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# Agency, dependency, and welfare: beyond issues of claim and contribution

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## **Chapter 8. Agency ‘dependency’ and welfare: beyond issues of claim and contribution?**

### **Introduction**

This chapter is concerned with the concepts of agency and dependency in relation to contemporary welfare reform. In order to explore such issues it is divided into two main sections. Part one begins by critically discussing ‘Third Way’ theory and its implications for future welfare provision. Notions of agency and dependency are central to such theorising and it is argued that the ways in which these ideas are used and constructed is flawed. The negative implications of a welfare philosophy that over prioritises the ‘active welfare subject’ (Williams, 1999) whilst simultaneously understating the importance of continuing (and in some cases worsening) social divisions are also briefly discussed. Part two draws on two recently completed qualitative studies (see Ackers and Dwyer, