. For others, however, pooling finances was simply in order to survive by providing food and maintaining a roof over their heads. When I spoke to Tina, a 26-year-old student repeating the final year of her university course externally due to mental health issues, she spoke about how both her and her parents had lost their jobs during the recession. She lived at home with her parents and her two brothers, everybody in the house was unemployed and on various welfare payments. Ongoing debt, the possibility of eviction and the continuous struggle to 'get by' was evident:

> … more often than not my parents' [welfare payment] goes towards the mortgage, so like that's gone immediately, and there's other overdrafts coming out of my parents account, so they have absolutely no spare money to spend on anything ... then obviously food is running out cause there's five people in the house, one or two of us [Tina and her siblings] will go and get it to make it until the next payment on Monday … **Tina**

Yet, the accumulated incomes were not always enough to survive on as Tina told me how she still depended on her boyfriend: "say if there's no food, and like my father is diabetic, so if there's no food in the house he'll [Boyfriend] give me money to get food".

Beyond the financial support provided by families participants depended on parents to provide childcare support. No parents in the research utilized formal childcare due to prohibitive costs that they could not afford, or which would render working financially pointless. Grandparents appear as a vital resource in providing the free labour of childcare which allowed parents to either work or take up education or training courses:

> … thank god I have my mam who will take them for the extra two or three hours until I've finished worked, and it's not every day, it's just three days, only for her I'd be paying only god knows what in childcare, so there again it would be pointless in working cause it'd be gone **Louise**

> We're lucky in a way that my parents will take them, it could be any time … next week she's [his mother] going to have them Wednesday and Thursday … my mom always said, you and [Wife] don't worry I'll look after [Baby] **Matt**

However, much the same as there is no bottomless pit of personal resources that can be continuously mined to make ends meet, lone parents in particular emphasized that there were limits to external supports and exhibited an awareness about asking for too much:

> I had to ask family members a few times to help out and … ya know, they have their own lives, they have their own bills, they have their mortgages as well, so ya don't want to be putting them under pressure … **Emily**

> We all have a network of women that we can call on, but it's like you're careful with your favours, you know that you can't keep asking the same people over and over again if they will take your child for you … **Sinead**

- **7:2.2 Experiencing and Coping with Stigma**

Getting by involves not only the material necessity of making ends meet but also simultaneously managing the psychological deprivations derived from the shame and stigma

of welfare. Unemployment is socially constructed as necessarily problematic, an inherent lack which must be remedied through formal paid employment. As noted earlier, the shame which permeates the experience of unemployment is rooted in historical distinctions of 'deservingness' in which the able-bodied poor are regarded as particularly lamentable. Researchers observe how the political and media rhetoric in the UK has combined to frame a particular consensus about welfare based on cultural and behavioural deficiencies (Wiggan 2012). Such rhetoric is supported by the emergence of highly edited and sensationalized 'poverty porn' television shows such as 'On Benefits and Proud' (Jensen 2014). This points toward the othering of the poor and those on welfare by the non-poor, as the former are defined by the latter as unlike us and therefore worthy of harsh or degrading treatment (Lister 2004; Peel 2003). It underlines Goffman's (1990) account of stigma which recognizes it as a relational process in which the discredited behaviours of some 'spoils' their individual identities, marking them as deviant. Moreover, as Tilly notes "othering is likely to support and be supported by relations of economic inequality, domination and social exclusion, and indeed to be stimulated as a rationale for these" (quoted in Sayer 2005:59).

As noted in previous chapters the political and media rhetoric of 'strivers versus skivers' in Ireland is neither as intense nor as explicit as in the UK, yet the historical distinctions regarding the deserving and undeserving poor do persist. Chapter Five suggested that such political and media rhetoric has intensified in recent years in Ireland, and has been explicitly drawn upon to justify the new regime of conditionality. The 2017 anti-fraud campaign, 'Welfare Cheats Cheat Us All', intensified this climate by engendering and encouraging suspicion of welfare claimants. This corresponds to Sayer's (2005) suggestion that the shame of unemployment and welfare must be situated within the particular socio-political relations of power where shaming backed by the state and other powerful interests

should be described as stigmatisation (Walker 2014). Moreover, one cross-national study highlights shame as an inevitable part of the psychosocial experience of poverty despite national variations in material conditions and is consistently linked with the stigmatisation of welfare benefits (*ibid.*). The use of work-related conditionality to coerce participation in formal paid employment can both draw upon and reinforce cultural tropes regarding workless individuals and/or communities. Exploring how individuals negotiate or resist conditionality then involves exploring how they respond to, manage or resist stigmatisation. Chapter Four illustrated how individuals can experience three categories of benefit-related stigma: personal stigma, claims stigma and stigmatisation (Baumberg 2016, 2012). This approach is useful in highlighting distinct categories which might apply in different ways to participants, but which can also be understood as interrelated dimensions of an overarching experience of stigma (Patrick 2016). Moreover, it situates individuals' psychological processes in the context of a social stigma regarding the construction of unemployment.

- **Claims Stigma**

Stigma in relation to the process of claiming features prominently in this research. Mirroring research in the UK and elsewhere (Patrick 2016; Chase and Walker 2013; Baumberg 2012) participants felt that they were on the receiving end of judgmental treatment within welfare interactions that were dehumanizing and alienating. Participants often reported that they felt like second class citizens, that they were begging for payments they were entitled to, that they were made to feel as if staff were handing over their own money and that their own individual circumstances did not matter.

> They're [*Intreo* staff] looking down on you and they're real snotty … and you're trying to get them to help you with say a payment got mixed up or whatever the deal was like you know what I mean … I hate going down to the place **Kathi**

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… ya'd feel like you're begging cause there's so much documentation to go through and you're not getting any answers to anything … there's a level of suspicion all the time and sure like there's cameras over you and that's not just for the protection of the people working in there because they're all caged in there behind glass … **Jeff**

So widespread was the stigma, and related frustration, felt by claimants that it gave rise to one of the quirks of the research findings. International research highlights how the presence of security guards operates as a technique of control in welfare offices by intimidating claimants while also reinforcing societal characterisations of them as 'threatening' (Patrick 2016; Fohrbeck *et.al* 2014). Yet, here a significant number of participants acknowledged the security guard in the main *Intreo* building as the most helpful staff member in the building:

> … the forms were just sent out to me and I didn't have one faintest idea of how to fill them in or what would happen … I filled them all wrong and to be honest the person that told me about them was like the security guard at the reception at the door ... he's explained to me how to do them, the dole didn't … so you didn't find the people working there helpful … **Anne**

While reports of claims stigma were evident across participants' stories they stand out most acutely in those of lone parents. Lone parents often felt under suspicion and dehumanized in their interactions with welfare staff. Such interactions often entailed an invasion of privacy complete with implicit or explicit judgements regarding their status and past relationships. Their experiences demonstrate the gendered experience of stigma:

> They're just appalling … her [the welfare officer] starting point was defensive, she was like, "Well, did you know your partner was going to leave?" like, "Had you been having rows? Were you getting on?" She was firmly trying to establish whether it was a spurious claim or not. **Alexia**

> One welfare officer had the nerve to tell me that I got myself pregnant … **Nadine**

- **Personal Stigma**

Perhaps surprisingly, personal stigma emerges as the least evident within the data. This is not to say that participants were satisfied with or reconciled to life on benefits, nor that they did not feel an absence in the lack of work. This is certainly not the case. Rather, while often experiencing claims stigma and demonstrating awareness and understanding of wider society's stigmatisation of claiming benefits participants nonetheless fortified themselves against the internalisation of personal stigma. Where personal stigma did emerge most strongly was in the stories of younger participants with chequered work histories or without a formal work history altogether. In our conversation, Ian, who had been employed for one year out of the previous ten spoke about becoming "stuck in a rut" on the dole, but frequently stressed a desire to work. Seeing his friends and family work had brought an internalisation of stigma through self-identification as a waster:

> … if ya don't work ya feel like a waster I suppose, people look at ya like a waster … it's more what other people think of ya, like daddy gets up at half five in the morning to work at the horses and you're only getting out of bed at 12 o'clock when he's coming back in … **Ian**

At times a partial internalisation of stigma arose in some men, aged between 40-55, reflecting anxiety over their ability to provide for their families:

> …they're [males] the ones that should go out and work and make a wage and bring it home and feed the family … I certainly became a bit dejected and a bit sad … [but] that's starting to pick up now with getting this other path … **Harry**

As implied by Harry's trailing remark, the internalisation remained partial as he managed to draw upon his new trajectory in education to fortify himself against it. For others, it involved

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drawing on notions of citizenship, collectivity and reciprocity by highlighting their own work histories and related payment of tax into state finances.

Female participants drew on these elements while also complementing them by highlighting their role as mothers and carers to buttress themselves against the internalisation of stigma. In the course of our conversation Emily drew on her earlier work history and defended her choice to give up work to look after her children:

> … they'd be kinda looking at ya as if to say 'well that's not a job', whereas it is a job as realistically my understanding and my saying of that is that it's a twenty-four hour job because when you have children and when you're running a house there's so many jobs that need to be done … **Emily**

While the three categories of stigma can indicate various dimensions of an overarching experience, they can also apply in particular ways to various groups. As Baumberg (2016) points out, and which is evident here, individuals or groups may experience claims stigma and understand wider views regarding the shame of claiming benefits yet may not fully internalise such views as personal stigma. The gendered dimension of stigma emerges here as men appear more likely to internalise personal stigma, at least partially since many can draw on personal work histories and tax paid into the system. On the other hand the role of parenting provides a bulwark against internalisation which women appear more likely to draw upon. This reflects the male breadwinner model of welfare in Ireland (Murphy 2018) in which the man is regarded as the provider and the woman as the primary care giver. Yet, based on this research, women appear more likely to suffer acute and direct claims stigma within the process of claiming as patriarchal values emerge through implicit and explicit historical and cultural (and at times, misogynist) understandings of women in Ireland.

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- **Stigmatisation**

Participants' awareness of how claiming benefits is perceived in wider society was also a prominent feature of the research. As Patrick (2016) notes these subjective perceptions are inevitably framed and interpreted through one's own attitudes and feelings, thus they are connected to personal stigma. A prominent feature in the research is the stigmatizing experience of 'the queue'. This experience of queuing for one's social welfare payment in the local Post Office reappears across the interviews time and again. It brought a visible demarcation of othering as participants were exposed to the gaze of worker-citizens:

> … because people know the days that people collect their money they know why you're going in there, you can't always pretend to be buying a stamp like … **Lisa**

> Well like when you take out that little card everybody knows you're getting Jobseekers, ya attend the queue that's getting Jobseekers ya know that kinda way, so I do feel ya know that sorta way, I'm embarrassed … **Rachel**

From the viewpoint of participants, the queue and social welfare Identity Card designates an identity which is 'spoilt' (Goffman 1990) marking them as deviant and other. However, this stigmatisation was also felt closer to home through interactions with friends and families who often made 'sly digs', passive aggressive comments ostensibly presented as humorous interplay. Jenny described how after being made redundant following 20 years in the same job, and despite now becoming a full-time carer to her children, she still faced the 'sly digs' in random encounters with friends:

> 'Oh you're a lady of leisure are ya?' … 'you still not working?' and ya'd be holding the two kids like … 'you still not working?' or 'have ya got anything since ya left the job' … yeah, it's the way they say it **Jenny**

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Similarly, Teddy found the mark of othering intruding into social settings with friends, here he provides the example of 'sly digs' in the pub:

> You get one of your mates might say, like if I'm paying – 'sure I'm paying your wage anyway so I'm basically buying the next round', even though I know it's kind of joke, it's a little dig, you get that a lot. **Teddy**

The ubiquity of social media ensures that there is little escape from the social construction of unemployed people and their concomitant critique as dependent claimants. As Louise points out:

> … I do see it on Facebook, do you know if a radio show puts up something like and you do see the comments, they have this opinion 'oh well I'm working, I don't get anything free, I pay'… it's what the government has everyone thinking that like and they're blaming the most helpless instead of the big fat cats that don't need the help but keep taking, and it drives me mental, I get really angry about it like and that's why I'm like people on welfare aren't living the high life … **Louise**

This excerpt is interesting for a number of reasons since Louise identifies the role of both social media and more traditional media in stigmatizing welfare claimants. However, her excerpt is one of resisting negative characterisations while also linking it to the inequalities in Irish society, as her reference to 'fat cats' invokes memories of the public bailout of private banking institutions through the Bank Guarantee. Indeed, while acknowledging how benefit claiming is perceived by others in society participants often did challenge at least a universal application of this characterisation. Considered in the light of the partial internalisation of personal stigma this suggests possible implications for resistance. If the personal psychological deprivation can be managed it may diminish the desire to challenge or resist systemic practices and related stigma; channelling grievances into individual resistance or 'gaming the system'.

- **Avoidance**

As the above indicates participants drew on a number of tactics to manage and resist the stigma of claiming welfare benefits. Participants often drew on the common tactic of concealing their categorisation and related spoiled identity by passing as non-claimants (Goffman 1990; Tyler 2013). For many this involved trying to avoid the topics of work, unemployment and social welfare, but when such issues did arise participants felt the need to lie about their situation. After leaving his job in the care sector due to health reasons Matt had taken up voluntary work in a local charity. With his first child on the way Matt felt the need to lie about the unpaid nature of this work to his father-in-law in order to position himself as continuing to provide for his family:

> I told him I was getting paid for it, … [Wife] was pregnant … and he was "every man has to fight for his family." I couldn't tell him that I wasn't getting paid, I was getting paid from the Social … I did it to protect him and myself from, maybe not a backlash, but what he might think of me, he might think less of me. One of the last things I said to him [Before he passed away], he was unconscious, but I said, "I'm sorry for lying" … **Matt**

Returning to the stigmatizing experience of the Post Office queue, Lisa describes how she would carefully plan her payment collection time for when the store was least busy, although an encounter with a friend or acquaintance would necessitate walking past the Post Office. Often, she would carry a ready-made excuse for why an innocent citizen might be in the Post Office:

> I used to always try and leave it 'til the last minute, just get in there while there's no one in there [laughing] … [when seeing somebody she knows] - 'oh no just getting some milk, not going in there, just walking by' … or I'd go in with a letter in my hand

and just stand in the queue and just get it and walk back out with the letter like it wasn't even anything … **Lisa**

- **Othering**

While avoidance often played an important role in the everyday management of wider stigmatisation facing participants what is most notable in the research is the process of othering. There is a death of literature regarding the relationship between claiming welfare and stigma in Ireland. As such there is little known about the level of stigma or how people may respond to it, however a burgeoning body of literature from elsewhere highlights 'othering' among welfare claimants and those in poverty as a pivotal tactic in defending their entitlement and fortifying them against stigma (Patrick 2016; Garthwaite 2014; Walker 2014; Chase and Walker 2013). The stories articulated here reflect this research as participants emphasized their own 'deservingness' of benefits in contrast to other less deserving claimants whose behaviour is deemed problematic. This points toward the importance of social characterisations of benefit claiming since despite resistance to stigma as it is applied to them individually participants nonetheless call upon and use this negative construction as a defence mechanism. Their daily lives are framed by this negative construction of unemployment, as well as other benefit claiming, where they both utilize and are subjected to 'othering' (Lister 2015). The dominance of othering within the research suggests that although there is resistance they are nonetheless susceptible to conditioning of dominant discourses regarding unemployment and welfare claiming.

Within the interviews the 'undeservingness' of others arises in various forms and to varying degrees. Immigrants, lone parents, fraudulent claimants and those with issues of substance misuse are at times sporadically invoked as transgressors of the welfare system.

The frequency of their invocation is however minimal, with the latter two categories in particular arising only in a single instance respectively. While lone parents were rarely exempted from the necessity of work in participants' transcripts, neither was there a widespread portrayal of lone parents as playing the system or undeserving. However, such characterisations did arise in a minority of interviews and centred on the notions of 'loose women' procreating in order to obtain social housing:

> I do think that if that Lone Parent [Allowance] wasn't available it could've been another little means of contraceptive ya know, if they weren't getting a few pound … I do remember a few years ago there was one girl who got pregnant then her six friends beside her got pregnant, like they all went out and got pregnant, it was all for a house and then the children's allowance once a month as well like … **Jenny**

References to immigrants claiming benefits was marginally more frequent and centred around perceived preferential treatment along with a supposed encyclopaedic knowledge of the welfare system and their entitlements:

> … the foreign nationals come in and, "I want this, this, this, this, this" … they know their rights better than we do … **Eamonn**

> I'm not racist, I'm not against any other people but I have found it very difficult to understand the fact that non-national people seem to get a lot more from the government and from social welfare than people in the country … **Emily**

When I asked whether they had any personal experience of immigrants receiving preferential treatment or witnessing their knowledge of welfare system all participants admitted they had not but had based their thinking on stories they had heard.

Most participants sought to emphasize their own attributes and characteristics in opposition to those perceived as lacking similar attributes, a theme replicating findings from

research in the UK (Patrick 2016; Chase and Walker 2013). A common method for this differentiation derived from outlining one's past work history. After a brief sabbatical to care for his daughter with special needs, Bob was eager to find work and outlined his own work history in contrast to what he saw as a welfare dependency culture:

> I'm a fucking gardener, I've management, I've addiction, I've fitted kitchens, I've fitted bathrooms, I've built walls, I've built roads, I've done everything … I think our welfare system has done more damage to a lot of people, ya know, ya can see it … people who wouldn't be quick to get out and get a job … **Bob**

This explicit use of benefit claiming as a lifestyle and its attendant accusatory blame for one's own situation underpinned the demarcation of the undeserving 'them' versus the deserving 'us' who genuinely want to work. William, who left what he felt was a dead-end job to return to education, separates himself from a 'lazy' friend who he sees as using Disability Allowance as means of avoiding work:

> … he went all weird in the head off the stuff out of the Head shops, he went into a mental health hospital, and now he's out on Disability [DA], gets paid 240 a week or something, he's got a bus pass and everything else and he's just lazy like, swear to god, he could be working doing what he wants to do to improve himself … **William**

As William's trailing sentence indicates critiques of others behaviour and choices was not only about the necessity of work but was also bound up in notions of improving oneself. While socially and culturally constructed othering operates through a personal lens involving subjective criteria of what amounts to genuine effort. William's friend had similarly recently returned to education yet for William his friend was not genuine in intent since there was "just a laziness in him".

Moreover, these subjective criteria provide a means for even those without any formal history of paid employment to position themselves as deserving since their intent was genuine. Both Ruth and Chris shared a similar story, they were similar ages (29 and 26), had been unemployed since leaving school ten years earlier and had been on a number of courses:

> There are people who do take the piss out of it though you know what I mean like well I could've been maybe taking the piss out of it a bit maybe myself but like I wanted out, like I wanted to do something, I want to have a job like but there's others that just like don't give a shit, like do whatever, go on sick whenever they want ... **Ruth**

> A lot of people on jobseekers receiving money and probably sitting around, probably doing nothing all day, drinking … I'm not like that, I know I take the taxpayers money alright but in the end its helping me get through here, to find work and then I'll pay taxes out of that as well … **Chris**

For both Ruth and Chris their participation on courses along with their stated desire to work separates them from the undeserving claimants.

A number of participants not only resisted othering fellow claimants but also rejected the dominant characterisations and treatment of welfare claimants in general. These participants could all be described as 'discouraged jobseekers', they had strong work histories and a number had third level degrees. These participants were often consciously political in our conversations. Sinead, a lone parent of two teenage children, had taken up postgraduate study after becoming frustrated with job-seeking. Sinead's ire fell upon the fixation with tax underpinning welfare as a 'handout' from the worker-citizens to welfare claimants:

> Well, for a start, everybody pays tax, so I reject that notion that other workers have to pay for [welfare benefits] … it's this notion again that there is a set of people that

don't want to work and don't want to earn and don't want to support their families, I don't know who those people are, I've never met them … **Sinead**

In the context of an approaching budget which would increase social welfare payments Peter spoke at length in openly political terms which highlighted the socio-political stigmatisation of those on benefits:

> … what's the first thing ya see on the Facebooks, on the radio stations, on the Talkfm104 talk shows – 'social welfare recipients are getting an eighty-five percent bonus', so straight away what do ya do, ya get the well off and the lesser well off against each other, the well-off are saying well I don't get a bonus

During a discussion about the rhetoric regarding the annual 'Christmas Bonus' paid to individuals on Jobseeker payments Peter, like Sinead, rejects the characterisation of welfare claimants as non-contributors while also emphasizing notions of collectivity which stigmatisation is weaponized against:

> … saying 'ah yeah sure look at him he's a bum he's on the dole so he's getting his Christmas bonus', little do they know that that Christmas bonus is paid straight back to *Pennys*, straight back to Tesco, straight back to Dunnes Stores, into the Irish economy for a couple of tins of biscuits and a couple of packets of Tayto, [laughing] that your hundred and eighty-five quid is gonna fucking leave your kids a little bit better off and ya know what man? If I was on a hundred grand a year, and I've earnt good money so I'm in my rights to say this [exasperated] - 'give them their fucking Christmas bonus', but don't, don't, play society against each other …

Lister (2004) highlights how the process of othering itself inhibits potential collective resistance by undoing lines of solidarity among those in shared situations. Despite instances of anti-othering through the reframing of the unemployment identity the act of othering was the most common response suggesting a binding to the governmental logic underpinned by the master narrative of work and social the construction of unemployment. This further

suggests a primarily individual navigation of the unemployment experience and responses to work-related conditionality.

- **7:2.3 Summary**

While not about conditionality per se, this section sets the context in which participants live and provides a basis for understanding the decision-making informing their tactics and strategies deployed to negotiate and/or resist conditionality. It permits a holistic portrayal of participants' experience as they navigate the welfare system in Ireland. In doing so it suggests that the popular rhetoric regarding the generosity of the Irish welfare system belies the lived experience of system. It supplements and develops the limited existing literature on coping with life on welfare in Ireland while making uncharted inroads into this psychological experience from the perspective of those navigating the system. There is more that needs to be done to further explore this experience. Indeed, the participants here come from a relatively affluent commuter county with large provincial towns, most have strong work histories, and many are or have been in education; if any group could be suspected of doing well on welfare it is perhaps this group. However, the experience that is captured here is one of struggle in which survival to make ends meet is managed through continuous budgeting and borrowing when needed. It is a gendered experience of patchwork survival. It is often an isolating experience in which small pleasures matter. It requires endurance at both a material and a psychological level in which participants face the attritional ubiquity of stigma within the process of claiming, in wider society and at times seeping into their very being. Yet the experience here is infused with diversity as participants make use of multiple material coping mechanisms, similarly, where stigma is felt in different realms and to varying degrees it is productive of tactical coping responses of othering, anti-othering and avoidance. What it underlines is the agency of those on welfare, tightly constrained by the limits of lacking

economic resources they nonetheless manage theirs' and their families lives, finding ways to navigate into the following week to start again. As the coming sections demonstrate it is the protection, maintenance and augmentation of the tactics outlined here which inform the tactics and strategies utilised to negotiate and/or resist conditionality.

7:3 SECTION TWO: GETTING OUT OF WELFARE

Figure 13: Forms of 'Getting Out' of Welfare

Employment Strategies	Educational Strategies	Payment Switching
• Formal • Informal / Undeclared • Failed Jobsearching	• Education • Upskilling • Meritocracy	• Disability Allowance (permanent) • Illness Benefit (temporary; 1-2 years)

'Getting out' occupies the personal-strategic quadrant of Lister's (2004) typology and refers to the ways in which individuals attempt to leave welfare benefits and their attendant conditionality behind. The forms of agency which arose within the research relating to this quadrant fall under three headings. First, there were participants often frustrated attempts to find paid employment which for some was exacerbated by the imposition of work-related conditionality. Secondly, there was the related strategy of undertaking education which for almost all involved was directed towards obtaining a 'proper job' in relation to decent pay, working conditions and enjoyment. For both employment and education the decision-making process among participants is bound up with the necessity of 'getting by' as participants weigh up the risks of taking employment and/or the possibilities of education. Finally, a small number of participants engaged in 'payment switching' to other welfare benefits in order to escape work-related conditionality on Jobseeker payments.

- **7:3.1 Employment Strategies**

Employment and education are widely viewed as providing the main routes out of poverty and/or claiming welfare benefits. They are indelibly linked with conditionality under *Pathways to Work* (DEASP 2012, 2014, 2016) which situates transition to participation in paid employment as the cure for poverty and social exclusion. As laid out in the Record of Mutual Commitments and concretised through individualised Personal Progression Plans, jobseekers must be actively seeking work or involved in training or education in order to upskill to improve their employability within the labour market. As such individual agency is constrained and shaped by government policies and their mediation at street level implementation. Yet, economic and social processes, many of which are outlined in the previous section as well as earlier chapters, also inform how individuals can and do use agency (Lister 2004). Work, in the economic sense of formal paid employment, is socially, culturally and politically embedded in western societies, while movement out of poverty is most often as a result of changes in employment status (Jenkins 2011). One of the most striking features of this research, particularly in the context of intensified conditionality, is how rare formal paid employment appears as a strategy out of the welfare system.

Out of 42 participants only four participants were in formal paid employment (Louise, Kathi, Nadine, and Jeff). Eamonn was due to start employment soon after our interview. Jeff and Kathi had been in employment continuously for a number of years and were now casual workers receiving in-work benefits. Similarly, Louise had recently taken up work as a cleaner and began receiving in-work benefits. Louise sought to maximise the household income while carrying out the bulk of caring and home duties. Conditionality has been justified as a paternalistic necessity in hassling "dutiful but defeated" individuals out of

welfare dependency and into work (Mead 1992:133; Dunn 2010, 2014). Yet, only Nadine described her interactions with a social welfare agency as sufficient 'hassle' to provoke her into taking employment. Nadine had a long history of unemployment which she stated was due to her decision to care for her children as a lone parent. Nadine's transferal from One Parent Family Payment to Jobseeker's Transitional payment had initially resulted in her participating in educational and training courses. However, her referral to the JobPath provider Seetec necessitated leaving her training course and undertaking increased job-searching and the provision of evidence. In describing her referral to Seetec, Nadine stated that "the bastards got me" and described her experience as "horrid" such that:

> …. so I took the first job out. I got really really desperate to just get away from them…just apply to any bit of shitty cleaning job … **Nadine**

Nadine repeatedly stated how she hated her low pay and working conditions as cleaner in a hotel, describing the physical toll it took on her body as being "like an abusive relationship". Despite this she insisted that continuing in her job remained a less stressful option than the possibility of returning to Seetec. The hostility and frustration Nadine felt towards Seetec was not unique but rather was often a common feature of participants' stories as they described everyday interactions with *Intreo* and both JobPath providers.

There are a number of reasons why the 'hassle' of conditionality resulted in only one participant taking up employment. The governmental rationality of *Pathways to Work* is to cultivate active jobseekers, drawing on conditionality as concrete techniques of power to coerce this rationality where necessary. Yet one reason for the absence of work as a strategy out of welfare is simply that participants' repeated efforts over a number of years to find work had not been successful. Participants often found that the jobs on offer, and often pushed by caseworkers, were unsuitable as they were either underqualified or overqualified.

Many participants felt that their age had become a barrier to regaining employment. This was evident in my conversation with Bob who had left work as a temporary measure to care for his intellectually disabled daughter. Bob was emphatic regarding the need to work and was proud of his own work history and repeatedly applied for jobs over the course of his unemployment. He arrived 30 minutes late to our interview bounding through the doors of the café after making a 128km round trip to hand in a CV. Despite his dedication, qualifications and long work history in the Community and Volunteer sector he had found it difficult to find any employment in the sector. This led to Bob widening his search to include any type of work:

> … I would have been very snobbish when I was first unemployed, I was fussy about what I wanted, I still wanted to be Bob the manager, now I'll be Bob the manager of shovelling shit just to pay the bills …I'd do anything, because I know I have to do it … I can't sit and wallow and say poor Bob isn't it terrible all my life, bollocks to that, I'm going to work until the day I die cause I like work … **Bob**

Bob had been a landscaper as a young man. By the time of our conversation Bob was beginning to alter his job-search strategy as he applied for jobs less often and when he did he focused on part-time work. He had begun developing his own landscaping business carrying out undeclared work and had upskilled through schemes funded by *Intreo* to do so. Bob had little guilt about his change of direction, highlighting his past work history, his attempts to find work as well as the pressing need to bring any income into the house. He insisted however that his strategy entailed developing his business into a legal and legitimate endeavour within 18 months:

> … okay so where I currently am taking cash for work I will be legitimate within 18 months, and I wouldn't not and couldn't not because it would be wrong, I'm enjoying getting the cash, it's great, but I have an obligation to pay PRSI and stuff like that and I get that, I'm okay with that as long as I have the work to sustain it … **Bob**

The government of unemployment constructs the 'good jobseeker' as a motivated 'entrepreneur of the self' (Foucault 2008; Boland and Griffin 2018). However, research in the UK highlights how repeated negative experiences in the labour market can lead to resignation and fatalism (Shildrick *et.al* 2012). This is mirrored by recent research in Ireland on the use of conditionality and sanctions which highlighted the negative psychological consequences of repeated failed job applications (Boland and Griffin 2015b). Frustration and anger were common outcomes of job-search activity for participants in this research where quite often applications would not even receive a reply:

> I never heard from them. I have a few e-mails, because I applied everywhere to them, sometimes they replied, sometimes they didn't. All of them are the same, "Due to the high standard of applicants … We wish you every success." … it's just so frustrating… **Alexia**

The process of job-seeking requires time, skill and effort on the part of jobseekers. Boland and Griffin (2013) refer to this as the 'hard work of doing nothing' as such efforts go unrecognized and unvalued by society. Despite the anger and frustration derived from job-seeking there is little of the "resignation and fatalism" that Shildrick *et.al* (2012:35) refers to. Rather what underlines the experience is once again the notion of endurance as participants continue to job-seek or turn their energies to another strategy, such as education. Sinead highlighted the added difficulty for lone parents in the labour market. Research highlights lower educational qualifications and a lack of work histories among lone parents (Millar and Crosse 2016). Yet, Sinead, who had multiple third-level qualifications, highlights how traditional working hours aligned with a male breadwinner model of employment make it difficult:

> … it may mean that, yes, I will not be here until 10am but I'll leave at seven or I'll have to leave at 4:30pm, but when I get home after dinner I'll fire up my laptop and

log on to the work network and get work done once the kids have been fed and put away for the night. I think that as a lone parent you constantly feel like you're on the back-foot that until such time as your kids are 18 or 20 … **Sinead**

Sinead's repeated attempts at job-searching had borne little fruition with the result that she had started to reduce attempts at finding formal employment.

Dunn's (2014) research on benefit claimant's attitudes in the UK highlights how those with third-level educations tend to reject suggestions that any job is better than welfare by drawing on structural critiques of society and the labour market. In this way individuals evade the internalisation of self-blame regarding one's state of unemployment. My findings correspond to Dunn's, yet where for Dunn (2010; Dunn *et.al* 2014) this amounts to evidence of alternative lifestyles which must be corrected through conditionality, here the agency of welfare subjects is situated in response to structural conditions that participants must navigate in their own best interests. Research in Ireland points to embedded pockets of flex-insecurity and precarity traps within the Irish labour market (Bobek *et.al* 2018; Pembroke 2018; Murphy 2017). Sinead, who turned away from job-searching and was now undertaking a PhD, illustrated her frustration with the labour market by highlighting a job she interviewed for:

… you were guaranteed two days' work a week. The pay was rubbish, considering that they were 12-hour days and they were paying between €118 for the day, which isn't a lot, not only that that, they were saying, "Well, you won't be an employee of the company, you'll be a contractor, so you're responsible for your own PRSI, your own tax, and you're not paid for holidays" … well, sorry, what good is that to me? … **Sinead**

Here Sinead identifies the emerging trend of 'bogus self-employment' (Wickham and Bobek 2016) within the labour market which transfers risk and care of the employee from the

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employers onto individuals themselves. She reflects a common trend among participants in refusing to take low paying work and/or exploitative work which offers little benefit to her. The refusal to accept that any job is better than being on welfare was common across the interviews, highlighting how those claiming benefits often resist dominant cultural presumptions (Kingfisher 1996).

Indeed, out of 42 interviews it is only Lisa, Bob and Nadine who stated outright that they would take any job over being on welfare. Lisa had lost her job in childcare due to a serious accident. After receiving Disability Allowance she transferred to Jobseeker's Allowance and was currently in education. Out of work she felt isolated and missed the social outlet work gave her. At 29 she was one of the youngest participants in the research and lived in the family home which meant that although she contributed to the household bills she was not as constrained by the struggle of 'getting by' as other participants. 'Getting by' and 'getting off' welfare can intersect, often in conflicting ways, in the lives of claimants as they weigh up the benefits and negatives of taking often low paying work. An example is provided by Sarah's case as after a number of years unemployed following her redundancy she struggled to pay her bills and was facing the possibility of having her home repossessed. Sarah voluntarily attended her JobPath provider, Turas Nua, on numerous days of the week yet her job-searching for a professional position similar to her previous job was without success. She openly resisted the low paying employment suggested by her Turas Nua caseworker. Sarah insisted that such work would trap her in low paid employment lacking a progression path to increased earnings and would leave her unable to meet mortgage payments:

> You know she keeps telling me to look at jobs as deli assistance, you know and I'm explaining I have a mortgage to pay, I can't afford to work for 14,000 euro, I want to

work but I will keep looking and I will find that job myself … I would take a job in financial services for 18,000 euro, I know I'd get back up to a certain level again ....
Sarah

This decision-making among participants also involved weighing up risks in relation to how taking work would affect their receipt of welfare benefits. Quite often the potential losses made the employment on offer unfeasible.

A striking example of this emerges in the case of Peter. After losing a well-paid job in construction Peter began to receive state assistance through Jobseeker payments as well in paying the rent on his family's home. For Peter, his receipt of the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) was central to his family's survival and ability to get by on welfare. The low pay employment his Turas Nua caseworker insisted upon threatened his precarious survival:

> She said "Well you will have an interview with Factory Foods next week", I said I'll have no interview with Factory Foods next week – "Well if you don't go they'll cut your money" … there's no houses, tell the social welfare to leave me the fuck alone 'til there is a house, what am I gonna do? [mock excitement] OH YEAH I GOT A JOB YEAH! But I'm fucking homeless … yes I work, yes I'm a privileged member of society! I pay my taxes! But I'm living in a fucking cardboard box on main street with two kids, and this is the funny thing, I made a suicide attempt after that, that night as a matter of fact, I tried to take my own life cause within a week I had an interview, they had it all set up ya know?

Agency is not always positive. Peter's suicide attempt points to Hoggett's (2001) identification of how agency can collapse as the routes through welfare individuals attempt to navigate close in around them with seemingly no room for manoeuvre. It reminds us that the routes individuals attempt to navigate are defined and shaped by structural and cultural factors which constrain actors in a number of ways (Lister 2004). When I spoke to Peter, he had returned to education and spoke openly and humorously about his experiences. He was

positive regarding his strategy of remaining on welfare while attending education until he felt qualified to find well-paying and interesting work, or until he received social housing. Work-related conditionality attempts to discipline out-of-work benefit claimants to the responsibility of paid employment. It draws upon cultural tropes of irresponsibility and dependency which permeate the social construction of unemployment. Yet, at the risk of sociological cliché, responsibility is a contested idea. The actions of participants here both implicitly challenge the government of their lives and the dominant association between responsibility and work. Participants work from their own notions of responsibility (Dwyer and Ellison 2009) as they act in what they perceive to be their own best interests, including the refusal of low paid employment. Moreover, the level of job-seeking carried out by participants is derived from their notions of responsibility, indeed, as will be explored in more depth later, the imposition of conditionality and it's often attendant suggestion of low paying employment marks it not as the harbinger of responsibility, but more of a hindrance to be navigated. For many the escape route of paid employment undergoes transformation to a goal to be achieved through education.

- **7:3.2 Educational Strategies**

Education emerges as the most popular strategy for 'getting off' welfare in this research. It is a strategy intimately tied to work. Where work strategies were hindered by the experiences and barriers highlighted above it did not usually entail a collapse of agency but often its redirection towards education. This refusal of collapse challenges popular stereotypes regarding supposed submergence into a 'culture of dependency'. Participants' strategies align with the stated governmental rationality under *Pathways to Work*, yet participants were motivated not in pursuit of any job but rather 'proper' jobs involving good working conditions, financial benefits, and work that they found interesting. While *Pathways to Work*

(DEASP 2012, 2014, 2016) preaches upskilling to better position oneself in the labour market, in practice participants often found the promised assistance toward training missing within the *Intreo* service. Most participants undertaking educational courses insisted that they did so on their own initiative. Matt told me how he felt social welfare staff were more interested in pressing him to return to employment, which after two major surgeries he did not feel immediately able for, than engaging with or helping him:

> Yeah I had to go the Citizens' Information actually, to ask about coming here because when I asked them [*Intreo*] about going on a course to re-educate myself they asked why aren't you just trying to find a job … sure why did you leave that job, sure go back and do it again, you've done it before so why not? … **Matt**

Matt used his own initiative to attend the local Citizen Information office to find out what options were available to him before visiting the educational institution to learn about the courses on offer. There was a strong belief in education as engine of meritocracy. Teddy described himself as having been trapped in low pay work that was not enough to provide for a mortgage while simultaneously too much to receive aid from social welfare benefits:

> ... I was earning too much for any assistance, so I was not entitled to any rent allowance or bus pass or medical cards, but I was earning too little to say go for mortgage, I was earning too little to rent and have a standard living … I realized that the jobs are available to me are always going to be in that bracket always, because places like Tesco and stuff that you get to a certain threshold and that's where you stop … **Teddy**

Teddy's reasons for returning to education reflect a recognition of a low learning trap in Ireland which captures individuals in precarious situations (Bobek *et.al* 2018; Murphy 2017; O'Riain 2017); it was a perception common among participants in education. Moreover, time was precious to Teddy; it was, he said, not something that could be given back 'in lieu'. The jobs he found himself eligible for demanded too much of his time, weekends and

evenings took him away from time spent with his wife and daughter. He considered education as the ameliorator of his situation.

Among the participants, few recalled being compelled to education or training courses by *Intreo* caseworkers. The next chapter will highlight how, when compelled, individuals often used their agency to navigate conditionality by taking what they perceived as their least bad option. Training and education possibilities were suggested to lone parents Emily and Jessica, who were both transferred from One Parent Family payment to Jobseeker's Transitional payment. They both reported how they were quickly informed by *Intreo* caseworkers that they were required to find work or undertake training or education. Emily had been out of work for two decades while Jessica, aged 52, had never been employed but had spent her life raising her children. Of the new horizons foisted upon them education appeared as the least daunting. Both spoke of their mental health difficulties, their initial fears and hesitations about starting education but also about their growing confidence due to undertaking education and of their future plans. Jessica told me how she had abandoned her caseworker's suggestion of childcare and was now studying business with a plan for the future:

> I'm actually doing work experience starting in January and I'm actually doing it in a shop, in the coffee shop so it'd be the running of it and multitasking you know all with the coffee machine, the table and all these things, skills as well and then the running of it hopefully as well, so I am going down that road … **Jessica**

She told me how her original *Intreo* caseworker used Turas Nua as a threat to enforce compliance and developed a Personal Progression Plan with little input from Jessica. However, her return to *Intreo* in between courses brought a new encouraging caseworker who told Jessica he was proud of her achievements. A point which reinforces the importance

of the street-level experience (Brodkin 2013) and the role of the caseworker. This encouragement along with her weekly payment transferring from the Post Office directly into her bank account gave her a sense of confidence and independence:

> Oh it is after building my confidence so much … I never felt proud 'til I started in here, now I feel proud, 31 years of getting social, it's the best feeling ever you know not to have to go to that post office with the card you know I'm actually getting paid through a bank which I never had a bank account either until I started here so, it's brilliant … **Jessica**

Education provides an important means for welfare claimants' agency as they attempt to navigate it toward improved employment opportunities. It also provides an important role in building confidence necessary to sustain and strengthen individual's sense of agency (Murray *et.al* 2014).

When we compare the experiences of Emily and Jessica, two lone parents who chose to be fulltime mothers rather than seek employment, to Rachel and Jenny, two mothers with previously long work biographies it points toward the shifting terrain of gendered moral rationalities (Duncan and Edwards 1997). Emily and Jessica could be originally categorised as 'primarily mothers' since they adopted moral positions prioritising caring for their children themselves. In contrast, Rachel and Jenny's moral position had been one of 'worker/mother integral' based on the perceived importance of being economic actors both in terms self-sufficiency and in being a role model to their children (Duncan and Edwards 1997). What is interesting here is how these gendered moral rationalities have changed according to their new experiences (Herbst-Debby and Benjamin 2018). Both Jenny and Rachel became redundant workers deciding to care for their children with little interest in pursuing new employment opportunities, adopting positions closer to 'primarily mothers'. Contrastingly,

Emily and Jessica's engagement with activation and conditionality, combined with their children's ages, has shifted their perspective to a new horizon of 'worker/mother integral'.

Referral to the JobPath providers rendered one ineligible for the BTEA payment and educational or training courses beyond the basic employability skills offered by Seetec or Turas Nua. Participants found this lack of options frustrating as it narrowed the field of their possible actions in pursuing their own agency. The organisational structure of the JobPath providers, derived from government policy, was therefore underlined by a work-first approach which attempted to direct agency directly to employment. I earlier detailed Peter's drastic response to the restraining of his agency. The following chapter will demonstrate in more detail how participants resorted to various defensive and offensive tactics to maintain autonomy even within these constraints. Yet, the implementation of one's own strategy was difficult. The reader will recall that Sarah's finances were tightly budgeted, relied on cutting expenditures and relying on family. She refused low paid employment for fear of becoming trapped and unable to pay her mortgage. For Sarah, completing a Qualified Financial Adviser (QFA) course was pivotal to finding work in financial services, but her *Intreo* and Turas Nua caseworkers insisted such training was not a necessity to work in financial services. As such, Sarah was putting aside small amounts of money each week in order to pay for her QFA courses:

> … every exam is 292 euro, so obviously it's hard coming from 188 euro a week and trying to save, but I'm doing my third one at the moment but I can't get any assistance from any government department, even though I could go in and ask to go on a course for tea making … they're telling me it's not compulsory but yet you can't work in financial services without it … I asked and asked and asked for assistance but yet they send me on, I've been on 5 or 6 courses but they're all like confidence building, how to fill out an interview application form, how to write your CV … **Sarah**

Sarah highlights how she felt neither *Intreo* nor Turas Nua understood or catered for her needs and interests. The courses that these agencies obligated her to attend were of no interest and little use to Sarah who instead budgeted and saved her meagre income in pursuit of her own educational strategy. Participants felt that courses were not only pointless but often those provided by both JobPath providers were described as degrading as they instructed participants on the importance of personal hygiene and washing oneself for an interview. This formed part of Alexia's frustration at her experience with Seetec which was marked by what she perceived as a lack of recognition of her interests and needs. Alexia told me how her caseworker appeared not to know what her training as psychotherapist entailed, as he forwarded her job opportunities as a physiotherapist. Alexia, like Sarah, followed her own educational strategy which she kept hidden from both *Intreo* and Seetec:

> My sons got together and have paid my for my Masters, only for them I wouldn't be doing it. The only thing [course] I could get with Social Welfare was that second A,B,C of how to turn on the computer, I didn't tell Social Welfare I was doing it … if they knew I was doing it, they would have cut me off … **Alexia**

Much of the literature on poverty and welfare highlights how repeated negative interactions and growing distance from the labour market can stifle optimism and provoke resignation and fatalism (Shildrick *et.al* 2012; McDonald and Marsh 2005). Two participants did appear fatalistic about the future. Despite returning to education Jeff had a pessimistic outlook regarding work after growing disillusioned as the company he worked for repeatedly changed ownership while his hours steadily reduced. He was critical of what he saw as the trends of zero contract hours and 'just in time' work in the Irish economy. Simon had lost his job, car and home over the course of the recession. Despite this he had retrained in addiction counselling through a Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme (VTOS). Simon had hoped

to progress to an advanced qualification but had been unable to after *Intreo* refused to cover his transport costs. His backup plan to apply for a Community Employment scheme in an addiction services programme was thwarted following his referral to Turas Nua which cannot utilise community work schemes.[9] This occurred in the midst of ongoing court cases with banks regarding his debt. His multiple attempts to navigate the welfare system to his advantage through training and education were undermined by economic precarity and bureaucratic rules and organisation. When I asked if higher education would be something he would like to do Simon was non-committal:

> I don't know to be honest with you. Just at the moment now everything's up in the air, the goal was originally to apply to college after the VTOS, but we're just, we started getting court cases after and I said no, no I'm not having this hanging over my head trying to do it and the degree at the same time. I wouldn't have been able for it …
> **Simon**

Yet, in the main participants in this research demonstrate a remarkable predilection for endurance as they pursue their strategies for 'getting out' of welfare; strategies which in numerous ways converge with and diverge from the dominant rationality. I finished interviews by asking participants about their aspirations for the future. Almost all participants held fast to their belief that education would lead them into a better job. This is best captured by Sarah's almost dogmatic belief:

> … I still have hopes and dreams and aspirations, every day, that's what keeps me going, is that I am going to get my job, and I am going to be able to pay my bills, and I am going to have a bit of craic again, and I am going to be able to go out without depending on someone. Really, yeah, oh yeah, that's coming. Absolutely, that is going to happen. When I can't tell you, but it's going to happen, I have to believe that. Because if I don't believe that, I wouldn't get up in the morning … **Sarah**

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[9] As of June 2018 JobPath providers can now refer claimants to Community Employment and Tús schemes.

Education was intimately linked with the pursuit of better employment opportunities and emerges as the most dominant strategy of 'getting out'. However, a small number of participants felt either unable or disinclined to work and therefore sought out alternative routes of 'getting out' of Jobseeker payments and their attendant conditionality.

- **7:3.3 Payment Switching**

For a small minority of participants their strategy involved an outright avoidance of work. Patrick and Pauline shared similar experiences as they were close to retirement age and had found themselves on the JobPath programme. Patrick had performed skilled work and Pauline had worked as an artist and both were unwilling to take other work. They continued to perform their own work for their own personal satisfaction, occasionally going through the required process with their caseworkers but receiving little hassle in regards to job-searching. Similarly, Colin had learned to live contentedly on a low income and spent his time working on his own projects and performing 'handyman' work for his neighbours. His impending referral from Obair, where he had a friendly relationship with his caseworker, to JobPath necessitated a development of a new strategy and saw Colin attempt to avoid work-related conditionality by seeking Disability Allowance. Unlike the UK approach, Irish work-related conditionality has not yet extended to disability payments. Reports highlight increases in the numbers receiving disability payments in Ireland (Baker 2018) with the implication being that significant numbers of cases are not genuine. This reflects the rhetoric in other countries which have reported similar increases and forms part of the justification for the subsequent extension of conditionality to disability payments (Patrick 2011). Other participants in the research sought out the shorter-term (1-2 years) Illness Benefit since it was perceived as easier to obtain. This was the case for both Rachel and Jenny who had both received

redundancy and had been shocked by the level of 'hassle' received from *Intreo* caseworkers. Neither had intentions to return to work but after long work histories had hoped to spend time at home with their children. Both spoke of the stress and anxiety caused by the necessity of job-seeking and the frequent phone-calls from caseworkers, which Illness Benefit provided a temporary release from:

> I've been on Illness Benefit … stress and anxiety … I basically went on that because of the social welfare … what happened was I was made redundant by the [Business] after working for them for 12 years which was heart-breaking after working there for so long and with everything that happened with it and as soon as you sign on with the dole then they asked ya to look for work and work and work and they constantly ring ya and all that … **Jenny**

In disciplining individuals to a continued presence within the labour market work-related conditionality attempts to erode possible lines of flight (Deleuze 1995) toward decommodification and non-labour market participation. Government policy and its street level implementation shape the possibilities of agency toward particular goals. However, as Jenny, Rachel and Colin demonstrate individuals' agency may still counter this government of their lives through altered tactics to follow their own interests. While Colin was in the process of attempting to switch to Disability Allowance when we spoke, Illness Benefit provided Jenny and Rachel with their escape from the governmental rationality and techniques of conditionality. In doing so they provided unintended challenges to the governing logic operating through the master narrative of work. A point we will return to in coming chapters.

- **7:3.4 Summary**

The strategies for 'getting out' utilised by participants here mirrors existing research from elsewhere where employment and education predominate as the means for escaping welfare and/or poverty. However, employment arises here more as a goal or desire as frustrated job-seeking or limited prospects regarding a 'proper job' impinge on its possibilities as a feasible escape route from welfare. It is therefore intimately linked to education as participants display a strong belief in education as the engine of meritocracy as they upskill towards better employment and better prospects. These strategies are then closely linked with participants necessity of 'getting by' on welfare. A third strategy emerges in this research directly linked to work-related conditionality as a small number of participants utilise the switching of payments to escape the work-related conditionality of Jobseeker payments.

7:4 Conclusion

This chapter draws on Lister's (2004) typology to capture the multiple and intersecting forms of agency exercised by participants within the personal-everyday ('Getting by') and personal-strategic ('Getting out') forms of agency. As such, it recognizes both an immediate short-term 'everyday' agency as well as longer-term strategies that participants employ. In doing so it complements and informs the governmentality focus on investigating techniques of conditionality as a mode of governing unemployed people by permitting an exploration of how participants interact with and respond to dominant power. The exploration of the personal-everyday tactics of 'getting by' demonstrates the informal coping mechanisms deployed by participants. It gives testament to the material and psychological struggles of surviving life on welfare and the tactics deployed to manage their experiences, as well as the diverse manifestations this takes. These 'getting by' tactics while not appearing directly

linked to work-related conditionality are pivotal in setting the context which informs participants' tactics and strategies in relation to conditionality. While men appear more likely to experience some partial internalisation of stigma the experience of 'getting by' and in particular its material aspects emerge as highly gendered with women bearing the brunt. This is of course intensified for lone parents who have fewer resources to draw on to manage their survival.

The chapter further explored the longer-term strategies of 'getting off' welfare which are intimately bound up in 'getting by'. It demonstrates that participants have sophisticated understandings of their particular segments of the labour market and the measures to navigate through or out of it. What these strategies illustrate is a much richer sense of agency in which participants are engaged with their own perceived work trajectories which often stand in contrast to the social welfare system's assumptions about them. In this sense the system appears unable to provide an enabling role and, based on the stories here, is impeding the capacity to 'get by' and 'get off' by its minimal engagement with participants' circumstance, their own understanding of their situation as well as their sense of self, agency and direction. The intersecting nature of these strategies and tactics is continued in the following chapter where the forms of agency explored here inform and shape the political/citizenship-everyday tactics of 'getting back at' as well as the political/citizenship-strategic possibilities of 'getting organised'. Through these types of agency I analyse the resistance performed by participants in order to defend their interests and chart their own trajectories through work-related conditionality.

CHAPTER EIGHT: 'GETTING BACK AT' AND 'GETTING ORGANISED'

8:1 Introduction

The preceding chapter demonstrated that life on benefits centres around the hard work of 'getting by' in order to make ends meet. Most participants found the possible escape of paid employment as unfeasible due to low pay, poor working conditions and at times perceptions of uninteresting and unfulfilling work. This prompts a number of questions regarding participants agency in relation to resistance. For one, how do individuals maintain their own interests in an increasingly conditional regime which seeks to elicit or coerce participation in paid employment? Does the perceived paucity of welfare rates which permits only survival prompt individuals to engage in activities to supplement incomes, and can such activities be labelled resistance? What kinds of collective responses, if any, evolve in reaction to the material and psychological deprivations of unemployment, and/or in relation to work-related conditionality. This chapter addresses these questions by exploring participants' agency within the political/citizenship quadrants of Lister's (2004) taxonomy: the everyday 'getting back at' and the strategic 'getting organised'. As such, it complements the previous analysis through an exploration of resistance performed by participants in order to maintain and pursue their own interests.

8:2 SECTION ONE: GETTING BACK AT

Figure 14: Forms of 'Getting Back At'

Tactical Mimicry	Fraud	Hostile Interactions
• Going through the motions • Impression Management • Courses – 'the least worst option'	• Undeclared Working	• Breaking out of Tactical Mimicry

This section explores the various forms of agency used to 'get back at' the welfare system as individuals navigate its contours. Participants operate within the blind spots of conditionality in order to maintain their own interests and desires, as well as to defend their needs. Three forms of 'getting back at' arise in the research: 'tactical mimicry' (de Certeau 1984) of the good jobseeker; fraud; and more hostile interactions. I begin by drawing on de Certeau's concept of 'tactical mimicry' to elucidate how participants employ a dramaturgical performance of the 'good jobseeker'. This involves working within the bureaucratic nature of welfare organisations by 'going through the motions' needed to meet requirements, the impression management of one's caseworker and the use of training courses as the 'least bad option'. It situates these as a form of 'everyday resistance' (Scott 1985) utilised to pursue one's own interests within the cracks of the welfare bureaucracy. From here it moves on to explore fraud, and in particular, unreported work as a similar form of 'everyday resistance' embedded within implicit and explicit critiques of the failure of welfare provision to address needs. Finally the section explores some of the more hostile practices which break through the veneer of feigned compliance utilised in 'tactical mimicry'. The agency here is not demarcated to particular actions but often participants engage in multiple forms of 'getting back at'. In its focus on 'going through the motions' as well as more hostile practices this chapter pushes Lister's typology into new areas by situating it in relation to street-level

bureaucracy (Brodkin 2013). Where studies of street-level bureaucracies tend to limit their focus to dynamics of internal organisations, workers and policy chains, this research illuminates the missing half through its exploration of claimants' engagement.

- **8:2.1 Tactical Mimicry**
  - **'Going through the motions'**

The intensification of conditionality on Jobseeker payments necessarily permits increased intervention in the lives of those availing of these payments. Caseworkers are further empowered as the 'petty engineers' (Rose 1999:92) within this new mode of governing unemployment as they attempt to elicit the rationality and practice of job-seeking. The dominant model (e.g. Dunn 2014; Le Grand 2003; Mead 1992; Murray 1990) of welfare agency interprets individuals as deficient and in need of interventions which nudge them into pre-structured rational choices invariably linked to formal employment (Wright 2016). Yet, individuals are active in asserting voices and interests and in making related choices, although that is not to say such agency is always inherently positive or without risk (Lister 2004; Hoggett 2001). With some exceptions participants overwhelmingly described social welfare engagement as uncaring, cold and sterile with a bureaucratic concern with process and procedure, or 'box ticking'. This bureaucratic mode of engagement and its concomitant concern with 'box ticking' provided a tactical space for participants to maintain their own interests by a superficial engagement of 'going through the motions' to fulfil requirements.

Participants invoke a form of 'tactical mimicry' (De Certeau 1984) which draws upon the inventive possibilities within actually existing circumstances and constraints. Participants perform dramaturgical trickery in ostensibly carrying out the role of the good jobseeker.

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These guileful ruses depend on the opportunities provided by dominant strategies as they make use of the elements of a terrain imposed by power. They are as de Certeau (1984:54), quoting von Billow, puts it : "manoeuvres within the enemy's field of vision". Such manoeuvres do not constitute a strategy but rather happen in the immediate and require renewal in various ways, although they may operate as part of individuals' longer-term strategies. Rather than opposing or overthrowing power they operate within the blind spots of established rules (Dey and Teasdale 2016). In effect, it is a hidden refusal of power. For instance, participants subverted the compulsory job-search activity through the provision of inauthentic, and often borderline ridiculous, evidence:

> … I do apply for things randomly, I applied for a job as a beauty consultant … an eyebrow threader … I've no idea what that is … but you have to because then the boxes are ticked … **Nick**

Having obtained his third-level degree Nick worked on and off in archaeology when opportunities arose and was engaged in ongoing attempts to frustrate social welfare engagement which he viewed as attempting to push him into work which was low paid and of little interest to him. As a 52-year-old male with no past experience or qualifications in beauty therapy his inauthentic job-search not only frustrates engagement but does so with a mocking contempt of the mandatory obligations and pushes the boundaries of what is considered reasonable job-searching. Similarly, Peter's tactical mimicry involved an inversion of the good jobseeker's attributes (Rogers 2004) of positivity and relentless motivation. It involved contacting employers but with a tactic of deliberate sabotage by emphasizing his own lack of education and portraying a lack of intelligence.

> … go into your local Solas office, they used to have these little scanners, these little printers and ya go rooting and there'd be a hundred and sixty jobs available today, just print out a couple of forms and ring yer man [employer], ring him up, how ya

going I'm looking for a job d'ya have anything, tell him ya've nothing [education], tell him yer an eejit, hang up the phone, grand there's one for the dole office, there's two for the dole office, bring them down, there ya go lads tried all them, no job, it's your word against theirs', what the fuck are they gonna do to ya … **Peter**

Peter's deliberate sabotage was set within his broader strategy of remaining out of low pay work which he feared would make him homeless, directly challenging the underlying philosophy that any job is better than none.

It will be recalled from the previous chapter that after taking redundancies neither Jenny nor Rachel desired to work in paid employment. Their decision set them in conflict with the new governmental rationale of welfare services whose intensity and frequency of intervention surprised and stressed both enough for them to eventually opt for a short-term strategy of Illness Benefit. Yet, prior to this both engaged in tactical mimicry to placate their caseworkers regarding job search activity. For Jenny, this involved friends creating letters that could be passed to caseworkers as the genuine but regrettable responses of employers:

> … so that letter will keep me going and to be honest with you, you'd nearly say well that will do me for this month and if she rings again I'll get the next letter off someone else, and to be honest with you Philip, I'd basically no intentions of going back to work, I was kinda fobbing them off every time, saying I'm looking and I'm this and I'm that… **Jenny**

Rachel's approach involved simply fabricating a list of applications to employers:

> Oh there was a few I made up … oh yeah I'd put some of them on that [form] – I think that was my second sheet to fill up anyway … and they never checked to see if I did put these CVs in, it's paper work for them I suppose … **Rachel**

As Rachel indicates, both her own and Jenny's approach implied a greater risk since it depended on caseworker's 'ticking boxes' without interrogating the veracity of the documentary evidence submitted.

The tactics outlined here can be read as lines of flight (Deleuze 1995; Thoburn 2003). While not outright intended 'refusals of work' (Tronti 1966a) they highlight ways in which participants attempt to follow their own interests and ground their own autonomy against the strategies of power attempting to hasten attachment to the labour market. For Nick this involved choosing work that he found interesting and satisfying, for Peter it similarly meant finding work which was both interesting (hence his strategy of education) and financially worthwhile. While for Nick and Peter these may constitute partial lines of flight still in some sense bound to the governmental logic of work. Similarly, escaping conditionality's enforcement for Jenny and Rachel constituted a break from work to follow their own interests and spend time with family, albeit without rejecting the logic of work's importance. In this regard the tactical mimicry deployed here amount to weapons of the weak which form part of everyday resistance (Scott 1985). While Scott's conception of 'everyday resistance' is critiqued as amplifying individualized pre-political meaningless idiosyncrasies (Sahlins 1995), such a view purports a binary individual-collective view of resistance which ignores the strategic constraints placed on agency by organisational, material and symbolic relations. Such tactics are seen by Sahlins as accommodating power since without collective action they do not challenge or transform the system. Yet, as evidenced here resistance can operate in a space between acceptance and revolt (Trethewey 1997; Foucault 2007), as provoked by material need, individuals willingly submit to relations of power but seek to maximize their advantage. It points toward localized and repeated street-level games (Sharone 2007) in which jobseekers engage and pursue their interests. Although it must be noted that what is

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absent here is the other side of the game, that is the role caseworkers play and the extent of their knowledge regarding claimant actions.

- **Impression Management**

While caseworkers' role as the 'petty engineers' (Rose 1999:92) seeking to elicit or enforce active job-searching is central to the deprivation model of agency, a recognition of individuals as already active agents capable of acting on their own behalf requires exploring the case-worker-claimant relationship from the other side. The tactical mimicry performed by participants also extends to 'impression management' (Kingfisher 1996) within interactions with caseworkers. As indicated above participants' management of their relationship with caseworkers is central to attempts to pursue their own interests. Alexia, a single mother of two, spoke in-depth of frustrations with her Seetec caseworker continually suggesting unsuitable jobs. Alexia admitted to tears during car journeys to her Seetec appointments, having to draw on her training in psychotherapy to calm herself prior to, during and after meetings with her caseworker. This was part of her deliberate approach to dealing with her caseworker:

> I'm very compliant and I'm very measured when I'm with him. When I heard him saying things to me like, "Is there anything else I can do for you?" I'd say, "No, I don't think so, but if I think of anything…"… **Alexia**

Impression management is a key component in the survival repertoires of subordinate groups navigating power-laden relationships (Goffman 1990). For participants, feigned compliance involved a deferential performance of gratitude in order to sustain the illusion of a beneficial and worthwhile process. This points to the emotional labour (Hochschild 1979) of not only managing a lack of control in navigating one's life freely, but also the labour performed in

street-level interactions to defend and pursue one's interests as much as possible. Many of the older participants in the research found that their experience and age aided in building rapport with caseworkers. Patrick highlights how his rapport with his Seetec caseworker subverted the process of 'active engagement':

> But I found that there's very little resistance on the other side there, you know? Like … so, what I think it is, at this point now it's to run its course. I think there is an attitude-, a different attitude to the older cohort … we spend a lot of time talking about soccer, you know? there is like that, sort of, hands off … **Patrick**

Colin's relationship with his caseworker in Obair followed similar lines to an extent that the caseworker warned him in advance of his referral to the JobPath programme. This prompted Colin to attempt to obtain Disability Allowance in order to avoid engagement with Seetec, while his caseworker chose to delay his reply to the referral in order to give Colin time to do so:

> [Caseworker] rung me up yesterday and … said [he] got a big list of people, he said, "your name was on it', well I'm going to the doctor on Monday to see if I can get this applied for and he said "what I'll do, I'll hang on before I'll send anything back or close anything" … **Colin**

These relationships involved being vigilant of what was said. Jenny, who earlier admitted she had little intention of looking for work found that expounding her work history and preference for employment over educational courses offered a means of avoiding the latter:

> I genuinely said to her at the moment I wouldn't be into doing courses, I never was, said what I'm looking for is a job to get out there, I said I'm used to working with people and seeing people and meeting people so that's what I want to do, I don't want to be at home doing a course, I don't want to be y'know, doing a course, **Jenny**

Nick shows how this vigilance was necessarily constant and ongoing in order to continually frustrate the caseworker within acceptable limits that do not provoke coercion or sanction:

> … change the subject as often as you can so it uses up the time … you might make something up, as in I build boats at the weekend, I don't but ya tell them that – "oh why don't you do that as a job? Why don't you go into business for yourself doing that?" and then they go down various strange directions and you're forgetting almost what it is you've said to them ya know … **Nick**

Nick goes on to show how tactical mimicry of the good jobseeker is always a contingent and repeated performance that is filled with risk as it attempts to stay within the bounds of acceptability:

> [impersonating caseworker] "there's a job in Aldi in a store why aren't you doing that?" well I don't want to do that – "what's that got to do with it? no bearing, it's a job you have to take it, if you don't take it – are you refusing to work? Are you refusing to work? Are you refusing to work?", if you say yes to that question you're gone, they want you to say yes to that question … **Nick**

Each dramaturgical performance can have its limits within the context of the necessity to be actively seeking work. A single performance or tactic is not enough, but as is demonstrated by Nick's case participants draw on a repertoire of tactics, varying forms of job-search sabotage, filling time and impression management within interactions, and as demonstrated below, exit routes into the temporary sanctuary of education or training courses. It demonstrates the contingent nature of claimants street-level engagement where power imbalances and economic need necessitate repeated performances of emotional, cognitive and dramaturgical labour in satisfying requirements.

At times the performance of compliance broke-down. Indeed, due to the age gap between Alexia and her caseworker, who she described as the same age as her sons, Alexia eventually felt able to invert the relationship:

> [I said] … "Listen, you know as well as anyone, I don't want to be here, you know that and I know you know that, I said "you've boxes to tick and so do I, so let's just tick them", he was "okay, all right, I hear you". He ticked his boxes …

She goes on:

> I introduced him to the website *Activelink*, you know where all the kind of social jobs are and volunteer positions. It was like I gave him the crown jewels or something because he was e-mailing me nearly every day with jobs on *Activelink* - "Here's another one for you and you might like this" and "that's a great website." **Alexia**

Alexia was able to draw on her own experience of job-searching to aid her young and inexperienced caseworker in his job. While it backfired to an extent via increased emails regarding jobs, these emails, although frustrating, amounted to earnest suggestions which lacked a compulsive element. At times this break-down of compliance became hostile as when Eamonn asserted his rights after his caseworker reprimanded him for turning down a low paying job:

> What do you mean "that's not allowed?" I've every right I said, in other words, I burst my bollocks for seven days of the week, pay me taxes and the whole lot and try and survive on €125? I said I'm looking at being evicted in the next six to eight months I need a proper standard of wage and I need a decent fucking wage to survive … **Eamonn**

Despite his outburst Eamonn avoided sanction and described his caseworker as "fairly okay". This was common among participants who, although they often told anecdotes of negative stories they had heard about other caseworkers, nonetheless described their own relationship with their caseworkers as "okay" and recognized that "they're only doing their jobs". This

highlights both the importance of caseworkers in the experience of navigating the welfare system and concomitantly the organisational rules in which caseworkers operate which may constrain their ability to meet the needs of claimants (Brodkin 2013).

However, it crucial to note that the power-imbalance embedded in the claimant-caseworker relationship, where the former is at some level economically dependent upon the latter, requires an ongoing performance of compliance and deference in order to safeguard one's survival. In the rare occasions where compliance breaks down relations were quickly restored through apology. Simon, who had lost his job, car and home over the course of the recession and faced a continued court battle with banks explains how he apologised after losing his temper with his caseworker:

> I said it to one at the time that the last thing on my mind was a job and I just walked out, I did go back up the next day and apologise to the lady because of the way I spoke to her, I did raise my voice … I said I want to apologise for my behaviour yesterday, I've a lot of stuff going on at home at the moment, the last thing I want is people telling me what to do … **Simon**

While impression management may not immediately appear a form of agency at all since it operates within a highly constrained power relationship, claimants' attempts to manage these relationships are central to pursuing or maintaining their interests. Moreover, these attempts to manage the relationship challenges the confessional practices (Foucault 1981) embedded within claimant-caseworker power relations. It subverts the role of the petty engineer as expert intervening to guide the "dutiful, but defeated" (Mead 1992:133) jobseeker as participants attempt to frustrate techniques of intervention based on their own interests, needs and desires. Welfare claimants have agency at the street-level and their interaction with bureaucracy highlights that policy is not only translated, reconfigured and developed by

street-level bureaucrats but can also undergo a hidden translation as claimants engage with it. It is a resistance which is both ambiguous and double-edged since participants find the boundaries of acceptability and work within it to favour their interests, yet its individualized nature keeps the system intact and unchallenged (Trethewey 1997).

- **Courses – The 'least bad option'**

A third aspect of 'tactical mimicry' (de Certeau 1984) is the use of courses by claimants. The development of Personal Progression Plans in conjunction with one's caseworker can necessitate attendance on training or educational courses in order to upskill and bring one closer to the labour market. As the previous chapter highlighted there was little provision of information or compulsion toward education or training from *Intreo* caseworkers. However, where such compulsion did arise it was not necessarily an erasure of agency through paternalist imposition. Rather it also provided a means for participants to temporarily escape caseworker engagement, job-search activity and potential work deemed to be low quality or uninteresting. As such, courses often provide the 'least bad option' open to the constrained agency of welfare claimants dependent on income support. They provide an opportunity for a tactical mimicry of the jobseeker which falls within the bounds of conditionality and thus meets requirements of the street-level bureaucrats implementing it. This appeared as a favoured tactic for Chris who had been unemployed since leaving school ten years earlier. Despite this he was not idle, but rather had remained active by supplementing his income through cash-in-hand gardening and house-repair work. When we spoke he told me that this work had dried up and while his caseworker pressured him to undertake warehouse training he insisted on a course in computer programming:

> … she wanted to send me on to a warehouse training course, that letter just went in the fucking bin … she thought the warehouse course would find me work quicker, which it probably would, but I'd rather go through the education doing something I like, than doing something that bore the hole off ya … **Chris**

Similarly, when Ruth found herself summoned to attend Turas Nua for an interview she opted to sign up to a course in the local education and training board, leading to an altercation with her Turas Nua caseworker:

> … well when I rang him and told him that I wasn't going in for the interview, that I was going down to the place to sort it out he said well your money might be stopped, and I said well I'm coming in here to sort it, so you can't stop my money for not attending cos I'm in here … **Ruth**

Like Chris, Ruth had been unemployed since leaving school early 14 years previously. Ruth had been on numerous courses, of varying lengths, over the years:

> … youth training and development, it was when I was 15, when I did that I was there for 3 years, that was good …em, woodwork, pottery, metal work all that kinda communications and maths and stuff so yeah …

In telling me about a recent course she highlighted their repetition:

> … it was a 3-week job, I dunno what it was called now, em one in Kildare… it was basically just like preparing your CVs and that and looking through the world of work and all that, that was it, I did it twice … **Ruth**

Ruth discussed her wish to work in animal welfare. Her wish appeared removed from practice and had not yet been formulated into a concrete plan. When I asked about her plans once the course finished she reiterated an unwillingness to take low paid and uninteresting work:

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I'd probably go on more courses being honest with ya, until I found something that kinda suited what I wanted to do … **Ruth**

On the other hand, Ian spoke of his desire to avoid training courses due to his dislike of the classroom experience. When presented with a four-month course by his caseworker he managed to get himself into an CE scheme:

… my friend was the manager of one shop so I knew I could go in there … I'm getting an extra €65 for doing it … it's a good bit of money, and it's kinda the good factor of going in there, ya don't mind doing it … he was trying to send me on a course for four months, so I was delighted I was going into that place because I didn't want to do that … **Ian**

Chris, Ruth and Ian all demonstrate agency of participants involved in street-level games with caseworkers where competing goals are played out and negotiated, and in this case the governmental rules permit enough space for participants to pursue the 'least bad option' in each case.

The use of conditionality, backed by sanctions, seeks to elicit or enforce a rationality and practice of active job-seeking (Foucault 2007; Boland and Griffin 2015b). Economic necessity and reliance on income support compels engagement on behalf of claimants, yet despite the highly regulated environment participants utilize their agency within the limits of these constraints. Tactical mimicry operates as a form of everyday resistance in between acceptance and revolt where individuals chart their way. Despite its individualized nature it is nonetheless important for its focus on individuals' attempts to maintain their autonomy and control, which by their very action implicitly challenge existing dominant power relations. While accommodating power and aiding the reiteration of both its exercise and rationality it simultaneously challenges it through a covert refusal of consent. There is a hidden critique

within the actions recounted (Gilliom 2001). Boland and Griffin (2018) portray the experience of unemployment and conditionality as a form of 'purgatory' where the individual, defined by their lack, is repentant and motivated as they are worked upon and guided in search of the saving grace of paid employment. While there is much truth in their description, as supported by the psychological effects of unemployment detailed earlier, it nonetheless erases the agency of individuals involved. Some actively choose their purgatory, operating within its limits to pursue their own interests. At times it operates as part of wider strategy seeking out education, at others it is a resistance to low paid and uninteresting work. Jobseeker claimants are highly constrained by economic and cultural barriers as well as government policy and its implementation. These things shape their lives, however, within these constraints they do chart their own trajectories in order to pursue their interests as best they can.

- **8:2.2 Fraud**

A significant minority of participants were involved in fraud related activities. There were some tales of concealing the full amount of household income on applications for means-tested payments, one breach of co-habitation rules regarding lone parents, while two participants had worked in tandem with their landlords to fabricate rental costs in applications for HAP. These incidences were rare, incidental and where they did occur were motivated by need. The most common form of welfare fraud reported in the research was the carrying out of unreported work for 'cash-in-hand'. There is a dearth of literature in Ireland in relation to welfare fraud and unreported work (see Gaffney and Millar 2019) but international literature suggests that undeclared work is heterogeneous in nature and occurs across various social groups (Williams 2009). The principle motivations for such work in marginalised

populations are an unsatisfied work ethic, communal mutual aid and economic necessity (Williams and Windebank 2005; Dean and Melrose 1996, 1997). Where unreported work occurred among the participants in this research the primary motivation was one of economic need. Sinead, a single mother of two teenagers, told me how she drew on her third-level education to teach and write articles in exchange for cash:

> … because you have to, it doesn't mean it's a supplement, it just means that you'll actually catch up on the bills … if I'm at a stage where I am paying income tax but at a stage where I definitely cannot afford to … let me catch up on my bills first and then let's have that conversation … **Sinead**

Sinead's example highlights how unreported work operates as of part of one's survival strategy of 'getting by' on welfare. We can also recall Bob's story from earlier regarding setting up his illegitimate landscaping business as being similarly motivated by the economic necessity of paying bills. What both examples further suggest is the importance of possessing skills which can be utilised in the black economy and/or a social network which provides opportunities to use those skills (Williams 2005, 2009). The importance of social contacts is demonstrated by Teddy:

> Well, I'll tell you exactly, basically, I was on the dole and I got a call from a guy I knew looking for a guy I knew to do a day's work, couldn't find him so I said, "I'll do it if you can't find him," and just like that I was in with him … I was doing paving stones with Travellers, and they'd bring ya to sign on and to collect your money … **Teddy**

For other participants unreported work provided a small supplement on their social welfare income. Chris, for example, was critical of the reduced Jobseeker payments to under 25s and had supplemented his income through unreported gardening and house work. In the

context of a discussion about individuals 'living it up on the dole' Chris describes what he perceived as the paucity of his payment:

> … they don't pay ya enough to go to Florida, far fucking from it, you'd be lucky if you made a train to Dublin on what they give ya … **Chris**

Living in the family home where he contributed to bills, Chris drew on unreported manual work in order to supplement his income and provide some spending money for himself:

> … just painting inside and outside of houses, fencing, flooring and tiling anything I could do to put an extra pound in my pocket I would do so, social welfare never knew anything about it, the money I was getting off people wasn't worth mentioning either … **Chris**

Tina drew on her extended family network to obtain occasional unreported work as a receptionist which provided the income for the small pleasures mentioned earlier, a jacket from *Penneys* or a take-away, which were always bound up with the guilt of discretionary spending (Tirado 2014). Similarly, Patrick utilised his skills in order to supplement his income, but also to provide himself with a routine and structure to perform work that he enjoyed. Patrick had a colourful work history in various engineering jobs across Europe over a number of decades. He had settled into musical instrument repair before leaving employment to care for his elderly parents. He told me he had learned to live on a low income over these years as a carer and he had little desire for accumulated wealth. Skilled work remained important to Patrick as he upskilled, gradually upgraded his equipment and taught himself how to design, build and repair a particular instrument. He expected the added income to be minimal, only providing enough to maintain his work, but was emphatic regarding its importance:

> … there's a reason for doing it, when I get up in the morning I've stuff to do, the work ethic is still there, Monday to Friday, and if I lose that I know I'm fucked

because it is something of interest, of great interest, that keeps the motivation up, there's no way menial work would motivate me in any way, it's detrimental …

Patrick

Although Patrick described his relationship with his caseworker as positive with no conditionality, this was nonetheless something that he kept concealed:

> … the bureaucracy doesn't understand anything like that, doesn't take on anything like that, the bureaucracy has a series of boxes that have to be ticked, and if they're not ticked, there's a problem … **Patrick**

So far one might be wondering what these actions have to do with 'getting back at' the welfare system or the state more generally. On the face of it unreported work, driven as it is by economic necessity, appears as another tactic in the survival armoury of 'getting by'. Whether or not welfare fraud more generally can be regarded as a form of resistance is a contested issue within the literature (Lister 2004, 2015). Bill Jordan (1996) interprets undeclared work as just that. Here unreported work is presented as one of the 'weapons of the weak' informing an everyday resistance through tactics which are "informal, often covert, and concerned largely with immediate, de facto gains aimed at survival" (Scott 1985:29-33). Unreported work is not simply an isolated act but is regarded as part of a culture of resistance through which poor people strike back against a resented system (Jordan 1996). Dean, however, contests the notion of a culture of resistance by highlighting that its driving factors are usually need and the perseverance of identity since its practitioners continue to hold a strong attachment to the work ethic (Dean and Melrose 1996, 1997). These activities therefore represent a desire for a 'proper' job rather than an intentional challenge to state power (Dean 2002). Moreover, patterns of such work remain isolated in locations lacking formal labour market opportunities thus undeclared work becomes the norm (Dean 2002).

As evident across the above quotes it is no doubt true that much of what motivates undeclared paid work is economic need laced through with maintaining one's identity as a worker. What marks the activities here out as practices of 'everyday resistance' is that they are set within a context of critique regarding a failure of the system to address their needs (Gilliom 2001). This is both implicit and explicit in the sense that the actions themselves and their motivating reasons contain a critique of the system's failure. All those involved in undeclared paid work, with the exception of Bob, explicitly discussed it within the context of a system that is not meeting their needs. While there is no culture of resistance that seeks to topple the state the stories are united in the belief that social welfare payments are not enough to live on or where they are permit only mere survival rather life. While at times this involved articulating a general sense of unfairness, at others it extended to political critique. Peter justified his undeclared work in terms of economic need and responsibility to his family as it allowed him to provide Christmas presents to his children. However, our conversation is peppered with his criticisms of Ireland's political and economic system. In this excerpt he also justifies his undeclared work by pointing to the financial success of Ireland's former Taoisigh (Prime Ministers) who he perceived as beneficiaries of an unequal Irish society:

> One of the boys said to me there was a bit of painting in Dublin; I was in his Jeep every fucking morning for a week… Do I regret it? No I don't, because Bertie and Enda and all the boys with their whip around at the Manchester United matches getting two and three hundred grand … **Peter**

While there may be no pattern of tangible collaboration or collusion in its material practice what does emerge is both an understanding of why people may carry out undeclared work and a refusal to report those who do so, even among those who do not themselves engage in the activity. During my conversation with Lisa she stated that she felt undeclared

working was a socially acceptable part of Irish society. Similarly, none of the participants said that they would report another claimant's intermittent undeclared work:

> … I have kind of heard like some people have said so-and-so is on social welfare, [laughing] like what ya said earlier about going on a holiday, but ya know … everybody deserves a life and what goes on with other people is nobody else's business … **Emily**

There appears then a tacit understanding of, and support for, undeclared working based on shared frustrations against a system participants felt caught within, which permitted only mere survival, and which did not address their needs. This support was always qualified by participants, including those practicing undeclared work, as different from ongoing and systematic fraud by those in continuous employment while illegitimately claiming welfare benefits.

There is another aspect of fraud which warrants mention. Both Alexia and Tina were participating in full-time education which rendered them ineligible for the Jobseeker payments they were receiving. Both saw their actions as a mode of resistance against the conditions within the welfare system which attempted to stifle their self-defined goals. Alexia resented her caseworker's suggestions of employment which she found both uninteresting and unsuitable, and to her demonstrated a lack of genuine interest in her and her goals. Her postgraduate study was a maintenance of her autonomy as she acted in her own interests in pursuit of the type of work she wanted. Similarly, Tina had been forced to repeat her final year of study externally due to mental health issues. The social welfare regulations denied her both the BTEA payment she had received in university while eligibility criteria for Jobseeker payments now disbarred her since she could not be actively seeking work. She had nonetheless applied for and obtained the latter. For Tina this meant managing the imposition

of work-related conditions as she pursued her own goals and interests, a task fraught with trepidation and ongoing atmosphere of fear and uncertainty:

> … for me applying for a job was an inconvenience to my time ya know like, I wanted to finish my full time education … some of the jobs I've been forced into applying I thought "oh god, I'm gonna get this job, I'm definitely gonna get this job, what am I gonna do when I get this job" … **Tina**

While reading a copy of the Record of Mutual Commitments which ostensibly contractualises the welfares services Tina demonstrates how she interprets her obligations to justify her actions:

> … [Reading] "I will work to secure employment at the earliest opportunity" - ya know, to me my earliest opportunity will be June so I don't intend to work until June, but I will be seeking jobs until then and that's how I look at it. [Reading] "I will work with the department to agree my Personal Progression Plan" - certainly, I have been doing that and I've been answering very personal questions even though I don't feel comfortable with it because if I said no, ya know, there might be stipulations like, so there is leeway within the system to work it to your advantage only if you do it carefully, it's a fine line and it's still a struggle … **Tina**

Despite the tight constraints which attempt to govern the lives of participants they nonetheless find ways to work within power's blind spots to chart their own trajectories. Unreported paid work, although driven by economic need and the protection of one's identity as a worker, involves a hidden critique of a system which does not address individuals' needs. Moreover, these actions often include an explicit articulation of general unfairness about Irish society. Similarly, where participants deem their interests not to be aligned with the practices of social welfare agencies they are willing to conceal information in order to maintain their income while pursuing their own goals.

- **8:2:3 Hostile Interactions**

At times participants engaged in small scale deliberate resistance toward their caseworkers or the welfare agency more generally. Although these occurrences were rare they still merit discussion as they symbolise the forms of everyday resistance which may breach the concealment or tactical mimicry required to navigate their own trajectories. Participants' agency was often covert and hidden as they pursued their own interests in the blind spots of power. Nadine who had felt sufficiently hassled by her Seetec caseworker to enter low paying employment told me how she did so on her own terms:

> But I didn't use their CV, I used my CV and I didn't use their form, cover letter either…I'd laugh at it, seriously shit cover letter … suddenly I had shit loads of replies … had an interview what two days or something later and started another day later in a hotel … **Nadine**

As shown above the dramaturgical performance of the 'good jobseeker' as tactical mimicry was an important part of navigating the caseworker relationship and work-related conditionality. However, there were some incidences in which participants temporarily suspended feigned compliance and challenged the authoritative knowledge of the caseworker in overt fashion. In the above quote Nadine remains close to 'tactical mimicry' through her hidden challenge to caseworker and agency authority and knowledge. At other times the hostility was more visible. Sinead had managed to complete undergraduate and postgraduate degrees while being a single parent. When her caseworker suggested that she was overqualified for jobs and should remove her qualifications from her CV, her response was forthright:

> … [caseworker impersonation] "Perhaps you should take off some of your qualifications" - don't admit to them like it's something shameful that you've been to

college … No, I think fuck off, I have worked so hard for every one of those letters to my name, you're bloody right I'm going to put them down on my CV ... **Sinead**

This amounts to a partial and temporary suspension of street-level games where resistance briefly assumes a more overt, and potentially risky, tone as participants openly disregard agency and caseworker suggestions.

In a few instances, participants' actions were a conscious mode of 'getting back at' the welfare system. Eamonn and Maeve were both attending Turas Nua and were insistent that the company would not profit from their finding work. This reflected a common hostility toward the JobPath programme and the privatisation of employment services across the interviews. While Maeve had not yet found employment, Eamonn was waiting to start a new job when we spoke. He told me:

> … they shove people in where it doesn't work, target driven and I can't, I can't wait to walk away from it - "good luck and fuck yous, leave me alone" … I'm walking in Friday there and I'm just going "up yours!" … **Eamonn**

Here Eamonn reflects the belief among participants that the pay by results model of employment services treated individuals as statistics to be coerced into any job regardless of claimants' needs or interests. Eamonn's revenge was to sign off social welfare without indicating employment as the reason for doing so in order to prevent Turas Nua profiting from him. Despite the hostility found within this research there was little organized opposition to the implementation of the JobPath programme in Ireland. One of the only challenges to the implementation of JobPath in Ireland came through a court case taken by one informal political organisation in relation to the sharing of an individual's data between *Intreo* and Seetec.

This reflects a wider discontent among many JobPath attendees in relation to the sharing of their data. Patrick had refused to engage with Seetec until *Intreo* could provide him with a written statement from the Data Commissioner regarding the legality of sharing his data. Patrick's refusal had lasted for one year with sanctions being implemented for the final four weeks of his refusal before the written statement was finally provided. Patrick relinquished his protest and attended Seetec while his sanctioned payments were reimbursed. At the beginning of our talk Patrick provided me with his copious amounts of photocopies of documents and handwritten letters which documented his refusal to engage with Seetec:

> … when I started refusing first I was called to the office and I brought up those hand-written copies, I came armed with copies, so I said to them "I wrote three or four weeks ago asking two questions I want answered about the legality of the handing over data" and I said "did you not get the correspondence?", they said "no", and I said "there you are there, there's copies for you, go and read that and answer the questions, you know, give me the answers to the questions", I says "until that's sorted, we go nowhere", I said "if that's sorted to my satisfaction, I'll take up the invitation", you know, I was straight up from the beginning, she says to me "when you sign on here, we tick the three boxes", I said "I wasn't told that, specifically that my data would be"
> … **Patrick**

Patrick's actions along with his use of the description 'armed' underline his intentional and politicised resistance to privatisation of social welfare employment services. Yet, despite the considerable hostility displayed by Patrick and others, his resistance remained at an individual level and collapsed upon receipt of the Data Commissioners' written statement.

- **8:2.4 Summary**

An individual resistance of 'getting back at' emerges in relation to both the 'getting by' and 'getting out' of welfare as participants use their agency to chart their trajectories through the

narrow constraints of welfare agencies and work-related conditionality. This arises primarily from the 'tactical mimicry' of the good jobseeker' where participants 'go through the motions', perform impression management and utilize training courses to frustrate and circumvent conditions. It underlies a sense that participants already actively understand their own interests and needs, and find ways of pursuing them through the contours of conditionality. For some, it necessities the use of fraud to 'get by' or to have a little extra income, a justification for which is found in both the hidden practices which critique a system that does not meet their needs as well as in economic and political critiques regarding unfairness. The covert resistance is maintained to safeguard income support but on rare occasions translates into more hostile or vengeful performances. What both the 'tactical mimicry' and more open non-compliance illustrate is that participants are involved in repeated and contingent street-level engagements with agencies, caseworkers and policy. This illustration of agency underlines the importance of pursuing this street-level focus in Ireland. Future engagement with agencies and caseworkers is important in order to broaden our understanding of these interactions by focusing on caseworkers motivations and practices. Such an approach would better illustrate the usefulness of particular policy aspects at the street-level. The following section explores Lister's final quadrant and whether the everyday individual resistance discussed here translates into more organised and collective strategies of resistance regarding unemployment, welfare agencies and/or work-related conditionality.

8:3 SECTION TWO: GETTING ORGANISED

Figure 15: Forms of 'Getting Organised'

Collective Self-Help	Collective Resistance
• Mens' Shed • Mental Health Support	• Lack of Collective (Unemployment) Resistance • Collective Resistance Elsewhere (Water Charges, Abortion Rights, Lone Parents)

The preceding decade has witnessed an intensification of social and political activism in Ireland across a broad range of issues. Contrary to the misconception that the Irish do not protest there has been an outburst of activism in relation to anti-austerity organizing; abortion rights; LGTBQ+ rights; and housing, among others. Moreover, a significant minority of the participants I interviewed were involved in activist groups. More made references to economic and political injustices throughout interviews. Considering the significant cuts to working-age payments following the crisis; the related struggles of 'getting by' on welfare; and the forms of individual resistance to work-related conditionality it is pertinent to explore the place of more organized forms of resistance in relation to unemployment, benefit claiming and/or conditionality. This section does just that by exploring the place of 'collective self-help' strategies before moving on to more political forms of organizing.

- **8:3.1 Collective Self-Help**

The social resources drawn on for support in the process of 'getting by' can provide the starting point for a more organised form of support which Lister (2004) labels 'collective self-help'. Lister (2004) points to a number of studies which highlight how these informal networks crystallize into local community action groups where participants identify their own issues and attempt to improve their conditions (Jensen 2014). As such, these actions

represent relatively long-term strategies through which groups attempt to address their own needs. Community based forms of self-help were evident during high unemployment of the 1980s in Ireland (Kelleher and Whelan 1992). Moreover, given the struggles of 'getting by' explored earlier which demonstrated ongoing difficulty in 'making ends meet' through budgeting, borrowing and utilizing social networks one might expect forms of collective self-help to emerge within communities. However, across the interviews little in the way of such strategies emerge among the participants. Where semblances of such strategies do emerge it is in relation to coping with the loss of work and the stigmatising effects of unemployment as well as providing oneself with a daily routine and structure. These strategies were entirely male dominated. Simon and Francis were both involved in setting up their local Men's Shed which, as Simon highlights, was important in providing a place occupied by other men who shared their experiences:

> I'm not sitting about, I'm getting out and doing a bit, bits and pieces, I was involved in the Men's Shed there for a few years, that's what kept me going because there was lads up there you could talk to, I was talking to people I'm an open book like …
> **Simon**

The negative impacts of unemployment are well documented. The loss of income, the erasure of identity and dissolution of social bonds all vandalise the self-worth of the individual and can lead to negative mental health consequences (Jahoda *et.al* 1979, 1981, 1982; Daly and Delaney 2013; Delaney *et.al* 2013; Thomas *el.al* 2005). Boland and Griffin (2015b) suggest that work-related conditionality intensifies the negative psychological impact by individualising the problem of unemployment as jobseekers internalise the repeated failures of job-search activity. This sense of failure was felt keenly by seven men who had participated in a local mental health support. One of the men, Marvin, spoke about how

unemployment had allowed him a greater involvement in his children's' lives as he had become involved their sports activities however it was tainted by his feeling perceived as a failure by his own family:

> I know my kids look at me different now than they did four years ago, their opinion of me at the moment is not good … **Marvin**

All of the men spoke highly of their involvement in the group which provided a space to talk about their feelings and issues with those in similar situations. They insisted that only those who had been through similar experiences could understand what it felt like. For Jimmy, this had involved cutting out of his life those friends making the stigmatizing 'sly digs' referred to earlier. He told me how the support group had enabled him to cope with the psychological impact of being unable to provide for his family due to a debilitating physical condition:

> … getting through the day is like kinda having a sense that ya've achieved something, for me it's that I've done something that day that was helpful in some way, even if it is just getting up outta the bed and making the bed after ya or doing the dishes … all that kinda stuff helps ya get through the day because before ya know when you're suffering with anxiety and depression ya just want to lock yourself away … **Jimmy**

- **8:3.2 Political Organising**

If strategies of self-help were rare occurrences in the research then examples of collective political action were altogether lacking, at least in relation to unemployment. Interviews are peppered with notions of unfairness, explicit moments of political anger and widespread hostility to the privatisation of services through JobPath. 'Ghost stories' detailing the target-driven profiteering of JobPath providers arise out of interviews regardless of one's own experience or even whether they had attended JobPath. Take Bob for example. Despite being unable to find work, Bob reported positive experiences with his *Intreo* caseworker who

had provided support and funding for training (which Bob would utilise for unreported work). Bob had not attended JobPath, yet when the topic came up in our conversation he declared:

> … it's fucking lethal, Turas Nua should be just stopped immediately because that's just criminal, because they're getting a percentage off every person they put into a job, now it doesn't matter whether ya like the job or not, now is that good for your mental welfare if you're put into a job that's shite after being unemployed for the last 2 or 3 years? no it's not, it's going to compound it … **Bob**

The sense of anger, frustration and unfairness never translated into collective action regarding benefits and the conditions of unemployment. A number of participants were involved in other forms of collective mobilisation such as community activism; pro-choice organisations; anti-water charges; and a lone parent action group. While diminished access to financial and knowledge resources are often presented as an obstacle to the poor's collective organisation (Giugni 2010; Royall 2000), participants' involvement in campaigns, other than about unemployment, suggests that this is not the case here. Yet, the multiplicity of agency across the four quadrants of Lister's (2004) typology do coalesce in undermining the possibility of organized political action. While financial and knowledge resources may not be a direct impediment in this case it is conceivable that the material struggles of 'getting by' erects obstacles to organizing. The labour of budgeting, borrowing and managing resources has been identified as time intensive and energy sapping labour that requires adherence to strict routines and activities (Patrick 2016). We earlier saw that for Emily attempts to rectify the suspension of her payment required an unplanned trip to the *Intreo* office which disrupted her parenting routine and added ill-afforded expenditure to her budgeting. The impact on the possibilities of political organizing was explicitly stated by Kathi who despite her interest had little time to participate in the recent anti-water charges campaign:

I wasn't involved in the local group here no and that was the time I had the two jobs so it was very selective with what I could do, no I stopped at some talks downtown and gave out a few leaflets for them, but I wasn't deeply involved in the one around here … **Kathi**

Attempts to organise in relation to unemployment do present specific barriers since it is an unwanted category. As Chapter Five illustrated it is not a classification to be claimed with pride. Stigmatisation derived from the historical distinction between the deserving and undeserving marks unemployment out as a socially unacceptable category and thus an unwanted category. To embrace such a category in a work-centred society is to deliberately spoil one's own identity (Goffman 1990). Where LGBTQI, feminist, disabled or black empowerment movements claim and pronounce their identity as part of a demand for recognition and social justice, the shame of unemployment prevents this. I have already highlighted in the previous chapter how othering among participants emerges as the dominant mechanism for coping with the psychological trauma of unemployment. In this way the protection of one's ontological identity (one's sense of self) prohibits the emergence of a categorical identity (sense of belonging with a group) (Taylor 1998; Lister 2015). While there was only minimal and partial internalisation of personal stigma among participants this is altogether different from saying that participants wanted, preferred or were amenable to unemployment. The very fact that participants relied on their previous work histories as defence mechanisms against the internalisation of stigma accentuates this point. It is a point further enforced by looking to where resistance has emerged in relation to unemployment; for example, in the Scambridge campaign against the employment scheme JobBridge. The struggle did not take place over welfare *per se*, but rather was carried out primarily in the realm of employment with the focus on the exploitation of workers. As such, it could be mobilized as a defence of workers rather than of unemployed people.

Not only is unemployment an unwanted category but it is also a transitory category, one which individuals expect and desire to move out of, undermining opportunities to build solidarity through struggle and shared experience. The difficulty in organizing unemployed individuals was articulated by Nick as he recalled his experience as a supervisor in an unemployment resource centre where he had tried to organise a group of unemployed men. It had been an utter failure Nick declared:

> … I found it virtually impossible because I found that the last thing than an unemployed person wants to do is spend company in the time of another unemployed person, because they see that as reflective – as negatively reflective of themselves, there's no positive quality to it, they would not sit together in the same room, didn't want to know each other, because there's that sense of social exclusion … **Nick**

At the end of every interview I asked each participant about their fears and hopes for the future. All but a small minority insisted that remaining stuck in welfare was their biggest fear, while concomitantly finding paid employment remained their aspiration. This suggests an acceptance of the governmental logic regarding the importance of paid employment as well as the concomitant negative construction of unemployment. While a researcher might be foolhardy to believe outright the utterances of the working class (Dunn 2013); the fact that education emerges as the most dominant strategy allied to the strong work biographies of most of the participants further supports that most do want out of the category.

However, the time-intensive material struggles of 'getting by' coincide with a complex psychological experience of unemployment and stigma in which personal stigma is only partially internalized but the identity of 'unemployed' remains rejected and largely acknowledged as spoilt (Goffman 1990). In doing it channels personal grievances away from recognising a shared collective experience and into individualized tactics of resistance to

maintain one's own desires, needs and interests. Economic need, the focus on maintenance of one's own interests allied to weak politicisation through the articulation of stories and defensive fraud mitigate against the development of more long-term and collective strategies. While everyday resistance is often conceptualized as a mirror of the type of power in operation (Scott 1985; Gilliom 2001), suggesting that conditionality at the individual level produces individualized and immediate resistance, in the case here this appears only partially true. Following the discussion of agency over this chapter it appears clear that techniques of conditionality do produce immediate responses from participants in order to manage the street-level interactions in their favour. However, this in and of itself is does not provide sufficient reason for the lack of collective organising.

Agitation around issues of dignity and respect provoked the emergence of the Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed during the 1980s. It is perhaps somewhat strange that despite cuts across welfare payments, intensified and extended conditionality, a new sanctioning regime with an upward trajectory in terms of usage has provoked so little organisation or mobilisation on the part of the INOU. The INOU maintained a marginal presence throughout the austerity years (Royall 2016). While the 1980s produced a network of local unemployed groups the INOU's subsequent incorporation into the Community and Volunteer pillar of social partnership rendered it increasingly dependent on state funding which served to erase these local groups. Local groups also relied on local social partnership as well as national funding which over the last decade was used by state bureaucrats to inhibit activism (Harvey 2014, Murphy 2016). The political landscape was cleansed of traditional organizing points for unemployed people's resistance. There therefore emerge multiple factors: time-intensive labour of struggle; the unwanted and transitory nature of unemployment derived from the master narrative of work's importance; and the loss of

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traditional organizing points, serving to channel resistance away from collective possibilities to individual tactics.

However, unemployed people do not constitute a homogenous group but rather the experience is infused with a heterogeneity in which individuals occupy multiple categorical identities, some of which allows them to become politicised. For Sinead, her identity as a single parent was central to her politicisation with a lone parent action group in order to challenge the structural inequalities and barriers they faced as a group. It is a politicisation which involves contestation with welfare services but from the specific categorical identity of a lone parent, rather than that of 'unemployed':

> … there's an awful lot of fear wrapped up in being a single parent, you're afraid of social welfare, you're afraid to put a foot wrong in case they take everything away from you and your children starve … people are terrified of doing the wrong thing by social welfare … we have a sizable number of women who have left abusive relationships and they are afraid to engage with their ex, they're afraid to ask for maintenance if it's not paid … **Sinead**

The experiences shared with other lone parents prompted Sinead's involvement in an already existing lone parent action group. Her identity as a lone parent was one she proudly displayed and by sharing solidarity with those in similar situations it has been possible to mobilise around issues affecting lone parents. Other participants drew upon broad notions of citizenship in their involvement in anti-household tax and anti-water charges. Yet, again, despite low levels of personal stigma displayed in the research there appeared to be little appetite for solidarity or collective organising in relation unemployment, welfare benefits or work-related conditionality.

- **8:3.3 Summary**

The significant levels of individual resistance do not translate into collective organisation. Despite the struggles of 'getting by' on welfare collective self-help appears minimal, occupied entirely by men and focused solely on coping with the psychological deprivations of unemployment. This supports the finding from the previous section in which personal stigma appears to stain the male identity more so than females whose occupiers as primary providers of social reproductive work buffers their identities (Whelan 2017). The importance of the Men's Sheds and mental health support group for Jobseekers indicates the importance of providing support to unemployed individuals; this is returned to in the following chapter by looking at approaches adopted by welfare agencies. If collective self-help strategies are parsimonious then political organizing in relation to unemployment is conspicuous by its absence. Despite low levels of internalised stigma, unemployment remains an unwanted category to be exited as swiftly as possible. The time-intensive management of life on welfare and the immediacy of street-level interactions channel resistance into individualized acts; this complex interplay of factors is compounded by absence of traditional points of political organizing for unemployed people.

8:4 Conclusion

This chapter has explored the agency of participants via the political/citizenship quadrants of Lister's (2004) typology. Everyday individual resistance emerges prominently as participants draw upon a number of activities to survive on welfare and to chart their own trajectories through the narrow confines of work-related conditionality. The tactical mimicry of the good jobseeker operates in the blind spots of power through the superficial satisfaction of conditional requirements. These findings are highly significant since existing research tends

to marginalise agency to the realm of welfare fraud or resistance through subjectivity. The dramaturgical performance of the good jobseeker appears as the predominant form of everyday resistance in street-level games, although at times such games are briefly suspended and punctured by more overt resistance. It raises questions regarding the role of caseworkers in these games; whether they are aware of the performances of claimants and whether they facilitate such 'trickery'. Moreover, the chapter provides evidence that although fraud is driven by economic necessity it may emerge as a tactic of everyday resistance through its political and economic justifications.

Adapting Lister's typology to explore the experience, navigation and resistance of work-related conditionality therefore illustrates that although structure, culture and policy shape avenues individuals navigate them to their own interests and needs as far as possible. In this sense we get neither complete self-discipline nor open resistance undoing power, but rather the managing of interests within the possibilities permitted. There is little resistance to the master narrative of work, but in interweaving Lister's forms of agency through an overturned street-level perspective on claimants we see nuanced engagement with governmental power. In this there are genuine acts of repeated and contingent everyday resistance to techniques of conditionality in localized interactions. To ask whether such acts undermine power is to ask the wrong question; they are acts in the immediate, concerned with survival; the more relevant question is whether they connect to a more collective possibility. Here we see a multitude of factors where the lack of traditional organizing points for unemployed people compounds the individualized nature of struggle based on 'getting by', immediate interactions in welfare offices and the rejection of the spoilt identity of 'unemployed'. Agency remains primarily on the individual level. The following chapter embeds this agency of participants in a more direct relation to welfare agencies and the

governmental techniques of conditionality; in doing so it further demonstrates the enduring

strength of the master narrative of work.

CHAPTER NINE: TECHNIQUES OF CONDITIONALITY

9:1 Introduction

Chapters Seven and Eight explored participants' navigation of, and resistance to, work-related conditionality as well as the motivations underlying their agency. This chapter turns to looking at how participants do what they do by exploring the constraints which shape the avenues of possible agency. In doing so it involves extending the analysis of actions and motivations into a more direct relation to techniques of conditionality, welfare agencies, policy, and the master narrative of work. The arrival of *Pathways to Work* (DEASP 2012, 2014, 2016) aligns the Irish welfare state with the international trend towards utilising work-related conditionality in the government of unemployed people. It outlines concrete techniques of conditionality to elicit and coerce unemployed individuals toward a rationality of active job-seeking. *PTW* positions formal paid employment as the remedy to personal and social ills, an approach which is simultaneously derived from, and reinforces, the master narrative of work. It underlines the centrality of formal paid work as a lodestar distributing income, recognition and status in contemporary societies. Chapter Seven demonstrated how to be outside of it is to be 'other'; a 'non-worker'. This chapter begins by discussing participants' agency in relation to the techniques of conditionality in social welfare agencies. In the second section it turns to exploring the place of work in the lives of participants and its relation to policies which position them as deviant and in need of compelled engagement in order to achieve employment.

9:2 SECTION ONE: NAVIGATING THE WELFARE SYSTEM

In exploring how participants do what they do I turn first to explore their direct interactions with social welfare agencies and techniques of conditionality while continuing to draw out

participants' motivations for their actions. This section begins by outlining how the techniques of conditionality form a central aspect of the new mode of governing unemployment in Ireland. From here it progresses to exploring how the 'lightness of conditionality' permits room for participants to chart their own trajectories based on their needs and interests. The section explores how this lightness is part of an encounter with the Absurd (Camus 2015) of the Irish welfare state. The section ends with a comparison of participants' experiences across different social welfare agencies.

- **9:2.1 Techniques of Conditionality**

Chapters Four and Five highlighted the intensification and extension of welfare conditionality within an international context and its emergence in Ireland. As those chapters showed unemployment benefits have always contained conditional criteria such as for example: eligibility (that you are unemployed); circumstance (means-tested thresholds) and behaviour (that you are actively seeking work).   Policy reforms in recent decades mark a qualitative shift towards a robust emphasis on behavioural conditionality (Dwyer 2010). This is what Clasen and Clegg (2007:X) call "a new politics of welfare" directed at transforming the welfare state into a mechanism for the elicitation and/or coercion of behavioural change. Although Ireland is late to the welfare conditionality trend, recent policy reforms encapsulated under *PTW* introduced increased conditionality, buttressed by sanctions, in the government of unemployment based on a rationality of active job-seeking. This new mode of governing unemployment provides a wider assortment of implementable techniques of conditionality at both agency and caseworker levels.   The preconditions of initial access to Jobseeker payments, where benefits can be postponed due to resignation without good cause or where unemployment is voluntary or due to misconduct, is allied to underlying conditions

which must be satisfied (Watts and Fitzpatrick 2018). Ongoing techniques of conditionality arise in a number of guises beginning with the new Record of Mutual Commitments (Appendix 7), which all jobseekers must sign. The new 'social contract' (DEASP 2012) outlines the obligations both welfare agencies and claimants must adhere to. The document appears as both an initial pre-condition of benefit access as well as one whose general terms must be continually adhered to in an ostensible reciprocity of engagement. The generality of the Record of Mutual Commitments is concretized in jobseekers' Personal Progression Plans (Appendix 8) developed in tandem with their caseworker. The plan compels engagement in developing a mutually negotiated roadmap between caseworker and claimant toward the goal of the job-seeker's participation in paid employment. This points to two additional techniques of conditionality in the referral to mandatory training or education, and the provision of evidence of job-search activity to caseworkers.

Jobseekers may also be compelled to on-going engagement with caseworkers through mandatory meetings (Letter of Notification in Appendix 6) with the policy preference for monthly engagement (DEASP 2016). Online registration with, and submission of a CV to, the website JobsIreland is now also required. These techniques of conditionality are buttressed by a system of sanctions (Letter of Notification in Appendix 9) in which payments may be reduced by €44, suspended for nine months or disqualified altogether. The threat of sanction permeating the system can be read as additional technique of conditionality which coerces preferred behaviour. Correspondence from agencies to jobseekers becomes a technique of conditionality itself via its invariable reassertion of the explicit threat of sanction for non-compliance. These techniques are co-joined by the monitoring of claimants through the weekly 'signing' for one's payment, the monthly necessity of 'signing on', and the ongoing engagement with caseworkers through meetings, emails, phone-calls and text

messages. The post-crisis reforms which introduced the eight techniques described above have therefore restructured the provision of unemployment benefit provision at policy level by producing an armoury of conditionality aimed at managing the conduct of jobseekers. Moreover, as demonstrated in Chapter Five, a ninth technique of conditionality is found in the macro-level framing an individualised discourse of responsibility in relation to unemployment.

- **9:2.2 The Lightness of Conditionality**

It is an interesting finding of this research then just how little the assorted techniques of conditionality are felt in the everyday experience for most of the participants. Numerous studies from the UK and elsewhere highlight the disempowering effects of conditionality which often produce disengagement, mental, physical and financial deprivation (Welfare Conditionality Project 2018). Existing research in Ireland on the nascent conditionality regime has also been quick to emphasize how coercion to continual mandatory job-seeking deepens the already negative experiences of unemployment by exposure to repeated failure (Boland and Griffin 2015a; WUERC 2016). However, what emerges here is the superficiality of conditionality that permeates the experience of its different techniques which lack a robust or punitive implementation at the street-level. Most of the participants pointed to what they perceived as the overtly bureaucratic nature of the system which they said was primarily concerned with 'ticking boxes' or 'pen pushing'. The previous chapter illustrated how participants used their agency to exploit these bureaucratic preoccupations to their own ends through the 'tactical mimicry' of the 'good jobseeker'. At other times the dramaturgical performance seemed superfluous. Chris told me how he would apply for 'two or three' jobs every couple of weeks, rather than the ten his *Intreo* caseworker insisted upon. His rationale

was that there were few opportunities available and this appeared to inform an ambivalence in him, and in his view in his caseworker also, regarding possible repercussions:

> They want a list of places ya looked, if you applied for it, and if you got a response or not, and that's about it, and if ya have any evidence bring them with ya … they couldn't care, they still get paid at the end of the day anyway so … **Chris**

Similarly, Bob's interaction with his caseworker captures this light touch regarding the provision of job-search evidence:

> [Caseworker] did say to me to keep a list and a record, which I do, of jobs I applied for just in case, she said "it mightn't be me it might be somebody else I work with might want to see", ya know, legitimise, have you been looking for work ... **Bob**

The lightness of conditionality is further evidenced in participants' puzzled faces when I presented a copy of the Record of Mutual Commitments to them. Most of the participants did not recall the 'social contract' at all while none acknowledged having read it in any great detail, if at all. For participants it was one of many vaguely recalled documents that they signed in haste. As Goodin (2001) argues there is an inherent imbalance of power at that very heart of the contractualisation of welfare services. This points to the centrality of the state; its role is more than simply one node on the Foucauldian network of power. Rather the legal authority it imbues is pivotal in shaping the experience of jobseekers, while simultaneously influencing wider sectors of power via a derived rhetoric regarding welfare claimants (Garland 1997). The 'social contract' championed by *Pathways to Work* (2012) is one which the state designs, implements, oversees and which it can alter at any point. Welfare claimants have had no input into its construction, nor have they consented to the erasure of the status quo existing prior to the contractualisation of welfare. The struggles of 'getting by' outlined in the Chapter Seven illustrate the importance of income support in

surviving on welfare. Participants repeatedly referred to their payment as 'all I have',

emphasizing it as their only source of income and hence means of survival. If one insists

upon the 'contractualisation' of the welfare relationship, it must be recognised that it is a

contract signed out of necessity and under economic duress. Moreover, while reading the

Record of Mutual Commitments during the interviews participants were dismissive of

welfare agencies committal to their own obligations. After his employment hours began to

diminish Jeff had sought out education courses on his own initiative and felt that *Intreo* had

offered him little of the support outlined in the mutual commitments:

> [Reading] "We will work to identify suitable employment" - [dismissive] no;
> [continues reading] … well all that in the green I got none of that [regarding
> training/education] … [continues reading] see these things where they said they
> would help ya with these things, nothing, never … **Jeff**

Similarly, participants reported ambiguity in relation to their Personal Progression

Plans. *Pathways to Work* (DEASP 2012, 2014, 2016) emphasizes the importance of the

Personal Progression Plan in tailoring and personalising the welfare system to meet the

specific needs of individuals. The development of concrete tasks acts as a form of

'personalised conditionality' (Grover 2012; Gregg 2008) by delineating specific

requirements, related to achieving paid employment, for the continued receipt of one's

payment. The tailoring of services through the Personal Progression Plan suggests its co-

development between caseworker and claimant, a point emphasized in policy documents

(DEASP 2012, 2014, 2016). For most participants there had been little or no negotiation in

the construction of their personal plan. They appeared as hazy impositions that were difficult

to recall beyond the mere fact that they had been carried out at some point. Jessica's original

plan had involved returning to education beginning with a course on 'employability skills'

which she vaguely recalled being linked to possible employment in childcare. Through her

return to education and growing confidence she had however begun to develop her own plan independent of her caseworker:

> … because I was unemployed for so long she [caseworker] kind of came up with a bit of a plan herself, maybe what was her plan er, now it's changed, it was erm looking after childcare I think it was? That route I think that was the plan at the time and I mean now that's changed now because it's gone to business (laughs) cos I like to be organised and I have to be organised and everything has to be there on the date you know … so next year is business level 5 … **Jessica**

The findings here mirror recent findings in the UK regarding the lack of dialogue involved in the ostensibly co-constructed Claimant Commitments (Welfare Conditionality Project 2018). Once again it underlines the imbalance of power in which the agency of claimants is constrained by the economic necessity of maintaining income. As highlighted in the previous chapter there is a necessity of impression management in which a performance of real or feigned deference and acceptance is the starting point for interaction with caseworkers.

The lightness of conditionality extends to the implementation of sanctions at street-level. Sanctions are central to the new architecture of conditionality in the government of unemployment in Ireland. Whereas previously the only option available to caseworkers was the nuclear option of complete disqualification of payment since 2012 the regime now includes a reduction of €44 and a suspension for up to nine weeks, as well as the possibility of disqualification. As such sanctions are now embedded as regulatory tool within the system (WUERC 2016). As Chapter Five showed there has been an annual growth in the application of sanctions since *PTW*'s introduction; rising from 359 in 2011 to 16,451 in 2017 (Kildarestreet 2018). However, the use of sanctions in the Irish system remains comparatively low within an international context (WUERC 2016), and perhaps signals the difficulty in transitioning from a culture where sanctions do not predominate to one in which

their use is emphasized. Out of all the participants only two had experienced a sanction; Patrick for his year-long refusal to engage with Seetec and Emily after being five minutes late for her appointment. Moreover, both had had their sanctioned monies reinstated; Emily after explaining she had made a new appointment with her caseworker and Patrick after his decision to engage following confirmation from the Data Commissioner regarding the legitimacy of agencies sharing his data. Sanctions attempt to coerce a particular kind of desired behavioural change (Miscampbell 2014); their effectiveness therefore extends beyond a punitive function of penalty to encouraging continued satisfaction of conditions. The amount of unemployed individuals who are sanctioned may be small, but the threat of sanction hangs over the entirety of the population and serves to ensure engagement (Boland and Griffin 2015a), even if it amounts to 'tactical mimicry' of a good jobseeker.

Participants had little specific knowledge of how sanctions operated and for what reasons, indicating low levels of claimant knowledge reflected in other systems (Watts and Fitzpatrick 2018; Watts *et.al* 2014; Murphy 2008, 2012) and which provokes questions of fairness in the 'contractualisation' of welfare provision. They did however have a general awareness that not meeting requirements could result in having their payment cut. Participants frequently highlighted the re-assertion of the threat of sanction on correspondence as the primary source of this:

> Ya panic, and think shit I have to go, because if I don't I'm not gonna get paid, and if I don't get paid how am I going to feed my kids and pay for the roof over my head, they automatically put the fear into ya … **Louise**

As is pointed out here, it is this threat of sanction which prompted the necessary dramaturgical performance of the good jobseeker in order to maintain one's payment:

> … basically straight away, if you refused to turn up in there, you're sanctioned. If you refuse to play ball with them, you're sanctioned … if I don't play ball with these, I'm going to get penalized and that's basically what they do … **Eamonn**

The evidence here suggests the use of sanctions as a mechanism for ensuring engagement rather than as a practical or punitive instrument. This corresponds to the disparity in Chapter Five regarding the higher numbers of non-engagement (19,000) in JobPath compared to the number of sanctions implemented (4,000). A small number of participants reported that caseworkers, particularly within JobPath providers, reminded them of their obligation to job-search with reference to possible sanctions. The direct threat of sanction for refusal to take a particular job was rare, although where it occurs brought crisis and collapse of agency evidenced in Peter's suicide attempt. What emerges is therefore a system which compels engagement but whose lightness of touch permits its subversion. Participants felt they had no choice to engage since to do otherwise meant a cut or loss to what was often their only means of survival. However, as evidenced within the previous chapter the lightness of conditionality permitted them to work within these constraints in order to navigate their trajectories in their own best interest.

This points to the dualism of self that can arise through individuals' engagement with the social welfare system; at times active agent and at others passive object (Hoggett 2001). Based on her research in the UK Sharon Wright (2016) suggests that the subject as passive object predominates the welfare experience due to insufficient income, negative experiences with caseworkers and conditional policies inhibiting the agency and self-development of claimants. This is reflective of a trend in research on the welfare experience in which claimants appear as passive victims of conditionality. In the Irish context research has illustrated how jobseekers' feelings of failure due to the compulsion to job-search deepens

the negative effect of the unemployment experience (Boland and Griffin 2015a; 2015b).

Unemployed people are defined in terms of what they are not, workers, and as such they are caught within the 'purgatory' of job-searching (Boland and Griffin 2018). International research suggests there is a tendency to push agency to the margins where it emerges in risk-filled activities such as fraud (e.g. Dean and Melrose 1996) or as 'subjective resistance' of counter-discourses articulated in research interviews (e.g. Marston 2008; Trethewey 1996).

These studies are vital in recognizing and exploring the structural and personal barriers faced by claimants along with the inherent imbalances of power within the welfare experience.

Yet, as the previous chapter demonstrated, participants in this case pursued their own interests despite the tightening constraints imposed by conditionality. The lightness of conditionality permitted the 'tactical mimicry' (de Certeau 1984) of the good jobseeker to satisfy the conditions of engagement. The provision of various forms of disingenuous job-search evidence satisfied the requirement of 'actively seeking work' by utilizing the veneer of engagement shrouding bureaucratic 'box-ticking.

A further reason for the predominance of agency within this research is that most participants' goals align with those of government policy. The discrepancy between stated policy goals and street-level practice emerges in the lack of ground-level assistance for participants in finding education and training to upskill. However, most participants wanted employment and for many educational strategies provided the hope and opportunity to find a 'proper job' which was interesting, financially feasible and had good working conditions.

Despite the lack of assistance at street-level these participants still navigated the system based on their own interests. Moreover, agency arose in the economic necessity of fraud, mostly manifesting in undeclared working while the dramaturgical performance was often punctured by more hostile, if at times, concealed responses. We see multiple and often intersecting

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examples of agency as participants navigate through the narrow confines of conditionality based on the best course for them in maintaining their interests; interests which overwhelmingly involve finding decent paid employment.

- **9:2.3 An Encounter with the Absurd**

Although the perceived bureaucratic concern with 'box ticking' provided participants with opportunities to 'play the system' to their own interests; the veneer of engagement was not felt as a positive. Almost all the participants felt that the *Intreo* and the JobPath providers had little interest in them. There were frequent references to feeling like a 'statistic' or 'a number' to be processed with little in the way of assistance. Indeed, Sinead's upset at the lack of interaction from *Intreo* manifested itself in the 'unbearable lightness of conditionality'. Like Bob, she had never been called upon to provide job-search evidence, stating in response to my question about providing evidence:

> No, I haven't and half the time I wish they would actually ask me, because I have so much evidence of jobs that I've applied for and emails come back and thank you for your application, but we won't be moving it forward and why not … **Sinead**

Sinead articulated a common frustration with a system which participants perceived as primarily concerned with the process of conducting formalities and which had little interest in them (Whelan 2017):

> … the woman [caseworker] looked at my CV, she went, "Have you ever thought about using your degrees to get a job?" I went, "Yes, fuck no. That never occurred to me, Jesus, I'm glad you mentioned it." … I said "that hasn't worked, do you have a suggestion? Is there anything you can do? Will you take a look at my CV? Can you suggest how I might make it more attractive?" - she went, "No, no. That's not my job." "Okay, what is your job?" - "I want to make sure you're looking for work." **Sinead**

Albert Camus insisted that life was fundamentally absurd. The Absurd, Camus (2015) argues arises from our tendency to search for inherent value and meaning for our existence in a universe which is ultimately indifferent to us. It is a line of thinking which strangely befits participants' experience in navigating the Irish welfare system. The experience which emerges is one marked more by a similar indifference rather than by a punitive tendency.   For participants, their needs, interests and desires seemed to matter little in engagement with welfare agencies. Despite the language of tailoring and personalizing services within *Pathways to Work* (DEASP 2012, 2014, 2016) what emerges is the construction and treatment of a 'singular type' of jobseeker (Watts and Fitzpatrick 2018). It was common for participants to articulate that they felt their own particular experiences were ignored or did not matter. The previous chapter showed how both Peter and Sarah, among others, had been repeatedly presented with low paying work that they were unable to take due to their debts:

> I have a mortgage, like I just think there's… they just want ya to… all they want in Turas Nua is to fill their little box and say they brought 100 people, or they met their target. And they don't care what type of employment that ya get or if it's what you need … **Sarah**

Moreover, the irony of the 'male breadwinner model' of Irish welfare provision materializes here as female participants felt their roles as mothers were erased. This was felt most keenly by lone parents such as Jessica and Emily who stated:

> … she [Caseworker] says "there's care, there's afterschool care, you can avail of that", in other words she was taking no excuse for not getting out there to work, so I did find it very stressful you know, like I hadn't worked for so long, I had no skills, you know what I mean … **Jessica**

… social welfare I feel are … a bit unrealistic about helping people … mothers … say when the children are at a certain age trying to get out and getting a job … it doesn't seem manageable, realistic the fact that em [sighs] you have to, you go out and get a job and you need to get somebody to mind your child, you need to get travel, like the payments don't match as in for the cost of living and the payment ya get it just doesn't match and it's hard to cope with … **Emily**

The erasure of individual experience and circumstance was exacerbated by the 'unknowability' of the system. International research often points to the lack of claimant knowledge during their journey through the welfare system (Watts and Fitzpatrick 2018; Watts 2014; Murphy *et.al* 2018). The lack of knowledge on behalf of participants in relation to the specifics of sanctions has already been alluded to. This lack of knowledge permeates the experience in a number of additional ways. Even the process of applying for a Jobseeker payment can be a daunting one:

I didn't understand the forms … they word the things up and yeh its fine, but it's not getting to the people who aren't educated, that form isn't easy to fill out, its complicated like, that's what they don't get and they should provide a help desk where you can go – look it, if you need help filling out forms come here like … **Harry**

Confusion does not evaporate with one's entry to the system, rather the regulations can continue to perplex participants. This arose most commonly in relation to conditional receipt of benefits while performing part-time or casual work. Those performing such work have to return weekly statements of hours worked ('Xs and Os')[10] signed by their supervisor. However the process was never explained to those involved. Mistakes could result in suspended payments and as such jeopardize participants abilities to 'get by':

[10] The common name for worksheets working claimants must fill out detailing the days worked each week in ordinary to receive means-tested supplementary income for unworked days.

… if there's one little mistake even made on it they'll send it back out to you and your payment is stopped for two weeks, so I find it very awkward … the forms were just sent out to me and I didn't have one faintest idea of how to fill them in or what would happen, I filled them in first and I filled them all wrong … **Anne**

Continuing with the musical references dotted across this thesis, participants found themselves echoing Johnny Logan's Eurovision refrain of 'Why me?'[11] in relation to what they perceived to be their targeting by the welfare system. For example, during our conversation Eamonn contested his eligibility for the JobPath programme on the basis that he was not long-term unemployed:

> I said to them I'm short-term unemployment, maximum maybe two months unemployment, she said "That was random selecting." - I said "how can it be random when that person over there, that person over there and that person next to me signed on the same bloody day. How was that random?" … **Eamonn**

This questioning of why they had been targeted often drew on the process of 'othering' outlined in Chapter Seven. Here participants reaffirmed their own work ethic as opposed to others whose behaviour was deemed morally reprehensible and undeserving:

> I was constantly going back in and going back and back in, and it just got to the stage where, it kinda annoys me cause there's people out there like that would be on the dole all their lives and would never get an ounce of hassle and would just sit in the pub all day drinking their dole, and people like me who are genuinely trying to get through life with our kids, trying to get a job and they just hassle ya like you're just a bad smell they're tryna get rid of, it's horrible … **Louise**

This confusion often became imbued with a sense of 'pointlessness' for participants referred to basic 'employability skills' or other training courses. Such courses were seen by participants as having little practical benefit to them while also managing to patronize them

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[11] A colleague has pointed out that while Jonny Logan wrote the song, it was in fact performed by Linda Martin.

via assumptions that they did not know how to develop a CV or how to conduct themselves during interviews. These courses could at times adopt a moralizing and judgmental tone through reminders that one should, for example, wash prior to an interview. At times they simply appeared meaningless. Rachel told me how the course she believed to be about returning to employment turned out to be very different than she had expected:

> … we were given this sheet of paper and on this sheet of paper was a tree, a big massive tree … and there were like jelly babies, if you can imagine jelly babies, these jelly babies were knocking all around this tree, some were hanging off the tree, some was climbing the tree, some was sawing a branch off the tree, you were to pick out what jelly baby you felt you were that morning ... like some of the stuff was horrific, just horrific, I just said to meself "oh lord Jasus Christ this is shocking" ... it was kinda gone to the stage where I started to bring home the stuff because people wouldn't believe ya that ya were actually going through this sort of shite … **Rachel**

Earlier I noted how participants' own goals broadly aligned with policy goals stated within *PTW*. This is also true of those involved in preforming the 'tactical mimicry' (de Certeau 1984) of the good jobseeker since for most it is not a deliberate attempt to subvert or frustrate the system for its own sake. Rather it is an active defence of participants' needs, interests and circumstances which *Intreo* and the JobPath contractors refuse to take account of. There appears adherence to the governmental logic of work's importance and the necessity in finding it, *yet the agency of individuals is set against the frustrating implementation of this governmental logic*. The multiple forms of often intersecting agency participants demonstrated in the previous chapters often coincide with and exist with feelings of disempowerment and a lack of control. Alexia, a single mother of two, actively engaged in impression management with her caseworker while undertaking postgraduate education

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concealed from social welfare. Yet, despite her agency it coexisted with feelings regarding a lack of control:

> People in social welfare who think they know better than you, who don't have your life experience, who don't get the lack of control, the lack of management that you have over your own stuff. It's like a power trip for them and you come away and you're shorter in stature and you're more stooped … it's the impossibility of the situation … **Alexia**

There is frustration with an indifferent system that participants had expected to help them, but which refuses to take account of their particular situation. Rather than occupying a position of agent-as-object (Hoggett 2001) we see the necessary turning of agency against the social welfare agencies in defence of and in pursuit of individual's needs and interests.

- **9:2.4 Comparing Experiences in Different Agencies**

Participants' experiences in *Intreo* and JobPath providers were underlined and compounded by what they felt as a lack of dignity and respect from agency staff. Chapter Seven explored the significant amount of 'claims stigma' (Baumberg 2012, 2016) experienced by participants. The findings here mirror research from the UK highlighting how such stigma undermines caseworker-claimant relations and serves to worsen the experience of unemployment (Sage 2017). References to a lack of respect and dignity in welfare agencies is one of the most frequent complaints articulated by participants in this research. Here Matt talks about his experiences with *Intreo*:

> I didn't want to sit in a room with someone that's not going to show respect to me or other people trying to find a new job, especially when you're leaving one type of job, knowing best and trying to get something different. "Sure why did you leave that job, sure go back and do it again, you've done it before so why not?" And found some of them quiet intimidating to ask questions … **Matt**

However, for those participants who had also attended the non-profit local employment service Obair a different picture emerges where interactions were based on their own needs and interests (see also Whelan 2017). Eamonn had described his ongoing interactions with Turas Nua as like being "ridiculed by stealth" since they did little to address his underlying literacy issues and insisted he apply for employment he did not feel qualified for. He had previously attended Obair, and told me how he continued to meet with his Obair caseworker while attending Turas Nua. His experience with Obair was one based on mutual respect in which he had an equal say in the development of plans. Moreover, he felt that courses with Obair attempted to address his needs and were sympathetic to his difficulties:

> Like I went up to the tutor and I said "listen, I am fucking struggling." – He says "right, this is going to work different for you, this is a five-week course, we're going to double it to maybe 12 to 13 weeks for you", and it fucking worked … **Eamonn**

The previous chapter highlighted the importance of supportive environments to those men involved in Men's Sheds and, in particular, mental health support groups for jobseekers. These were spaces which fulfilled the need for these men to share their experiences with others in similar situations. It is this importance of addressing one's own needs and interests which is also found in Obair and also in the local education and training board. Many of those attending courses in the local education and training board often positively compared their positive experiences there against *Intreo*:

> … because they treat their students as being on a level that you get a response from, I mean if you go down the line of forcing people out to work it becomes a bit of a fight, it becomes a bit like 'ah fuck them', you certainly wouldn't say that in here, you're saying these guys are hugely helping us … **Harry**

Chapter Four identified the alternative approaches of the more enabling human capital based 'activation' as opposed to the a more punitive and work-first 'workfare'. Bonoli (2010) emphasizes that there are numerous variations of active labour market programmes. However, there is a growing convergence such that while policies are not identical they nonetheless draw on a similar "programmatic toolkit" of enabling, compensatory and regulatory elements in ensuring labour market participation (Brodkin 2013:7). Recent research from the UK has emphasized enabling programmes can perform better than work-first orientated programmes by fostering engagement and participation based on mutual respect and dignity (Sage 2018, 2017). This research adds weight to these arguments as here participants, as Harry highlights above, articulated how they were more engaged in supportive environments such as Obair and the local education and training board

This highlights the importance of the caseworker relationship since high levels of claims stigma reported in Chapter Seven along with a perceived indifference among participants undermines engagement. Further research is therefore required on the perspective of the caseworkers and in particular how the organisational rules shape their interactions and conduct toward welfare claimants. International research highlights that caseworkers can use their often-limited discretion to circumvent regulations in order to support and benefit claimants (Caswell *et.al* 2010; McDonald and Reisch 2008). As noted previously, participants in this research often described their caseworkers as 'okay' while demonstrating hostility towards the agency. It remains an open question of how much of the lightness of conditionality is due to the intention of caseworkers in supporting participants. One case in particular stands out. Tina explained how while her first two caseworkers in Seetec pushed low paid work in her direction, her third caseworker was sympathetic to her situation as she finished her third-level education and actively aided her in circumventing

work-related conditionality. What these examples also underline is the importance of how social policies are constructed in relation to unemployment. Participants' interests, goals and agency aligned with stated policy, yet the individualised and decontextualized work-first approach encapsulated in *Intreo* and JobPath means that agency is most vividly exercised in maintaining one's own interests against those agencies. This is reflected throughout interviews in which although most participants agreed that there should be work-related conditionality attached to receipt of payments it should be co-joined with the state's responsibility to ensure decent work and an emphasis on enabling engagement and support to jobseekers:

> …. because you have to protect heavily a very small critical thing you're getting [payment], it allows you very little freedom, capacity or even motivation to do any other thing at the risk of that being curtailed … there's no provision within the system where it says to ya look don't worry, we'll give you that it's fine, do ya wanna go and try a thing that's fine we're not gonna take your money off ya, you can pay your rent, but try this thing and get back to us to let us know how you get on … **Nick**

- **9:2.5 Summary**

Policy reforms have introduced a new mode of governing unemployment based on an array of techniques of conditionality including sanctions now embedded as a regulatory tool. The evidence explored here points to a lightness of application in relation to these techniques. On the one hand they insist upon engagement since participants fear the potential cut to, or loss of, payment. On the other hand, their lightness permits a space through which participants chart their own trajectories and/or defend their own interests via multiple and intersecting examples of agency. Despite participants often only superficially engaging with agencies, a lightness of engagement is not necessarily perceived as a positive as what emerges is an encounter with the Absurd. Here the experience is marked by indifference on behalf of the

welfare agencies rather than a punitive tendency. It produces anger and frustration as participants' agency is wasted in defending their interests and needs against agencies which, overly concerned with completing formalities, ignore interests experiences, circumstances, needs and interests. Much of the anger and frustration found in interviews derives from a perceived lack of support from *Intreo* and JobPath providers. Participants seek support and are emphatic about the benefits of enabling agencies, such as Obair and the local education and training board in addressing their issues and needs. As the coming section makes clear, participants overwhelmingly desire to be out of welfare and into paid employment, but not at any cost.

9:3 SECTION TWO: THE MASTER NARRATIVE OF WORK

Pathways to Work (DEASP 2012, 2014, 2016) and its accompanying techniques of work-related conditionality derive their force from the historically contingent master narrative of work which was outlined in Chapter Two. Work is defined as formal paid employment and occupies a central role in contemporary societies as the distributor of income, recognition and status. The corollary is often the construction of unemployment as deviant which is demonstrated by political and media rhetoric, as well as the stigma and othering articulated by participants. *PTW* attributes this deviancy to individual responsibility through its emphasis on the necessity of conditionality to elicit or coerce participation in paid employment. This section challenges that perception by exploring the dominance of the master narrative of work in the lives of participants as well as the relative absence of refusals of work as a social or political strategy. However, it moves on to challenge the primacy of emphasizing work as a solution to personal and social ills by widening the understanding of unemployment through a focus on positives in the experience as well as other forms of

societal participation beyond paid employment. The section finishes by discussing the erasure of social reproductive work, primarily carried out by women, in both *PTW* and critiques of paid employment.

- **9:3.1 The Work Ethic**

The social construction of unemployment informing the contemporary government of that most intractable problem situates unemployed individuals as dependent, irresponsible and in need of both disciplining and upskilling or self-improvement. As Chapter Five made evident the political and media rhetoric over the years since the inception of *PTW* situates the problem as one of a defunct work ethic. This research challenges such a negative construction of unemployment as participants in this research exhibit strong work ethics. Toward the end of each interview I talked with participants about their fears as well as their hopes for the future. By far the most common hope was to be 'off welfare' and working in a 'proper job' with good pay, working conditions and which was enjoyable:

> … [My] Aspirations for the future is that this course opens up some industry that I can enjoy working with, I can follow up or whatever I need to follow up with, where it be another course or go on further, whatever I have to do, do what I have to do and get a job that can offer me a good standard of living, an all-round standard of living … **Teddy**

As noted in Chapter Seven these articulations are supported by participants previous attempts at job-searching, the dominance of educational strategies linked to obtaining a 'proper job' and the strong work biographies of most of the participants. Those who were working regarded themselves as only marginally better off in their employment than they would be on welfare, but work was nonetheless important. The women involved in Traveller support and advocacy gained little financially but continued to work despite this:

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> … I'm gaining, to be honest with you I'm gaining nothing, but it's just to keep my mind occupied, I'm happy enough being in here … **Elaine**

Most participants explicitly articulated a strong commitment to the work ethic. This corresponds to literature from other jurisdictions demonstrating the enduring hold of the work ethic among unemployed people (Shildrick *et.al* 2012). It also supports similar recent findings in Ireland which found that precarious workers hold a strong commitment to the work ethic and a moral preference for paid employment over welfare (Moran 2016). However, this commitment did not stretch to an acceptance that 'any job' was better than being on welfare. Almost all participants qualified their commitment by emphasizing that paid employment should be financially beneficial with good working conditions, with many including that a person should find the work interesting or enjoyable. Jeff was working part-time while attending an education course. He was emphatic about the importance of work throughout our conversation, even going so far as to insist that those under twenty-five should not receive any social welfare payment in order to coerce them to work. However, he had become frustrated at what he perceived to be the increasing prevalence of zero-hour contracts and poor working conditions. For Jeff nobody should have to take such work:

> … no, no, any job is not better than being on the social, like you could be in a job where like you're just getting abuse, and two hours there, three hours there, you need certainty at least over a certain timescale in any job, cause I mean would you go to any job where you're told – ya go in at 8 o'clock in the morning and you're told to go home at 10 o'clock … **Jeff**

Teddy articulates the sentiment that individuals should be supported in leaving work that they found unsatisfying so long as they had a plan to find work they found interesting:

> They just make you get a job anywhere … like "there's five jobs, there is a phone, go and apply for them", I don't agree with that at all, I think them saying, "look, you

didn't like the job you're in? That's grand, we'll give you time off, we'll pay it every week, we'll give you nearly 200 quids, but what's your plan?" … **Teddy**

The negative social construction of unemployment was prominent throughout the research; the absence of work was felt as a loss. The deprivation thesis (Jahoda *et.al* 1979, 1981, 1982) remains predominant due to its neat correlation between paid employment and personal and social benefits. Its influence remains steadfast within social policies concerned with unemployment which invariably position paid employment as the solution to unemployment through job guarantee schemes and/or active labour market programmes (Sage 2017). Chapter Two highlighted how the deprivation model has been critiqued by Fryer (1986) for its removal of agency and lack of focus on human autonomy, while Ezzy (1993) points to the interpretive passage from the respected status of worker to the diminished category of 'unemployed'. Sage (2017) argues that the experience of unemployment involves a combination of these approaches such that a loss of latent and manifest benefits, a restriction of agency and autonomy, and diminished status all coalesce into an overarching process of loss. My findings support Sage's conceptualisation of the experience of unemployment shaped by multiple and entwined forms of loss. Participants often talked about being 'stuck in a rut' due to a loss of structure and routine. For example, toward the end of my conversation with Sarah she told me how she had looked forward to the interview since it gave her something to do that morning. Time, for Sarah, had lost meaning:

> … Do you know, I don't wear a watch, did you notice it? I haven't worn it since the day I stopped working, I stopped wearing my watch, because I was at it all the time, checking the time, and the, and the days were so long … I've too much of it, so doing that, you know, when you said "oh, I'm conscious of the time", it means nothing to me anymore … **Sarah**

Chapter Seven detailed the agency involved in struggling to get by on welfare. For many the budgeting to make ends meet was felt as a restriction of agency and loss of autonomy as avenues of enjoyment and fulfilment became limited. For example, Bob spoke of how this need of getting by reduced the amount of family activities, such as going to the cinema. Similarly, Teddy spoke of how the 'bare minimum' received on Jobseeker payment meant that the social activities of he and his wife were restricted:

> We've done nothing, we're active, me and my wife, we like days out, we like to go out to shows, we like to meet up with our friends a lot and stuff like that, we just didn't do that … we're getting a lot of texts saying such things are on this weekend, we're just like we've no money, we can't, my wife and her sisters, they booked a holiday to Budapest, they were asking her to go, she's just like I can't … **Teddy**

Similarly, although the internalisation of personal stigma was limited among participants they were aware of the wider stigmatisation of receiving welfare benefits. There was also significant experience of 'claims stigma', indicating a general acknowledgement regarding diminished status. As such there is a feeling and recognition that being unemployed is not something you should be and even those who challenge the dominant framing as Peter did in Chapter Seven emphasize their past history as a worker:

> … my experience [with social welfare agencies] has not been good … from being made feel small, ya know, I worked all my life, I mean I paid my way in this country, the way I see it when I lost my job I went in to get back what I paid in and … it's like the people behind the counter are giving ya the money out of their pocket … **Peter**

While each of the three participants quoted above had strong work biographies the sense of loss was also felt by those with limited work histories and even those without. Both Ian, who had held brief employment in the past, and Ruth, who had remained unemployed since leaving school, felt this absence keenly:

… there's only so many hours ya can do that or sit playing a video game that does nothing for ya, yer making no money, it's just boring like, ya work and ya've money, at least you've options, ya've choices of what ya can do … ya feel like a waster I suppose, people look at ya like a waster … it's more what other people think of ya, if ya didn't worry then ya wouldn't think of it … **Ian**

… just one day rolling into another and you know just basically getting really lazy, just doing nothing, I felt horrible after a while you know. People asking well what do you work at and just nothing … **Ruth**

Recognising the functional losses of unemployment is therefore not sufficient in fully comprehending the experience. The recognition of the restriction of agency and autonomy along with the devaluation of status in the experience of unemployment undoes the link between the inherent positives of paid employment implicit within Jahoda *et.al*'s 'deprivation thesis'.   It is not simply the loss of paid work which accounts for the unpleasantness of unemployment but rather the social and cultural consequences where life is reduced to the 'getting by' of both economic and psychological survival. The fact that the overarching loss is felt not only by those with strong work biographies but also those without underlines this point. There then appears nothing inherently negative about unemployment rather its unpleasantness arises from its social construction; how we think, speak and act in regard to it. In contemporary societies work is the lodestar around which income, recognition and social status are distributed (Frayne 2015). The positive effects of employment rather than being innate to it are due to the centrality of paid work in contemporary societies dependent on waged labour (Cole 2007). Boland and Griffin (2015a) underline this critique by pointing to numerous groups, such as homemakers, retirees, artists and the wealthy who do not have access to the latent benefits of employment, but yet do not experience their absence negatively.

Strandh *et.al* (2013) illustrates the context dependent nature of unemployment and its experience by highlighting how unemployment was more detrimental to Swedish women than to Irish women. The long-term policy trajectory of integrating Swedish women into the labour market binds their personal identity more intimately to employment than Irish women whose identities were historically less bound to the psychological and social pressure to work (*ibid.*). While *PTW* mirrors the positivity of work in extolling paid employment as the route out of poverty and social exclusion, the political and media exhortations to work often involve an implicit recognition that there is nothing innately good about it. Take for example current Taoiseach, Leo Varadkar's, assertion regarding the good working and taxpaying citizens of Ireland that:

> … maybe aren't in their dream job, maybe aren't in a regular job but go out and work every day, earn money for their families and themselves and pay taxes … And they've a right to raise questions if somebody was saying: 'I'm not going to take a job because it's not suited to me or I don't like it' … (Leo Varadkar quoted in Walsh 2016)

Implicit within these comments is the social expectation to work. One should work not because it is innately beneficial but rather because it is what everybody else does. What emerges from this recognition of the enduring work ethic entwined with the felt loss of work is the persistence of the governmental logic of the master narrative of work. Although this narrative predates the implementation of *PTW* and its intensified behavioural conditionality, it both permits the policy and the political rhetoric accompanying it and is reinforced by them. It raises questions regarding the necessity and efficacy of policies deploying work-related conditionality. As this chapter demonstrates, conditionality appears as redundant since the macro-level master narrative of work permeates social psychology and ensures adherence. As argued in Chapter Two, the use of work-related conditionality and sanctions

thereby suggests a political function in maintaining this macro-level governance as well as a supply of labour (Wiggan 2015a).

- **9:3.2 Positives of Unemployment**

Despite this macro-level normative government of individuals such internalisation does not appear to operate a ceaseless or totalizing hold on unemployed people; despite real material and psychological deprivations there are important moments of positivity. Leisure time is often perceived by unemployed individuals as an unearned burden due to the absence of paid employment (Boland and Griffin 2015b). This is also alluded to in the quotes above from Sarah, Ian and Ruth where for them time becomes unstructured as hours and days roll into one with the seeming unproductivity of their activities engendering feelings of being a 'waster'. Yet, the experience is not one marked solely by struggling against hardships. One might even go so far as to say that there are benefits to unemployment. This was certainly the case for Colin who was one of the few participants to state that he did not want to work (in paid employment). Being unemployed allowed Colin to spend his time as he pleased, which he often spent on carpentry projects. During my visit to his home he had proudly displayed the garden furniture he had made. Colin spent his time working on his own interests while also performing odd jobs for his neighbours for which they would repay in kind through small gifts. The reciprocity and mutual aid in these activities provided him with more joy than paid employment had:

> … what I do is good, as far as I could see is very very good for the community, now I'll get a much better buzz helping people out than I do … [than] I will do working, yeah, and you know it's God honest truth, I'll get a real buzz out of that … **Colin**

Similarly, after long periods of employment, both Rachel and Jenny had looked forward to unemployment after being made redundant. For both the unpleasantness of unemployment only arose through work-related conditionality as their caseworkers insisted upon job-search activity, serving to interrupt their desire to spend more time with their children. Switching from Jobseekers payment to Illness Benefit provided both Rachel and Jenny with the space to enjoy their lack of paid work and to engage in the activities they wanted to, at least on a temporary basis. Jenny told me:

> … I can do a lot more, and the freedom to go to and fro with the kids as well, like I volunteer up in the school with the kids, I do a bit of reading up in the school with the kids and I go swimming with my daughter's class as well volunteering, if they have any fun days or activities, so it's nice to be able to do that because I'm not working, I can do it from 9-12 because Daisy is in playschool so I have them 3 hours free, I also have those 3 hours free to meet my friends for a little cup of tea down the town …
> **Jenny**

For both Patrick and Pauline the experience of unemployment was something approaching pleasant. This had been somewhat facilitated by their age and proximity to retirement which they suggested influenced their relationships with caseworkers resulting in a lack of applied conditionality. Moreover, both had learned to live on low incomes and had little interest in material wealth and consumer acquisitions. Patrick had continued his own interests in using his skills to design and make musical instruments in his own homemade workshop, while Pauline continued to work as an artist, occasionally selling her pieces for cash-in-hand. Like Colin, Pauline and Patrick were heavily involved in their local communities through formal and informal organisations, while all three were also politically active in local grassroots groups. The lack of paid work had no negative for Patrick, Pauline or Colin who were all content and engaged in their own interests and activities. This is also true of David who, despite his third-level education, had sought out menial jobs which lacked responsibility. He

had lost his last job working in a restaurant kitchen after interrupting the work process to, as he put it, "explain the laws of physics" to his supervisor:

> I just said "listen. I'm going to have to explain this to you again so just be quiet and let me explain the physics of this, it's physics, if I'm doing more work, stuff is going to come out slower here" - He just started roaring at me and he's just like "Just clean quicker" - I was just like "I am doing this as good as I can, I don't know what to tell you, if you give me more work when I'm doing something as well as I can, I'm going to be slower on the other end." … **David**

For David, paid employment was an imposed necessity that he had little tolerance for. When his *Intreo* caseworker insisted on job-searching David sought refuge in a return to education as a postgraduate student. Despite the lack of a work imbued structure David was not bored but rather used his time to pursue his own interests in writing comedy. He hoped to be in a position to write comedy artistically but had little interest in being career focused, rather he was more concerned with his own enjoyment:

> I tried writing comedy, and it's been poor, and I'll try and write more, and I'm sure it will be poor, I'm not sure it will be poor, hopefully, it will be good, but it may be poor, but I don't mind if it's poor because it's art, it's subjective anyway, if I find it funny, good enough … **David**

Despite the articulation of an overarching sense of loss in unemployment participants still had lives in which they were active and involved in various activities. Liz had worked all her life but had to leave her job due to her worsening physical health. When we spoke she was receiving a Jobseekers payment while waiting for her Disability Allowance application to be processed. Early in our conversation she had expressed a sense of loss regarding work. As our conversation progressed over cups of tea in Liz's kitchen she spoke excitedly about the new activities she had taken up which she never had time to do while working. She had

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begun to travel and was currently learning Spanish, while YouTube provided a landscape of practical learning tutorials that Liz put to use:

> YouTube taught me how to tile … [laughs] my tiles are falling down in the bathroom, so I went on YouTube for a couple of days and I learned how to do it, so I went out in the backyard and I got a piece of timber, and was sticking the tiles onto it, I taught myself how to do it … It's taught me how to crochet. I still can't do it properly but it's teaching me how to do it. It's fantastic, you can literally do anything … **Liz**

This highlights how unemployed individuals are not only active in their daily lives but also how it can provide time and space to engage in self-defined autonomous activities (Gorz 1989). Such activities, interests and pursuits operate as unintended lines of flight (Deleuze 1995) against the disciplining logic of *Pathways to Work* which eulogizes, and attempts to enforce, participation in paid employment.

This is not of course to say that these individuals are in any way anti-work, they were not. Apart from David and Colin they all articulated strong work ethics in relation to paid employment, while they all also possessed strong work biographies. Rather it highlights how resistance to the governmental rationality regarding the centrality of paid work may emerge as neither intentional nor couched in political terms. Some of these practices outlined here were at times a subversion of work-related conditionality (e.g. Colin, Rachel, Jenny, David, Patrick and Pauline). Yet, often they emerge via the fault-lines of conditionality's implementation which provided space to live in, to pursue interests and to develop new ones. They operate as inventive forces within the assemblages of power as individuals adapt to circumstances as active agents. In their exhibitions of autonomy and self-defined activities they point to an experience of unemployment that is not necessarily unpleasant. Colin emerges as the only act of refusal (Tronti 1966a) among participants. His preference for life

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on social welfare, and preference for engagement in his community, represents an intended break from the logic of capital; as seen in Chapter Seven it is one which work-related conditionality was closing off as Colin sought escape through Disability Allowance. While for the other participants here their activities are not articulated or practiced as refusal *per se* their actions and lived experience nonetheless carry within them seeds of refusal as they may deterritorialise the dominant regime of work-centred society through an implicit questioning of its value (Thoburn 2003).

As the examples above suggest unemployed people do things when they are unemployed. They have activities they enjoy and interests which they pursue. Yet, the things that they do do not count. The valorisation of paid employment allied to the intensification of work-related conditionality positions formal paid work as the primary duty of citizenship (Patrick 2012). The extension of conditionality to lone parents underlines this through a devaluation of non-work activities, and particularly the role of care. The techniques of conditionality, in idea if not always in practice, attempt to close down lines of flight from the governmental logic that one should work. As Chapter Five demonstrated the political and media discourses reverberating in the background of *PTW* constructed unemployed people as work-shy and welfare-dependent scroungers. The rule of productivity, defined in terms of paid employment, often permeates throughout interviews and diminishes other activities. William echoes earlier thoughts on the importance of work in providing a structure underlined by productivity when he described how he would spend time while unemployed with friends and that he had been more active through his cycling interests prior to returning to education. Yet, he would later describe his activities during unemployment as a form of ongoing waste:

> I wouldn't really do anything, nothing like beneficial for myself like, ya just do your everyday things, once you're finished that you'd just go home and play games, watch DVDs, stupid shite like … **William**

William expounded the importance of work to the extent that he was one of the few supporters of unqualified conditionality and sanctions, since for him coercing work meant:

> … a better economy definitely, loads of people working, everyone's on the go, nobody has free time, better, just good, it improves the world I think … **William**

That individuals engage in activities and interests while unemployed but come to articulate these activities as a waste or unimportant suggest that it is not the day to day experience of unemployment which is unpleasant but rather its interpretation. It is when individuals come to think about their unemployment, which necessarily entails comparison to employment, that they most acutely feel the sense of loss it involves. It is in this recognition of a devalued status that what they do, their activities and experience is often lost even to themselves. The socially embedded valorisation of work and the pervasiveness of the work ethic produces a negative comparative evaluation of one's life worth and feelings that one's life lacks purpose (Sage 2018). Not only are interests and activities redefined as pointless unproductivity, but the positives of unemployment are tainted by the suffocating reverberations of social and cultural norms regarding work. Simon told me how being at home more due to unemployment had provided with him family opportunities he had previously missed out on:

> … because I was actually able to bond with the kids … like I've a better bond with my 2 youngest than I have with the other 3, the 3 oldest … **Simon**

Despite having worked all his life Simon told me he had felt no shame in becoming unemployed for the first time since many others in his line of work had succumbed to a

similar fate. However, he had begun to feel shame as he watched his friends one by one return to work. He felt adrift within the welfare system where regulations had denied him the educational courses he wanted, he had left the Men's Shed community and seemed resigned to the fate and shame of unemployment. The negative social construction of unemployment had come to weigh heavy on Simon. Similarly, we can recall how Marvin lived with the echo of loss which, from his perspective, manifested itself in a diminished status in the eyes of his children. In these cases the construction of unemployment operates as the most persuasive technique as it can extends into the very being and psychology of individuals.

- **9:3.3 Social Reproduction**

The experience of the women articulated in this research is reflective of dominant assumptions regarding their roles as primary caregivers and points toward the gendered nature of welfare in which policies are constructed in male dominated environments (Ingold and Etherington 2013). Historically women have been visible in the male breadwinner model of Irish welfare state under the 'principle of care' (Sainsbury 1996) as caregivers to both children and men. By extending work-related conditionality to lone parents *PTW* does little to challenge this model since the social reproductive labour carried out by mothers, and women generally, carried little weight with caseworkers. The mere act of applying work-related conditionality to mothers suggests a devaluation of parenting and the care work involved. This is compounded by the rules requiring availability for full-time work. The invisibility of social reproduction renders it meaningless; as Rubery (2014:6) puts it women must 'work like a man' while 'caring like a woman'. Similarly, the political exhortations to work and the eulogisation of those "who get up early" (Leo Varadkar quoted in Bardon 2017) to do so not only devalues the parenting and social reproduction performed but also

diminishes the relevance of care in wider society.   The emphasis on paid work erases the social reproduction which permits the former's possibility and with it the experience of the women who carry it out.

All the lone parents and women in relationships I spoke with unsurprisingly reported that they carried out the bulk of home and care duties. Chapter Seven highlighted how Louise's experience encapsulated the 'second shift' as she carried out the bulk of this work while also working part-time as her husband pursued a postgraduate education. Similarly, Emily, a lone parent, described how her role as a mother and running a household was a "twenty-four-hour job". Jessica, like Emily a lone parent in education, described how hours spent in education each day were sandwiched between her home duties:

> … before I come here now I'll do the rooms and make the beds … I go home, and I make the dinners and then my lad's got his homework and I still have stuff to do in the house … **Jessica**

The interviews were also permeated by the performance of emotional labour by mothers:

> … I need to hear how the day has been, who they've interacted with, what's going on, what projects they're working on, what they need from me in terms of permission to go somewhere or permission to start a course that they want to do … **Sinead**

The emotional and physical labour of mothering is most vividly illustrated by Nadine. Nadine described how her teenage son struggled with depression and suicidal tendencies such that the applied work-related conditionality from *Intreo* was too traumatic and forced him off his Jobseeker payment. He had recently found unpaid work which he enjoyed, and which ensured that he was active. In a conversation about discretionary spending Nadine told me how despite the physical strain of her job, which she described as an abusive relationship, its marginal financial benefits allowed her to support her son:

I will never make him go there again and that's obviously, he eats, and he needs clothes you know and his da is still not terribly supportive, so my son is my luxury I suppose … **Nadine**

Most critiques of work tend to ignore feminist authors in their singular critique of paid employment, losing sight of both the labour of social reproduction and its gendered nature (e.g. Frayne 2015; Berardi 2009; although see Weeks 2011). For critiques that are grounded in a desire for greater human autonomy and more egalitarian societies it appears a strange oversight. In expounding the benefits of a reduction in paid work, post-work authors often turn to Marx and Engels' (1970: 53) vision: "hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening and criticise after dinner". One might ask who is going to take care of the children?   A critique of work is insufficient if limited to paid employment but rather must attend to the problem of social reproduction in which the majority of emotional, care and sexual labour is primarily carried out by women (Dalla Costa and James 1975). For many women participation in the formal labour market has brought 'equality with a vengeance' (Chasey-Lind 1995) since it is not matched by a decline in social reproductive labour.   What emerges here is that a reduction in paid labour does not bring a reduction of labour *per se* for women since they perform increased social reproduction. Earlier I highlighted the shifting sands of gendered moral rationalities as Rachel and Jenny transitioned from a 'worker/mother integral' rationality to a 'primarily mothers' rationality (Duncan and Edwards 1997) while Emily and Jessica moved in the opposite direction. What underlies this shift is a move, or in the case of Emily and Jessica a goal, towards performing a predominantly different type of work. For both Rachel and Jenny it involved dispensing with the needs of informal childcare in order to take on such labour themselves as well as performing domestic and other care duties. This point highlights the interrelation between private and public forms of work. It brings with it the understanding that moving out of paid

employment does not provide everyone with the requisite time to fish in the afternoon or criticize after dinner.

- **9:3.4 Summary**

I do not wish to over-emphasis the positives of unemployment. Chapters Seven and Eight have shown how participants are faced with numerous material and psychological deprivations which necessitate the development of coping mechanisms and forms of resistance. Rather the point is to illustrate, that although such deprivations are central, that is not the totality of the experience. Life is not in and of itself misery despite the very real hardships, and there are pleasurable moments and beneficial aspects to unemployment. These are often tinged by and work in tandem with deprivations. What is important to remember however is that in the same way that paid work is not innately good, there is nothing innately unpleasant about unemployment. Rather how it is experienced emerges out of how we construct and frame it; the ways in which we think, talk and act in relation to unemployment (Boland and Griffin 2015a). In this sense the master narrative of work remains pervasive as attachments to the work-ethic emerge strongly here, although qualified by a refusal of *any* job. Along with the attendant social construction of unemployment they appear as persuasive macro-level techniques governing conduct. It involves an implicit economic rationality (Fevre 2003) in which human beings are reduced to workers or workers-in-waiting. The framing within this rationality produces a version of 'economic citizenship' which devalues the role of care and through interactions with welfare agencies erases the labour carried out primarily by women. Critiques of the centrality of paid employment then must be attentive the gendered nature of social reproduction and the gendered ways in which different types of work relate to one another.

9:4 Conclusion

Recent policy changes introduce a new mode of governing unemployment in Ireland centred on the use of an array of techniques of conditionality eliciting and guiding individuals to a rationality of active job-seeking. The lightness of implementation permits avenues of agency where participants perform a superficial engagement as they maintain their own interests through the system. At times this arises as an unbearable lightness of conditionality in which the absurdity of the welfare system confronts participants with indifference rather than penalty. Work-related conditionality under *PTW* emerges as redundant, informed as it is by misguided or disingenuous political and media discourse regarding 'work-shy scroungers'. Almost all participants want to work; they are already conditioned to do so by the pervasiveness of the work ethic and the centrality of work as the lodestar of income, recognition and status. Agency at times is wasted defending one's needs and pursuing interests in defiance of welfare agencies overtly concerned with bureaucratic formality. Participants are experts of their own circumstances. They want to work but are often all too aware of the barriers which *PTW*, *Intreo* and JobPath provide little assistance in overcoming. While street-level techniques of conditionality produce much frustration as they mask superficial engagement and an indifferent system the macro-level framing of employment and the construction of unemployment resonates strongly. With this in mind, despite the redundancy of the street-level techniques they suggest a political function in reinforcing the master narrative as well as maintaining a supply of labour. The framing of paid employment as central devalues alternative community contributions and caregiving. It produces gendered consequences for the quality of life while undermining any notion of inclusivity beyond 'economic citizenship'.

CHAPTER TEN: CONCLUSION

10:1 Introduction

This final chapter begins with an overview of the thesis, briefly providing a summary of the preceding arguments, findings and narrative thrust of the research. It then moves on to present the thesis' contributions to knowledge in empirical, theoretical, methodological and policy terms. Finally, it outlines possible future avenues of research which have emerged from the current study.

10:2 Overview

Welfare states have increasingly become concerned with the 'conduct of conduct' (Foucault 2007) as evidenced in the intensification, extension and centrality of behavioural work-related conditionality in the management of unemployment (Watts and Fitzpatrick 2018; Dwyer 2010). Prior to 2012 the Irish welfare system was derided as a relative outlier; overly permissive and light on the application of work-related conditionality and sanctions (e.g. Grubb *et.al* 2009). However, a new definitive policy trajectory is afoot, encapsulated in *Pathways to Work* (2012, 2014, 2016), in which conditionality buttressed by sanctions provides a new means of governing unemployment. It permits a new array of techniques of conditionality for street-level bureaucrats to call upon in eliciting or coercing a rationality of active job-seeking. *PTW's* framing of unemployment as an individual responsibility is conjoined with a wider political and media discursive framing, reproducing the striver-skiver discourse of the UK in an Irish style which eulogises those who "get up in the morning" (Varadkar quoted in Bardon 2017). The 'work-shy' unemployed are in need of intervention. This policy level transformation marks a shift from a seemingly passive welfare state to one imbued with ensuring active welfare subjects conditioned to job-seeking.

This thesis explored the impact of this shift toward work-related conditionality and sanctions among those on Jobseekers payments in Ireland. It focused on County Kildare, providing a localised account and exploration of experiences and agency in relation to social welfare bureaucracies and encounters with conditionality and sanctions. It drew on Foucault's 'governmentality' to explicate how individuals are governed according to a 'job-seeking' rationality which gains a concrete manifestation through techniques, such as caseworker meetings, provision of job-search evidence, and sanctions.   The research is based on 42 qualitative semi-structured interviews across three groups of jobseekers; discouraged jobseekers and lone parent jobseekers from across Kildare. The Foucauldian governmentality framework is conjoined with Lister's (2004) typology regarding types of agency exercised by individuals in welfare. By exploring how individuals 'get by', 'get out', 'get back at' and 'get organised' the research centres and emphasizes participants' agency as they navigate and resist dominant power in their interactions with social welfare agencies, work-related conditionality and sanctions. Throughout the research I explored the gendered dimensions of these interactions as well the forms of agency which were produced as a result. In doing so the research sought to amplify voices, as well as individual agency, absent from the construction of policy.

10:3 Findings

The analysis of the main findings portrays a complex picture in which agency is often bounded by the provision of necessary income and other supports, but where claimants also articulate a desire for autonomy and the pursuit of individual needs and interests. Popular conceptions of the Irish welfare state's generosity provokes myths regarding a preference for welfare which offers justification for the implementation of conditionality and sanctions in relation to seeking work. What this research demonstrates is the struggles of 'getting by' as

participants utilize multiple strategies for survival including strict budgeting and borrowing, and drawing on familial networks. These struggles are gendered with the bulk of such work falling to women, while female lone parents are further constrained as their struggles to 'get by' on a single income are hindered by the inconsistency of maintenance payments from former partners. 'Getting by' also involves coping with the psychological deprivations of unemployment. Personal stigma is limited to partial internalisation among younger participants with little employment history and some unemployed 'male breadwinners'. 'Claims stigma' and the recognition of wider stigmatisation features prominently and necessitate developing coping mechanisms of avoidance, othering, and expounding work histories, although at times resistance to othering emerges. These strategies of 'getting by' intersect and inform participants' attempts to 'get off' welfare. What emerges strongly is the preference for work over welfare; with only Colin, Jenny and Rachel stating their preference for welfare. Frustrated job-searching and the unavailability of a 'proper job' involving good pay, working conditions and which is interesting channels many participants' agency into education. Conjoined with the desire to work is a strong belief in education as the engine of meritocracy and the route to what is perceived as rewarding paid employment. In the case of education the agency and interests of participants aligns neatly with policy and discourse suggesting a human capital rather than a work-first approach of activation policy. However practice tells us otherwise as education opportunities were often sought out without welfare agency assistance.

Despite the production of a new array of techniques of conditionality their application remains light, appearing as bureaucratic concerns with formalities rather than genuine engagement. It permits, on the behalf of some participants, a form of 'getting back at'; a superficial interaction through the 'tactical mimicry' (de Certeau 1984) of the good jobseeker.

This appears not as a positive for participants but more a waste of agency as participants circumvent formalities that do little to assist them. The system is marked by indifference rather than a punitive tendency, yet this indifference hurts. It provokes an encounter with the Absurd (Camus 2015) as participants become frustrated by a perceived lack of genuine engagement that begins with their interests and needs. Such frustration at times breaks down the dramaturgical performance of some as interactions become briefly marked by open hostility. The struggles of 'getting by' combined with the indifference of agencies produces fraud, primarily undeclared work, as a form of 'getting back at' which is couched in economic and political criticism.

The master narrative of work permeates my interviews with participants to an extent that it appears to render *PTW* and its attendant conditionality redundant. The lack of assistance based on the needs and interests of individuals means that pathways are walked alone by participants. As a policy edifice built on myths of dependency and irresponsibility and a superficiality of engagement, it frustrates agency and worsens the condition of unemployment. It reinforces the association between paid employment and personal and social benefit without qualifications regarding required needs and supports. It erases the value of community involvement and social reproduction, and with the latter much of the experience and worth of female participants. The pervasiveness of the master narrative of work coincides with the erasure of localized networks of unemployed groups to inhibit the emergence of 'getting organised'. Almost all participants do not want to be unemployed, for them it is a transitory category; they want to work. They know their circumstances and interests better others and want engagement based on these.

10:4 Contributions

This research contributes to Irish and international knowledge in three ways: empirically, theoretically and methodologically. Across the dimensions it supports and develops existing knowledge while contributing new knowledge to understanding how work-related conditionality is experienced, navigated and/or resisted. In doing so it also raises important policy implications and further avenues for academic research to explore.

-   **10:4.1 Empirical**

A number of empirical contributions to the literature are contained within this research. The thesis contributes significantly to the understanding of work-related conditionality in both a national and an international context. Ireland's turn towards activation underpinned by conditionality and sanctions is relatively recent. There remains limited academic interaction with its uses of conditionality and sanctions (see Boland and Griffin 2015a, 2015b, 2018; Millar and Crosse 2016; Murphy 2008; Doyle Forthcoming; Gaffney Forthcoming). Murphy as well as Millar and Crosse focus their attention specifically on its impact on lone parents, while Boland and Griffin's work, which provides the most influential account, was written in the context of turbulence as the new regime of conditionality and sanctions integrated into the system. As such, this research provides a more up-to-date understanding of how the system is operating and experiences of it. In particular it is differentiated by its understanding of how gender influences experiences as the social reproductive work and childcare carried out by women is invisible to welfare agencies and work-related conditionality. It supports both the national (Boland and Griffin 2015a) and international literature (Welfare Conditionality Project 2018) in identifying a lack of control among participants. However, while the UK programmes pursuing 'work-first' approaches appear punitive in nature (Welfare

Conditionality Project 2018) what emerges in Ireland is the lightness of conditionality. While echoing a rationality of active job-seeking at policy level and permitting an array of techniques of conditionality, contrary to Boland and Griffin (2015a, 2015b) this thesis finds conditionality does not appear as invasively corrective. To the contrary the system is marked by indifference rather than a punitive tendency. It permits agency within its restraints as participants defend their own needs and interests. Yet, the system holds, suggesting the macro-level framing of conditionality and sanctions underpinned by the master narrative of work as the reason for its success rather than strict street-level implementation.

This thesis produces a more nuanced account of how conditionality is experienced. The existing literature tends to depict those on the receiving end as passive objects managed, monitored and shaped. Agency is either absent (e.g. Watts and Fitzpatrick 2018); dominated (e.g. Boland and Griffin 2015b; Wright 2016) or evident only in the trajectories aligned with welfare agency goals (e.g. Welfare Conditionality 2018). This research supports the latter's findings regarding the potential for agency through the possible avenues delineated by policy. However, it nuances this by exploring the resistance tactics of 'getting back at' in which participants operate in the blind spots of power. This is a significant finding as the agency of resistance is often pushed to the margins where it emerges as fraud (e.g. Dean and Melrose 1996) or resistance through subjectivity (e.g. Marston 2008; Trethewey 1996). This research shows that despite the tight constraints placed on participants they can and do act in their own interests.

The research contributes to the understanding of the coping mechanisms deployed by welfare claimants in Ireland. In doing so it supports and updates the limited existing research in Ireland (Dagg and Gray 2016; Daly and Leonard 2002) but also extends our understanding

by drawing out in detail the specific modes of coping practiced by participants in this new *PTW* regime. The research demonstrated how 'getting by' on welfare required use of multiple intersecting practices of budgeting, borrowing and drawing on familial networks for financial and childcare support. Moreover, these strategies inform the possibilities of 'getting off' welfare as they are embedded in the decision-making regarding employment and educational opportunities. Despite a prolificacy of research in the UK, there is a surprising absence of research in Ireland regarding the shame and stigma of unemployment (although see Whelan Forthcoming). In this sense this research is unique in exploring the psychological coping mechanisms deployed by unemployed individuals. It supports the research from UK (Patrick 2016; Baumberg 2016, 2012) in highlighting levels of claims stigma and stigmatisation identified by participants as well as the dominant coping mechanisms of avoidance and, in particular, othering. It further adds weight to Walker *et.al*'s (2013) assertion that psychological deprivation and stigma is evident across welfare states irrespective of payment generosity. Although the research is distinctive in finding low levels of personal stigma among participants; a finding that is possibly due to female participants' identity being less bound to employment, recession infused structural explanations and ideational remnants of unemployment as natural in Ireland. The thesis contributes to an empirically based gendered understanding of unemployment by showing how 'getting by' is primarily the responsibility of women. This social reproductive and care-work mitigates the internalisation of personal stigma among Irish women as identity is less reliant on paid employment (Strandh *et.al* 2013), although claims stigma is felt acutely by female lone parents. There is little research focused on the role of social welfare fraud in Ireland (although see Gaffney and Millar forthcoming for policy level analysis). Although not the main focus of this thesis it nonetheless provides a contribution in exploring its practice as

bound up in 'getting by'. Along with need its justifications emerge based on political and economic critics regarding fairness, positioning it as a form of 'getting back at' also.

There is a burgeoning literature on anti-work and post-work futures (Frayne 2015; Weeks 2011; Berardi 2009; Srnicek and Williams 2015; Fleming 2015). Much of this literature remains on the theoretical level or where it is backed by empirical research (Frayne 2015) it does not explicitly focus on unemployment. This research makes a unique contribution by using interviews to tease out the positives of unemployment as a means of engaging with the centrality of paid work in contemporary societies. While it demonstrates the dominance of formal paid work it also explores the chinks in its armour by exploring how self-defined autonomous activities (Gorz 1989) can emerge in unemployment. However, the loss of paid employment often invades the autonomous activities of unemployed people rendering them pointless by the rule of productivity bound to paid employment. Moreover, the thesis draws on interviews to provide a timely reminder that work amounts to more than paid employment since its loss or absence for women does not necessarily bring leisure.

- **10:4.2 Theoretical**

Chapter Three highlighted the dearth of empirical support in governmentality studies. There is a tendency towards 'discursive governmentality' which articulates governing rationalities found in policy. The absence of material practice means such studies may lose sight of the social relations in which rationalities of rule are situated; thus failing to account for why the governable subject often does not turn up in practice (McKee 2009). It is an absence which undermines the Foucauldian conception of power as relational and non-hierarchical by setting too much focus on top-down processes of power. This perspective of the 'governors' implies a hierarchical and monolithic representation of power which is imposed on individuals. Such

a focus assumes only the 'conduct of conduct' (Foucault 2007) with little room for forms of agency or resistance. It suggests governmental programmes and strategies as cohesive projects rather than being internally contradictory and unpredictable, marked by conflict and contestation (McKee 2009).

This research therefore makes a significant contribution to the Foucauldian governmentality framework in three ways. First, it combines the framework with an empirical focus through semi-structured interviews with individuals targeted by the governing rationality of active job-seeking found in policy documents and its concomitant techniques of conditionality. In this way it shows how the messy implementation of policy matters as the lightness of applied conditionality in Ireland does not translate policy-level rationality of rule into practice through consistent use of practical techniques. Moreover, it highlights the central thesis of governmentality regarding the diffusion of power through multiple sources. Participants are in direct interaction with techniques of conditionality buttressed by state sanctioned authority; however the guidance of their own conduct is often attentive to the master narrative of work and its related stigmatisation of unemployment. State authority and policy as well as political actors play a fundamental role in reinforcing the macro-level discursive governance of the master narrative of work. Secondly, while Foucault (1977) tells us that there is always resistance to power this offers us little in the way of understanding and conceptualizing ways in which responses to governmental power emerge and the forms they take. The research therefore provides another significant contribution by allying the governmentality approach with Lister's (2004) typology regarding forms of agency. In this way it draws out how participants' agency, resistance and at times lines of flight operate within the assemblages of power both in relation to techniques of conditionality and the master narrative of work underpinning its rationality.

The research contributes to governmentality in a third way as it informs part of research exploring the competing governmentalities of unemployed drug service users (Finn and Healy Forthcoming).   Here it explores how the governing rationality of active job-seeking found in Irish social welfare intersects and competes with the rationality of methadone maintenance underpinning drug services. Unemployed drug service users must then meet the competing obligations of both services which can put at risk either the necessity of methadone or income support. It provides an original use of governmentality underpinned by empirical evidence of how competing rationalities and obligations form part of a double regulation provoking a double bind in which individual logical communications become irrational in their intersection. This approach has potential application across other regimes using behavioural conditionalities, for example, in the regulation of homelessness and probation.

- **10:4.3 Methodological**

The research's focus on County Kildare provides a localized of social welfare agencies and the rationality and techniques of conditionality via claimants' interactions with them. It provides a concentrated understanding of how work-related conditionality and sanctions operate in the lived experience of participants in a single community. The sample size, differences among participants in relation to age, gender and geographical location provide it with a robustness for generalizability to the national level. The research therefore provides a local contextualized account which nonetheless captures broader national trends. A central tenet to the new mode of governing unemployment and the use of techniques of conditionality is the contractualisation of welfare services. The Record of Mutual Commitments concretizes this renegotiation of the 'social contract' (DEASP 2012, 2014, 2016) and outlines obligations of both jobseekers and welfare agencies. The voices of

claimants were absent in this 'renegotiation' and continues to remain largely absent from policy. Similarly, limited research on the lived experience of welfare and unemployment in Ireland continues the marginalisation of voice and permits dominant power's continued framing of social issues. In this sense this research has contributed to the amplification of voice by those affected by work-related conditionality and sanctions. This includes the first academic account of direct experiences of privatisation through JobPath. In doing so it has been less concerned with policy possibilities than with exploring the stories of participants which uncover how welfare claimants are already active and contributing to society.

It also stands as testament to the difficulty of fully maintaining one's normative stance toward social change through the structured process of PhD research attentive to deadlines and financial considerations. The original proposal for this research involved a second stage of research utilizing Participatory Action Research to facilitate a smaller cohort of participants to pursue their own research. It is a project still in the making with significant interest from participants, but falls beyond the bounds of this PhD. So how then to maintain one's normative stance in relation to research beyond this? One such way is implied above in the relationship to research regarding unemployed drug service users; that is developing links with other scholars in a critical interrogation of how dominant power operates and the impact it has in the lived experience of its targets. This research is situated in an emerging literature on conditionality, sanctions and activation more broadly (Whelan 2017; Finn and Healy Forthcoming; Doyle Forthcoming; Gaffney Forthcoming; Whelan Forthcoming). There has also been an intrusion upon the policy landscape where the findings of this research were

presented to legislators.[12] A possible continuation of this incursion is possible through the

development of a briefing paper on the theory and practice of work-related conditionality and

sanctions.

- **10:4.4 Policy**

As indicated above this thesis takes as its central concern the articulation of stories and lived

experience in response to dominant power. It does not seek direct influence upon policy but

rather challenges the assumptions upon which they are built. Yet in doing so it inevitably

points to policy implications regarding the government of unemployment. The radical road

to a post-work utopia is, as Srnicek and Williams (2011:108) remind us, paved with "non-

reformist reforms". These are policies that are politically possible in the present, but which

are also orientated toward the potential of the future. The implications for policy in this

research can be easily reduced to a single notion: support. The superficial imposition of

work-related conditionality indifferent to actual lived experience and circumstances frustrates

the agency of participants. This stands in contrast to those participants attending non-profit

local employment agency, Obair, or the local education and training board. Here participants

spoke of mutual respect and dignity as well a shared engagement towards addressing their

needs and pursuing their interests; they felt that they mattered. Recent research in Ireland has

already pointed to the importance of taking account of individual well-being in the

construction of activation policy and programmes (Whelan 2017). Similar research in the

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[12]

https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/joint_committee_on_employment_affairs_and_social_protection/2018-01-25/3/.

UK outlines the benefits of addressing well-being and happiness in enabling programmes which develop engagement and participation (Sage 2018, 2017, 2014). This thesis contributes to such research and points to the importance of constructing social policies which begin with enabling and supportive engagement. As this research and others (Moran 2016) have shown, the work ethic remains prominent; participants want to work, but they require the provision of jobs which are financially feasible to them and the necessary support to enter them. A corollary of this is the construction of social policies which do not situate unemployment as innately unpleasant; a task that also requires an undoing of the political and media rhetoric accompanying policy.

- **10:5 Further Research Questions**

This thesis points to a number of other possible avenues for research. As noted above, the thesis provides a nuanced development of earlier findings (Boland and Griffin 2015a; 2015b) written as it is with suitable distance from the nascent implementation of conditionality and sanctions. However, the continued limited research on conditionality and sanctions requires correction through more studies which support, develop and contributes new knowledge to the understanding of how work-related conditionality operates and is experienced (although see Doyle Forthcoming). One particular aspect which is acutely pressing is the role of caseworkers in the street-level implementation of conditionality and sanctions (Brodkin 2013). What is presented in this thesis is a one-sided account based on participants experiences of interactions. Despite the lightness of conditionality as well as the superficiality of engagement and the indifference of the system many of the participants regarded their caseworkers as "okay" and recognised that "they're just doing their job". In a few instances caseworkers were complicit in participants resistance of conditionality. On the other hand, participants also felt the gaze of othering through a 'claims stigma' (Baumberg

2012, 2016) from agency staff and, at times, caseworkers. How do welfare agency staff perceive and interact with claimants? And does it differ across agencies? How do they interpret and respond to policy as well as to the organisational rules of agencies? How does the Irish experience relate to the international comparative literature? These are all questions which need addressing in future research. These are particularly pertinent questions since the construction of the one-stop-shop *Intreo* involved an amalgamation of staff from three different traditions: DEASP (control), FÁS (human resources) and Community Welfare Officers (Support). More research is also required in the exploration of agency and how claimants interact with work-related conditionality, sanctions and welfare agencies more generally. This research is unique in demonstrating participants' agency not only in relation to avenues permitted by governing policy (e.g. employment and education), but in charting trajectories through the narrow confines of conditionality to defend one's own needs and interests. Questions arise as to whether this form of agency emerges out of the lightness of conditionality which marks the Irish system or whether its absence elsewhere is due to an under-conceptualisation of agency.

Two other avenues for research have already been noted. The first is the role of stigma and shame in the experience of unemployed people and those on welfare more generally. This thesis has made some in-roads in relation to this by drawing on literature to highlight the weaponisation of shame while providing accounts of how it is experienced. Yet given the historical and contemporary ubiquity of stigma and shame in rationalities of rule in Ireland it is an area in need critical investigation (although see Whelan Forthcoming). Despite Lisa's comment that undeclared working is "socially acceptable" in Ireland research on the topic is conspicuous by its absence. This is altogether more pressing considering the recent intensification of stigmatising discourses regarding unemployment via the government

'Welfare Cheats Cheat Us All' campaign. Gaffney and Millar (Forthcoming) tackle this issue with a policy level focus on the treatment of suspected welfare fraud set within wider societal power relations but qualitative research gaps remain.

Finally, the findings in relation to the 'positives of unemployment' present another avenue of research. In its attempts to 'de-other' unemployed individuals sociology has at times unwittingly reinforced the importance of the work ethic as well policy solutions which eulogise and position participation in formal paid employment as central to personal and social improvement (Cole 2008). This thesis is situated within an emerging literature which contests the assumptions involved in this approach (Sage 2017, 2018; Boland and Griffin 2015a; Frayne 2015; Cole 2008). Its findings in relation to how participants qualify the work they want supports the suggestion that there is nothing innately good about work, while simultaneously, its findings on the positives of unemployment suggest that there is nothing innately unpleasant about unemployment. This is not, of course, to suggest that the material and psychological deprivations of unemployment are not central to its experience. As this thesis has also shown, they clearly are.   Rather it points to the need to interrogate more critically the social construction of unemployment through its relation to the historically, socially and culturally contingent master narrative of work. This dominance of the rule of productivity defined in terms of paid employment often erases the value of activities unemployed people are involved in, even to themselves. This thesis suggests however that a broader understanding of agency among unemployed individuals, exploring the things they do as well as what they say, provides avenues for challenging the work-centric approach to social policy and re-orientating it toward a wider conception of human autonomy.

10:6 Conclusion

Writing about the agency of unemployed individuals is dangerous. To dare mention resistance is even more so. The risk is that a superficial reading presents participants, as Sinead puts it, "high on the hog". Chapter Seven clearly shows that this is not the case. Despite Leo Varadkar's (quoted in Walsh 2016) contention none of the participants here were vacationing to Florida. Yet, nor were they ground down as passive objects by the weight of material or psychological deprivation, nor by the imposition of work-related conditionality. Despite the narrow confines of conditionality and the economic, social and cultural restraints they charted out their own trajectories as best they could. Choosing work whenever they could, sometimes education as a means to work and sometimes choosing welfare when employment was not feasible. They knew their own interests and needs and sought help only to be too often met with the indifference of the Absurd (Camus 2015). Boland and Griffin (2015a) suggest that Irish welfare provision is underlined by a tendency of mistrust toward claimants. We have seen that mistrust is also a political device used in the construction of a population to be governed. The redundancy of conditionality here gives lie to its political construction. All but a tiny minority want to work; their frustration arises from the superficiality of engagement which in its repetition of bureaucratic formality erases their circumstances, needs and interests.

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Appendix 1: Glossary of Marxist Concepts

Labour power is an important concept in the Marxist theoretical apparatus. It is a concept differentiated from labour with the latter denoting physical and cognitive activity to produce goods and services. Labour power on the other hand refers to those individuals who rely upon the sale of their physical, mental and attitudinal capacities for survival. It is a historically specific commodity given its fullest articulation under capitalism since the capitalist consumes the purchased labour power of the worker alongside tools, equipment and raw materials. A wage is paid to the worker in exchange for their labour power for a given period of time. While the employer's consumption of labour power is aimed at the production of another commodity whose value exceeds the combined cost of tools, equipment and raw materials and the wage paid to the worker. In order for labour power to be a commodity two conditions must hold: 1) the worker must have it at their disposal; they must be a free labourer rather than a slave or a serf, and 2) they must be compelled to sell their labour power within the market (Marx 2010; Harvey 2010). This latter condition is particularly important in relation to the nexus of welfare and conditionality since, for example, high levels of payment generosity and/or less stringent conditionality may permit a greater possibility of 'de-commodification', refusals of work or lines of flight into more self-defined autonomous activities. Moreover, the first condition implies an exchange of equivalents central to liberal democratic ideas of freedom founded on the right of property. It suggests two self-interested consenting holders of property, labour power and capital, equal under law. In pointing to the social and political relations underpinning the contractual exchange however Marx (2010) illustrates the imbalance of power within the relationship whereby the worker is dependent upon the capitalist for survival.

The active army of labour and **the reserve army of labour** refer to the conceptual distinction between those employed in the formal labour market and those outside of it. The former is

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further demarcated into those in the primary labour market enjoying high levels of renumeration and job security and those in the secondary labour market of lower waged and less secure employment. The reserve army of labour is also stratified into three categories: *floating* labour power refers to those pushed out of employment due to capitalist development and economic rhythms but who remain close to the labour market; *latent* labour power denotes those who could be drawn into formal employment; and *stagnant* refers to those irregularly employed or unlikely to enter employment due to age, sickness or impairment (Marx 2010). The reserve army of labour provides a supply of labour to new areas of capitalist development as it can be absorbed, dismissed and reformed according to the changing needs of capitalist economic growth. It further serves as a disciplinary mechanism for the active army by operating as a possible substitute and hence serving to moderate worker demands. In turn activation underpinned by work-related conditionality and sanctions can be read as a disciplining of the reserve army by closing off the de-commodifying potential of social security and labour power's use of it as a 'refusal of work' (Wiggan 2015).

Despite the ubiquity of formal paid employment there is nothing natural about wage labour. To understand why individuals might 'choose' to sell their labour power we must look to processes of proletarianisation (Marx 2010). The financial crisis of 2008 and its aftermath might be viewed as **passive proletarianisation** as individuals opt for and seek paid employment in order to ensure survival. Again, however, there is nothing to suggest individuals necessarily will choose to sell their labour power to a third party. Other routes of survival do exist, for example one might turn to crime, informal labour markets or turn to communal ways of living with others. **Active proletarianisation** therefore highlights the role of the state and social policies in transforming individuals into active wage labourers

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(Offe 1984; Grover 2012). Changes to welfare policy such as reduction in payments and/or use of conditionality can intensify the pressure for individuals to commodify their capacities for labour. Moreover, through policy the state defines which groups are inside and outside of the demands of active proletarianisation; for example, the extension of work-related conditionality to lone parents widens the scope of active proletarianisation.

The concept of **immaterial labour** captures a shift in the predominant nature of work in contemporary societies from Fordist industrial manual labour to the post-Fordist production-consumption relation of affective, cognitive, informational and cultural commodities (Lazzarato 1996; Hardt and Negri 2000). As such it bears directly on the above concepts of labour power, reserve army of labour and active proletarianisation as it emerges in capitalist (re)-development which sees increasing incorporation of females in the labour market as well as the 'feminisation' of labour markets, in particular through the expansion of service industries. The concept is not without its detractors, however, due to a potential exaggeration of supposed changes, a blindness toward the mobility of industrial capitalism toward the global south and overlooking feminist articulations of immaterial labour in social reproduction. These critiques are acknowledged and briefly explored in Chapter Two.

The necessity of selling one's labour power is also crucial to understanding capitalism's production of **alienation.** Labour is central to humankind as an expression of our capabilities as we translate consciousness into activity by fashioning and refashioning the world around us. For Marx (1977) capitalism disrupts this relation by dismantling labour (defined broadly as human creativity) as an end in itself and reorienting it as a means to an end (earning a wage). Alienation occurs in four ways. First, workers are separated from their *productive activity* since they can no longer produce according to their own ideas or needs; it is

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capitalists who set the limits of the productive activity and what is to be done with it and hence ultimately own it. It is intensified by the division of labour in often minute and mundane activities which offer little possibility of satisfaction or self-transformation in the labour process. Second, workers are also alienated from the *product* since it is ultimately the private property of the capitalist; if the worker wishes to own it then they must buy it. Third, the worker is alienated from their *fellow workers* since genuine cooperation is replaced by an enforced necessity to work alongside fellow workers. Even if workers are close friends outside of the workplace, within it isolation predominates with little time for personal engagement due to the organisational rules and demands of productivity. This can also instigate competition among workers due to rewards proffered by capitalists. Finally, the worker is alienated from their *humanity or human potential* since labour does not bring about self-transformation or fulfilment. Its enforced nature and lack of ownership regarding the process and product therefore render the worker less human and more a machine to be programmed and controlled. There is much debate and interpretation around the concept of alienation and, in particular, whether it essentialises an authentic human nature which must be recaptured. As noted in Chapter Two, I follow the *autonomist* interpretation which posits not a loss of authentic human essence but rather estrangement from imposed work, its demands and organisational rules.

Appendix 2: The Philosophy of Conditionality

Introduction

This section explores the three main justifications for welfare conditionality: contractualism, mutualism and paternalism, before turning to attempts to amalgamate elements of the three. A common thread running through all justifications are notions of 'fair reciprocity' which proponents call upon to insist that one should give something back to society through their labour. However, the review suggests that such approaches do not pay sufficient attention to power imbalances between the state and individual welfare recipients. In particular, while the state's side of the bargain in terms of reducing existing inequalities is not fulfilled, conditionality is inevitably focused on the supposed 'dependency' of the poor while affluent citizens' unearned public benefits are ignored. Conditionality can then be read as a means of facilitating a 'low-pay-no-pay' cycle which undermines any notion of 'fair reciprocity'. Moreover, emphasis on eradicating 'dependency' privileges paid employment and restructures citizenship while also devaluing other societal contributions. With this in mind the section discusses interpretations of independence and dependence by drawing on feminist notions regarding an 'ethic of care'. From here it turns to exploring a rejection of conditionality through a defence of welfare rights which emphasizes their symbolic and concrete importance due to existing inequalities in societies.

Contractualism

The contractualist approach to welfare conditionality insists that claimants must do all they can to find paid employment in exchange for welfare assistance. Such an approach explicitly engenders notions of a community based on a social contract; one which can be interpreted at both the micro-level and macro-level (Goodin 2001). The discourse of a new social contract underlying welfare reform is evident across western welfare states. In Britain, New Labour

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heralded a 'new social contract', while the French witnessed a 'new social compact' and the American welfare arrangements insisted that "you work when you can, we pay when you can't" (Clinton quoted in Goodin 2001:190). At the macro-level it is an approach rooted in notions regarding welfare dependency and fair reciprocity (Watts *et.al* 2014; Miscampbell 2014). It is argued that the state and citizen are indebted by an obligation towards one another, if the state is to provide welfare assistance to unemployed citizens it is incumbent upon those citizens to find work. As one commentator puts it: "those who willingly enjoy the benefits of social cooperation have a corresponding obligation to make a productive contribution, if they are able, to the cooperative community which provides these benefits" (White 1997:63-4). It amounts to an act of 'free riding' for those capable of engaging in formal paid employment not to do so (Galston 2000). The core principle of the contractualist approach is encapsulated in the motto of "no rights without responsibilities" (Giddens 1998:5) which underlines the foundation of Third Way politics. Proponents argue that ensuring that all citizens fulfil their obligations toward work legitimises welfare redistribution in the court of public perception since the tax paying public can then identify with those they are supporting (Field 1995). Such claims appear to be borne more from intuition than evidence, as studies show that conditional work requirements engender a 'them and us' division which undermines the principle of inclusive and equal universal citizenship (Fuchs 2008a).

Beyond providing a suspect foundation for legitimising welfare redistribution, the contractualist approach is problematic in a number of other ways. Firstly, an often-overlooked aspect of contractualism is that if welfare claimants are expected to behave in certain ways, the state must also fulfil its reciprocal obligations. White (2000:516) identifies a number of "core commitments" which governments must satisfy to fulfil their side of the

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contract. These include providing a reasonable standard of living; provision of real opportunities which ensure a decent quality of life; universal enforcement of minimum standard of productive participation; and equal recognition of different forms of contribution. Existing levels of economic and social inequalities would seem to indicate a failure of states to fulfil its side of the contract, as evidenced in the UK, for example, where there are ongoing cuts to public expenditure (Watts and Fitzpatrick 2018; Grover 2012:292), inadequate social security benefits (Hirsch *et.al* 2009) and worsening child poverty (Brewer and Joyce 2010). Secondly, there is a power imbalance within the framing of the contract since it is the state which frames and enforces the contract, and it may alter it how and when it chooses (Goodin 2001; Grover 2012). The state's authority allows it to increase the responsibilities extracted from welfare claimants in exchange for access to rights, while it can reduce the rights claimants have access to without a commensurate reduction in responsibilities (Goodin 2001). With this in mind, the reform of welfare amounts to a unilateral renegotiation of the contract by states without the consent or input of welfare claimants (*ibid*.). Goodin (*ibid.*) argues that such a unilateral rewriting of the contract should lead us to demand more of the state in the form of compensation to those welfare claimants whose contracts have been abrogated. It is this imbalance of power which permeates in a more intensely immediate form to the micro-level contracts negotiated face to face between caseworkers and welfare claimants. The negotiation of 'activation plans' amount to a contract under duress since the claimant requires welfare assistance as a means to subsistence (*ibid.*). From this perspective such contracts are inevitably coerced as claimants' real need for welfare eradicates the element of choice necessary for consent (Dwyer and Ellison 2009). At both a micro and a macro-level power imbalances undermine notions of fair reciprocity underlying contractualism.

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Mutualist Justifications

The notion of fair reciprocity finds a deeper expression in mutualist justifications for welfare conditionality. Here the focus goes beyond the obligations and claims between a state and its citizens to focus on responsibilities citizens owe to one another independent of the state (Watts and Fitzpatrick 2018; Deacon 2004). Proponents of mutualism are concerned with the responsibilities which "arise from social involvements or commitments [since] our lives touch others in many ways, for good or ill, and we are accountable for the consequences" (Selznick 1998:62). Welfare conditionality then becomes part of a community's right to establish their collective common good and delineate the responsibilities expected from its members. This includes capturing the obligations of the affluent within a collective responsibility to invest in the community and its institutions to create "a baseline equality of condition" in order to provide an opportunity for all to participate in communal life (*ibid.* p.61-63). Despite this, the issue is usually articulated as one of social participation (e.g. Selznick 1998) and inclusion rather than income inequality, thus the mutual responsibilities of individuals, neighbours and family are not contingent on state redistribution of wealth. However, limiting the responsibilities of the affluent to the provision of a 'baseline equality of condition' undermines the conception of the good society (Deacon 2004:920). Mutualism is rooted in a shared respect and recognition of one's neighbours through which our mutual obligations are fulfilled, but an unequal distribution of wealth erodes this basis. Social exclusion engendered by material hardships and deprivation significantly affects an individual's life chances and their ability to flourish as part of a community (*ibid.*).

Mutualism also suffers from a high degree of generality devoid of a means to circumscribe which responsibilities need enforcing and what conduct should be punished

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(*ibid.*). A communitarian insistence that "strong rights presume strong responsibilities" (Etzioni 1993:1) entails a danger of presuming an analytical necessity between rights and responsibilities (Goodin 2002). Communitarian thinkers attempt to establish a connection between rights and responsibilities such that one's rights are strictly dependent on fulfilling one's duties (*ibid.*). However, although X's right corresponds to Y's duty, this does not establish a correlation between X's rights and X's duties (*ibid.*). While there may be some sociological truth to the latter in that others may be hesitant to protect your rights due to your failure toward them (*ibid*), Goodin's argument nonetheless opens a more nuanced space for interpreting rights and responsibilities. The correlation between rights and duties does not necessarily reduce reciprocity to a bland equality whereby everybody has the same rights and duties, nor that everybody must do the same thing for one another or at the same time (*ibid*). With this in mind, one's right to welfare assistance is not necessarily dependent on making contributions to society through paid employment. Broadening and deepening the understanding of reciprocity allows for appreciation of state financial support for societal contributions beyond that of involvement in the formal paid employment.

Paternalism

Fair reciprocity forms the basis for a further justification of welfare conditionality, that of paternalism. Here the emphasis does not rest on enforcing a supposed contract between individuals or between individuals and the state, but on the state acting in the best interests of individuals receiving welfare. Broadly speaking such justifications can be divided into arguments for weak (New Paternalism) or strong paternalism. Advocates of the former do not wish to claim that work should be enforced as objectively good, thus they still cling to a liberal ideal that individuals know what is best for themselves (Goodin 2001:196). However,

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they hold that the long-term unemployed are "dutiful but defeated" individuals in need of a "tutelary regime" offering state support in exchange for fulfilling compulsory obligations (Mead 1992:133). The state's role is that of the administrator of 'tough love' to help individuals pursue what is perceived to be in their own best interests, in particular, paid employment (Dunn 2014). Although evidence for a 'culture of worklessness' is not substantiated in the literature, existing research does highlight that unemployed people share similar values, attitudes and beliefs toward work as their employed counterparts (Shildrick *et.al* 2012). However, proponents of weak paternalism argue that due to a lack of competence such commitment to the work ethic is only ever aspirational; while individuals might wish to work they ultimately fail to achieve this goal (Mead 1992). Therefore, by enforcing conditional obligations to find work, the state aids unemployed individuals in bridging the chasm between their aspirations and their lifestyle (Mead 1997:64). Critics of New Paternalism argue that the burden of proof falls on its proponents to highlight that it is a 'weakness of will' rather than external circumstances that prevents unemployed people from finding work (Goodin 2001). Anderson (2004) outlines a cacophony of evidence, including the work experience of welfare users and the often-short durations of welfare use, which undermines the case for weak paternalism. In the absence of evidence, the case for New Paternalism collapses into a perfectionist argument for imposing one's own vision of what is objectively good.

Goodin (2001) argues that insofar as welfare reforms are based on principles at all, it is a perfectionist argument for strong paternalism prioritising work as intrinsically good for society and for oneself which informs them. For Goodin (*ibid.*), this helps to explain the left's convergence with the right in support of 'active labour market policies', since the 'duty to work' is always a corollary of the 'right to work'. If moving individuals out of poverty

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requires the same amount of money irrespective of the means, there must be something extra which makes money earned through work better, and therein lies the notion of work as something which is good for you (Wolff 2003). However, White (2004) argues that this is not necessarily the case and suggests that under the conditions of fair reciprocity work-related conditionality can be justified since it is not fair to live off the labour of others. This returns us to the problematic definition of work and its implied politics discussed in Chapter Two since participation in paid employment is dependent upon the often unrecognized and unpaid labour of social reproduction. The power relations of work are evident in what forms of labour are defined as important and in need of enforcement. Even granting that paid employment is objectively good and that the state should enforce what is objectively good it does not follow that welfare conditionality to force unemployed people to work is just. On this argument, it would be equally necessary to extend the realm of conditionality to force the idle rich to work. Well off citizens are often the recipients of public benefits due to occupational or tax concessions which they have done nothing to earn (*ibid.*), in addition, they also avail upon a range of public services, such as healthcare. If work is objectively good and it is the state's obligation to enforce this good then 'activation' must logically be extended to include the idle wealthy, an extension that has not currently been made.

A Medley of Justifications?

As the foregoing review accentuates, none of the rationales offered for welfare conditionality overcome oppressive and discriminatory elements enough to provide an adequate and convincing justification. However, it has been argued that a more satisfactory justification may be constructed by integrating elements of the preceding arguments (Deacon 2004). In discussing housing tenancy and anti-social behaviour, Deacon (*ibid.*) cites localised projects, such as the Dundee Families Project, in which the 'contract' between the housing agency and

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the tenant is fused with the paternalist imposition of 'acceptable lifestyles' and compulsory counselling classes in order to establish the neighbourly communalism of mutualism. Although evidence highlights the success of the scheme, it is uncertain whether such an amalgamation of justifications is applicable to work-related conditionality in which the opacity of fair reciprocity is greater than that of imposing good neighbourly relations. This is particularly complicated by the existing inequalities and unfairness of societies which undermine the argument for enforcing obligations on the poor. While work-related conditionality might be an element of a fully just society, it may serve to exacerbate injustice and unfairness in our existing societies, thus fairness could be better served by not enforcing work (White 2004). As noted above, existing work-conditionality programmes are focused on the poor and make no claim on the idle rich, thus it has no moral superiority over a basic income allowing some to 'free-ride' on the production of others (*ibid* p.279). Moreover, it is argued that work-related conditionality can reinforce the 'market vulnerability' of the already disadvantaged by 'nudging' them into jobs with poor pay and working conditions (*ibid.*). A permissive welfare system, or a basic income, could conceivably act as a means of compensation for, and buffering, from such disadvantages (*ibid*). Proponents of conditionality may wish to argue that an orientation toward the development of human capital justifies such programmes. Yet this argument fails to adequately justify coercion without calling upon the problematic New Paternalist argument of 'weakness of will'. This places the burden of proof back on its proponents to demonstrate evidence of such a weakness that is sufficient to overcome the contextual injustices and unfairness of existing societies.

The assumption underlying the activation approach is that unemployed people will obtain the necessary skills and knowledge to progress and improve upon their initial jobs. Moreover, work is seen as the best means to social inclusion (Blair 1999:6) since "having a

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job is a necessary condition of what has been called social dignity" (Gutmann and Thompson 1996:293). Yet, neither is a necessary outcome of finding employment since the type of work available may reinforce the 'low-pay-no-pay' cycle which exacerbate existing inequalities and social exclusion (Fuchs 2008b). An understanding of the mobilisation of low wage workers inevitably involves an analysis of the low wage labour market, including job opportunities and gender divisions (*ibid.*). Such an analysis is deficient without a focus on the role of government in structuring welfare provision in ways which contribute or lead to such situations (Watts and Fitzpatrick 2018). This approach may therefore identify the state as an active instrument in encouraging temporary, part-time and low paid work which do not provide enough for subsistence. From this emerges a reserve army of labour dedicated to the secondary/low wage labour market which undermines wages and ensures insecurity and flexibility (Fuchs 2008b:812). The competition for jobs drives down wages while simultaneously weakening workers' bargaining ability and solidarity (Attas and De-Shalit 2004). An important aspect of this analysis is that it emphasizes the active role of the state and dominant economic groups whose power controls the terms of exchange (*ibid.*). Thus, a consideration of work-related conditionality within the context of existing society should not assume the neutrality or benevolence of actors within the state or other dominant groups in society. In the dissonance of demands for fair reciprocity, the 'fair share' of society's poorest may be a choice between low benefits or low wages.

The Vice of Welfare Dependency

Throughout the different justifications for welfare conditionality is a shared disdain for the supposed vice of welfare dependency. It is the immorality of such dependency which informs the principle of fairness used to decry 'free-riding' and insist that there are 'no rights

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without responsibilities'. The Marshallian theory of universal citizenship rights which

previously informed welfare states is viewed as problematic due to the significant emphasis

on social rights rather than responsibilities (see Mead 1997; Giddens 1994). Cultivating

responsible individual agency emerges as a panacea to the apparent welfare dependency

entrenched by the past unconditional passivity of welfare systems (Dwyer 2004). In this new

active welfare regime the 'irresponsible' who fail to fulfil demands placed on them may have

their welfare rights reduced or withdrawn (*ibid.*). The imposition of work through

conditionality becomes the means to achieving equal citizenship since "only those who bear

obligations can truly appreciate their rights (Mead 1986:257). A corollary of these structures

is the privileging of formal paid employment as the primary and necessary societal

contribution. The use of conditionality to 'activate' individuals erodes traditional

assumptions regarding social obligations, thus diminishing the sphere of valid social

contributions and turning us all into workers (Walters 2000). The extension of conditionality

to disabled people (Patrick 2011) and lone parents (Whitworth and Griggs 2013) in the UK

highlights how previously exempt groups are now reclassified as undeserving welfare

dependents unless they accept the new social contract (Dwyer and Ellison 2009). As such

there is an ever-reducing category of the population not expected to engage in paid

employment (Lister 2003), which also serves to undermine forms of work outside of paid

employment, such as parenting, care and voluntary work (Patrick 2012).

This notion of dependency is constructed through welfare institutions and has a real-

world effect on different groups, but it is one which ignores the interdependency inherent

within society. Grover and Stewart (2000) note that while New Labour governments in the

U.K 'activated' lone parents; subsidised nursery places were not targeted as 'welfare

dependency'. Thus, not all dependency is equal as moral condemnation is reserved for

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welfare benefits perceived as a barrier to formal labour market participation. This reflects the dominance of the narrowly defined dichotomy between independence as market based and dependency as a behavioural problem imbued by state assistance (Williams 2000). On the one hand, this serves to obscure the complex struggles that groups have in order to overcome dependency, often welfare is a means for groups such as women with children, chronically ill, disabled people, and older people, to achieve economic independence (*ibid.*). On the other hand, it also obscures the hidden systems of support upon which the independence of the paid worker is built, whether this is looking after the worker's children, cleaning his/her home, buying and cooking his/her food (*ibid.*) or through the inevitable use of public services. There is then a need to recognise the "privileged irresponsibility" of the well-off who fail to acknowledge their dependency on the caring work provided by others that is necessary to sustain their autonomy (Tronto 1993:112).

This independence/dependence distinction is echoed in liberalism's inability to adequately appropriate obligation due to its emphasis on the separation between individual and state (Hirschmann 1997). A feminist approach incorporates obligation within an understanding of care that positions the subject within an already existing network of relationships (Sevenhuijsen 2000; Hirschmann 1997). Thus, where work-related conditionality of welfare regimes seeks to ascribe obligation, an approach based on the ethic of care suggests that policy requires insight into the lived experience and actual social relations of those it targets (Sevenhuijsen 2000:11). While care is understood as a human practice it may also be conceptualised as a social process with concrete moral dispositions guiding our practices (Fisher and Toronto 1990). This conceptualisation of the ethic of care involves four dimensions of care: caring about; caring for; taking care of; and care receiving, with their corresponding values of attentiveness; responsibility; competence; and

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responsiveness (*ibid.*). Such an approach serves to highlight the relational autonomy of interdependence in which we are all dependent on each other and which recognises the multitude and diversity of social, emotional and material networks through which autonomy is achieved. Further, it creates a space to think about the state's role in guaranteeing the rights which recognise the multiplicity of responsibilities individuals have.

While proponents of the cultural dependency thesis lament a perceived lack of responsibility, others are unwavering in their defence of welfare rights. It is argued that without the legal right to a minimum level of social rights such as housing, health, income and employment opportunities any notion of a social contract appears to the poor as a "giant swindle perpetrated by the well-to-do" (Handler and Hasenfeld 2007:164). Proponents of work-related conditionality insist on its necessity for greater social inclusion and equality, yet, as already noted, critics highlight how structural disadvantages impede this goal. Anderson (2004:251) argues that a just society must provide access to equal social standing for all citizens, a provision which is undermined by activation programmes' focus on the most vulnerable and least advantaged in society. Penalising an individual for rejecting a job offer due to unrewarding pay and poor working conditions gives society's interest in filling poor quality jobs an "immeasurable importance in relation to the claimant's preferences" (Paz-Fuchs 2008b:816). On the contrary, safeguarding welfare rights as a component of social inclusion would add legitimacy to an individual's choice to forgo formal paid employment due to financial constraints (Paz-Fuchs 2008b:814). Moreover, an approach to social inclusion and equality which further places work in an instrumental role rather than end goal and which values differences opens a new space which may prioritise an individual's chosen lifestyle within policy (*ibid.*).

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The redistributive intent of social security plays an important role in alleviating and reducing poverty and social exclusion. While proponents of work-related conditionality acknowledge civil and political rights, they interpret social rights as conditional entitlements to be earned. However, access to civil and political rights may be undermined by a lack of material resources, thus social rights appear as a necessary condition for social inclusion through civic and political participation (Paz-Fuchs 2008). Joel Feinberg (1970:252) describes rights as "especially sturdy objects to 'stand upon', a most useful sort of moral furniture". In this sense, it is argued that welfare rights are also symbolic as they provide individuals with recognition of their equal moral worth with due respect and concern (Paz-Fuchs 2008). Their symbolism finds concrete reality in the tempering of fundamental differences in access to power through the mitigation of wealth disparities in liberal societies (*ibid.*). This points to the importance of the welfare state beyond mere sustenance, as it holds the possibility of infusing social citizenship in the Marshallian sense of active participation in society. While proponents of work-related conditionality insist upon the earning of entitlements through fulfilling obligations, a defence of welfare rights demands the right for the socially excluded to participate. It is only when such a right is awarded and acknowledged within policy can a dialogue on obligations of welfare recipients begin (*Ibid*).

Conclusion

Contractualism, mutualism and paternalism nor a hotchpotch of their derived elements appear as sufficient in providing adequate justifications for welfare conditionality. Fair reciprocity is a central notion arising in each of the justifications with emphasis on reciprocal obligations through formal employment. This is particularly evident in contractualist approaches which accentuate a social contract in which work-related conditionality is seen as enforcing repayment of obligations in exchange for state assistance. Evidence of it providing public

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support for welfare appears anecdotal, while the state's authority to rewrite contracts along with the continued existence of inequalities suggests that conditionality is coerced in a context of failed obligations on behalf of the state. Similarly, the 'fair reciprocity' of mutualism is undermined by its unwillingness to combat the social exclusion caused by existing socioeconomic inequalities. The paternalist attempt to guide individuals to fulfil their potential through enforcing formal employment potentially illuminates the real aim of work-related conditionality. An overt concern with the dependency of the poor, while more affluent citizen's unearned public benefits are ignored, suggests that it amounts to a strategy of managing the poor. While devaluing work outside of paid employment work-related conditionality arguably engenders a 'low-pay-no-pay' cycle through the provision of a reserve army of labour for capital. Such an approach emphasizes a strict dichotomy between independence as based on participation in the market and dependence as receipt of public assistance through welfare. However, formal paid employment is central to contemporary societies as not only a means of subsistence but also as a provider of social dignity. As such, in the context of intensifying work-related conditionality this research provides a timely investigation into the lived experience of individuals in receipt of welfare. In doing so, it can make an important intervention in the foregoing philosophical debates by illustrating their notions of fair reciprocity and their perspectives on work, and whether individuals articulate counter-justifications for a life on welfare.

Appendix 3: Overview of Activation Schemes in Ireland (Callaghan 2017)

Work Programmes

Programme Name	Aims / Objectives	Target Cohort	Duration of Scheme
Community Employment Programme (CE)	To assist long-term unemployed and other disadvantaged people to get back to work by offering part-time and temporary placements / training opportunities in local communities	Long-term unemployed and other disadvantaged people Qualifying age of 21 years from 2017 onwards (previously 25)	Average of 118 weeks
Rural Social Scheme (RSS)	To provide income support for underemployed farmers and fishermen/women to provide services of benefit to rural communities	Low-income farmers and fishermen/women (not related to unemployment or the Live Register)	Average of 6 years
TÚS	To provide short-term working opportunities for people who are unemployed while at the same time carrying out beneficial work within communities	On Live Register for more than 1 year	Max 12 months
Gateway[13]	To provide short-term work opportunities in county & city councils to bridge the gap between unemployment and re - entering the workforce	Long-term unemployed people who have been on the Live Register for over 2 years	Max 22 months
Job Initiative[14]	To assist long-term unemployed people to prepare for work opportunities through work experience, training and development opportunities	People 35 years of age or over who have been unemployed for 5 years or more	

[13] Closed in December 2017
[14] Closed to new entrants

Appendix 3: Overview of Activation Schemes in Ireland (Callaghan 2017)

Subsidies

Programme Name	Aims / Objectives	Target Cohort	Duration of Scheme
Back to Work Enterprise Allowance	Provides support to people wishing to set up their own business.	In receipt of a qualifying payment for at least 9 months and setting up as self-employed	This is a 2 year scheme.
JobBridge[15]	To provide work experience opportunities for unemployed people	Persons unemployed for at least 3 months	6 or 9 month duration[15]
Part-Time Job Initiative Scheme	To support people who are long-term unemployed to take up part-time employment for less than 24 hours per week while also making efforts to find full time employment	People working part-time for less than 24 hours per week and immediately before that were at least 15 months unemployed	PTJI is awarded for one year. This may be extended for a further period.
JobsPlus	An incentive to encourage and reward employers who offer employment opportunities to the long term unemployed and younger jobseekers	Long-term unemployed and younger jobseekers (under the age of 25). Larger payment to employers recruiting persons unemployed for over 2 years	Payment period is 2 years

Average duration was 17 months in 2014 |

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[15] Closed in 2016

Appendix 3: Overview of Activation Schemes in Ireland (Callaghan 2017)

Training

Programme Name	Aims / Objectives	Target Cohort	Duration
Back to Education Allowance	To raise education and skill levels to enable people to access the labour market	Over 21 (or over 24 for post graduate courses) and in receipt of qualifying welfare payment For second level courses, the qualifying period is 3 months on a qualifying social welfare payment. For third level courses, the qualifying period is 9 months	The duration depends on the type of training course being undertaken

Other

Category	Scheme
Family	Back to Work Family Dividend Activation and Family Support Programme (AFSP)
People with Disabilities	EmployAbility Service Wage Subsidy Scheme Disability Activation and Employment Supports
Other	Community Services Programme
	Employment Support Grant (Training for BTW Scheme)
	Technical Employment Support Grant
	Drugs Task Force
	European and Other Initiatives

Appendix 4: Research Participants – Lone Parent Jobseekers

Name	Gender	Age	Status	Children	Payment	Past Education	Current Education	Past Employment	Current Employment
Kathi	F	29	Single	1	OPFP	FE Level 4	FE Level 5	Retail	Call-centre
Emily	F	43	Single	3	JS	Leaving Certificate	FE Level 5	Retail	N/A
Jessica	F	52	Single	4	JST	FE Level 4 (I.T Skills)	FE Level 4 (Employability Skills)	N/A	N/A
Sinead	F	44	Single	2	JS	Third Level Degree	Postgraduate	Self-Employed	N/A
Pauline	F	61	Single	1	JS	Leaving Cert	N/A	Artist	Artist (Cash-in-hand)
Alexia	F	54	Single	2	JS	Third Level	Postgraduate	Self-Employed	N/A
Nadine	F	47	Single	2	Formerly JS	Leaving Certificate equivalent	N/A	N/A	Hotel Accommodation
Sandra*	F	45	Single	3	JST				Advocacy
Mary*	F	55	Single	3	JS				Advocacy
Elaine*	F	46	Single	4	JS				Advocacy
Anne*	F	50	Single	3	JS				Advocacy

*Did not fill survey – details provided taken from interview

Appendix 4: Research Participants – 'Discouraged' Jobseekers

Name	Gender	Age	Status	Children	Payment	Past Education	Current Education	Past Employment	Current Employment
David	M	33	Single	0	JS	Third Level Degree	Postgraduate	Service Work	N/A
Peter	M	30	Married	2	JS	Junior Certificate	FE Level 5	Construction	Intermittent Cash-in-hand
Jeff	M	49	Married	1	JS	Junior Certificate	FE Level 5	Security	Part-time Security
Eamonn	M	45	Single	0	JS	Junior Certificate	N/A	Labourer	Labourer
Nick	M	57	Single	0	JS	Third Level Degree	N/A	Archaeologist	Intermittent Cash-in-hand
Simon	M	??	Married	4	JS	FE Level 6	N/A	Construction	N/A
Maeve	F	49	Single	0	JS	FE Level 6	N/A	Retail	N/A
Patrick	M	61	Single	0	JS	Junior Certificate	N/A	Engineer	Intermittent Cash-in-hand
Colin	M	56	Married	1	JS – Applied for DA	FE Level 5	N/A	Carpenter	Community Mutual Aid – Repaid in Kind
Damian	M	44	Married	4	DA	Junior Certificate	N/A	Dry Cleaning	N/A
Rachel	F	49	Married	1	IB	Junior Certificate	N/A	Retail	N/A
Jenny	F	43	Married	2	IB	Leaving Certificate	N/A	Financial Services	Looking for cash-in-hand
Eric*	M	55	Married	2	JS				
Francis*	M	62	Married	1	JS				
Sean*	M	46	Single	0	DA				

Appendix 4: Research Participants – 'Discouraged' Jobseekers

Marvin*	M	43	Married	3	JS				
Laurence*	M	39	Single	0	JS				

*Did not fill out survey – details taken from group interview

Appendix 4: Research Participants – 'Mainstream' Jobseekers

Name	Gender	Age	Status	Children	Payment	Past Education	Current Education	Past Employment	Current Employment
Louise	F	31	Married	2	JS	Beauty Diploma	N/A	Childcare	Service Work
Tina	F	27	Single	0	JS	Diploma in Level 7	Third Level Degree	Retail	Intermittent cash-in-hand
Sarah	F	45	Single	0	JS	Certificate in Financial Services	Qualified Financial Advisor	Financial Services	N/A
Ruth	F	29	Single	0	JS	FE Level 5	FE Level 5	N/A	N/A
Lisa	F	29	Single	0	JS	Leaving Certificate	FE Level 5	Childcare	N/A
Dean	M	32	Married	1	IB	Leaving Certificate	FE Level 5	Healthcare	N/A
Bob	M	49	Married	2	JS	Three Diplomas	N/A	Community and Volunteer Sector	Undeclared Landscaping Business
Chris	M	26	Single	0	JS	FE Level 4	FE Level 5	N/A	Intermittent cash-in-hand
Teddy	M	28	Married	1	JS	Junior Certificate	FE Level 5	Retail	Intermittent cash-in-hand
Harry	M	49	Married	1	JS	Junior Certificate	FE Level 5	I.T	N/A
William	M	24	Single	0	JS	Leaving Certificate	FE Level 6	Retail	N/A

Appendix 4: Research Participants – 'Mainstream' Jobseekers

Dominic	M	60	Single	0	JS	Leaving Certificate	N/A	Casual Labour	Casual Labour
Ian	M	25	Single	0	JS	Leaving Certificate	N/A	Warehouse	CE Scheme - Retail
Liz	F	58	Married	3	JS– Applied for DA	Junior Certificate	N/A	Hotel Accommodation	N/A

Appendix 5: Interview Quote Prompts

A)   Job Snobs

I know it may not be popular to say this, but I think it does need to be said, all of this is paid for by taxpayers, who go out and work every day … they maybe aren't in their dream job, maybe aren't in a regular job but go out and work every day, earn money for their families and themselves and pay taxes … And they've a right to raise questions if somebody was saying: 'I'm not going to take a job because it's not suited to me or I don't like it, it's not the job I want. By the way, in the meantime you should pay for me'. We can't have that. That's not fair on the people who are working. That's not fair on taxpayers.

- Leo Varadkar (Taoiseach)

B) Welfare Dependency

We cannot have a situation where you have people in the country who are serially and forever drawing social welfare benefits that other workers have to pay for through their taxes.

- Enda Kenny (Former Taoiseach)

Appendix 6: Notification to Attend Activation Review Meeting

An Roinn Coimirce Sóisialaí
Department of Social Protection

Guthán • Telephone:

559

Date   PPSN:

NOTIFICATION TO ATTEND ACTIVATION REVIEW MEETING

Dear

The Department of Social Protection helps jobseekers to secure work by providing employment advice, assisting in jobsearch and providing access to work experience and further education and training opportunities.

You are scheduled to attend an individual activation meeting on

Date:
Time:
Location:

Co. Kildare

The purpose of this meeting is to review your Personal Progression Plan and provide a progress update on actions agreed with your Case Officer.

People in receipt of jobseeker payments from the Department of Social Protection are expected to work with the Department and to take-up any offers of support including offers of group and individual meetings and any subsequent offers of training, education and development opportunities.

Accordingly any refusal or failure, without good cause, to take up such offers will result in your jobseeker payment being reduced.

If you feel it will not be possible to attend, **you must** contact the office above as soon as possible to see if an alternative date can be arranged.

We look forward to meeting you.

Yours sincerely,

_____

Employment Support Team

Intreo

Appendix 7: Record of Mutual Commitments

Seirbhísí Fostaíochta agus Tacaíochta
Employment and Support Services

Intreo

Record of Mutual Commitments

**Between: Department of Social Protection and _____ PPSN: _____**

The Department of Social Protection is committed to providing comprehensive employment support and income support services to our clients. Our goal is to help our clients in two ways: firstly by providing income support during periods of unemployment; secondly by helping clients to find work. In return we would like you, our client, to commit yourself to work with us as we work to help you. This document records our mutual obligations to each other.

Our Promise to You	Your Promise to Us
• We will do all we can to process claims as quickly and as efficiently as possible.	• I will work to secure employment at the earliest possible opportunity.
• We will pay income support payment(s) as provided for in legislation in an efficient and timely manner.	• I will work with the Department to agree my Personal Progression Plan.
• We will work to identify suitable employment, work experience or training/education/personal development opportunities for you.	• I will attend meetings to which I am invited by the Department.
• We will work with you to help you prepare your Personal Progression Plan to assist you to take the right steps to employment.	• I will follow up all suggestions and take up any work placement, work experience and/or training/personal development places notified to me by the Department.
• We will monitor and review progress against this plan with you.	• I will inform the Department immediately if I find work, or if I am no longer available for work.
• We will meet with you by appointment and give you fair notice of all such appointments.	• I will treat the staff of the Department with dignity and respect and honour the confidentiality of my relationship with the Department.
• We will treat you with dignity and respect and honour the confidentiality of our relationship with you.	• I will provide the Department with all information requested to assess any claim for income support.
	• I will abide by the Declaration in my Jobseeker's Allowance or Benefit Application Form.

For and on behalf of the Department of Social Protection.

I understand that failure to adhere to my promises above may result in the reduction or withdrawal of any income support payments which would otherwise be due to me and that I could be prosecuted for making a false declaration or withholding information in relation to my claim.

Signed: _____

Signed: _____

An Roinn Coimirce Sóisialaí
Department of Social Protection

Appendix 8: Personal Progression Plan

Personal Progression Plan

For

My Contact Details

Address:
Contact Telephone Number: **Email:**

My Employment Plan

I am committed to finding employment in the following area(s):

Humanist (researcher), College teacher of law, social sciences, Market analyst

In order to achieve this, I commit to undertake the action(s) below:

Action	Description	Start Date	Review Date
My work search activities will include the following:	HAS SECURED PART-TIME WORK WITH (LECTURING 2 DAYS PER WEEK). TO NOTIFY MAINTENANCE SECTION AND REGISTER FOR CASUAL WORK.		

Plan Notes

ACTIVELY JOBSEEKING. HAS UP TO DATE CV PREPARED. TO EMAIL COPY TO   @welfare.ie HAS JOB OFFER FOR POSITION AS   , STARTING IN SEPT. OTHER APPLICATIONS MADE - AWAITING FOLLOW-UP RE INTERVIEWS. FULLY QUALIFIED FOR PREFERRED WORK OPTIONS - NO TRAINING NEEDS.
COMMENCING WORK IN   THIS WEEK. TO NOTIFY MAINTENANCE SECTION AND SIGN CASUAL - FAMILIAR WITH PROCESS.

Appendix 9: Notification of Sanction

Ionad Intreo Baile Formaid
Ascaill an Rois Mhóir
Baile Formaid
Baile Átha Cliath 10

An Roinn Coimirce Sóisialaí
Department of Social Protection
www.welfare.ie

Guthán • Telephone: 01-6160300

INTREO CENTRE BALLYFERMOT
ROSSMORE AVENUE
BALLYFERMOT
DUBLIN 10

632

PPSN: Date: 2017
Please quote this number when enquiring about your claim

Dear Mr

I am writing to you about your claim for Jobseeker's Benefit/Allowance.

I have decided that your Jobseeker's Benefit/Allowance will be reduced for the reason(s) set out overleaf. Your payment will be reduced by €44.00 per week.

In order to give you a further opportunity to comply, this Department will schedule another activation appointment for you. When you have attended, your payment may be reinstated, without arrears.

If, after 21 days on the reduced payment, you have continued without good cause to fail to comply, this Department will disqualify you from receiving Jobseeker's Benefit/Allowance for a period of 9 weeks.

If you are not happy with this decision, you may send in any relevant facts or evidence to this office and a Deciding Officer will then review the decision.

Alternatively, you may send a formal appeal to the independent Social Welfare Appeals Office within 21 days of the date of this letter. An appeal form is available from this office. The form may be returned to this office or to the Social Welfare Appeals Office, D'Olier House, D'Olier Street, Dublin 2.

Yours sincerely,

_____
Deciding Officer

NOTE: You may appeal to the Social Welfare Appeals Office even if you do not want a review by a Deciding Officer.

Appendix 9: Notification of Sanction

Decision of Deciding Officer

Name: Mr   PPSN:

Your Jobseeker's Benefit / Allowance will be reduced because, in accordance with Section 62A or Section 62B or Section 141A or Section 141B of the Social Welfare (Consolidation) Act, 2005, as amended:

☒ Without good cause, you failed to attend at a meeting arranged by or on behalf of the Minister for the purpose of providing information which is intended to improve your knowledge of the employment, work experience, education, training and development opportunities available to you (Group OR Individual Activation Meeting)

☐ Without good cause, you failed to attend for, or submit to, an assessment of your education, training or development needs (Individual Activation Meeting)

☐ Without good cause, you refused or failed to participate in or failed to avail yourself of an opportunity of participating in, or dropped out of a suitable education, training or development opportunity or specified employment programme which is considered appropriate to your circumstances

<u>Reason for Decision</u>

Failure to engage with Cenit, Jobpath Provider.

- Failed to attend Joint Information Sessions on   /16,   /16
- Signed a Verbal Warning on   / /16
- Failed to attend Joint Information Session on   / /17

Please engage with Cenit, Jobpath Provider.

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Deciding Officer

Date

ACT4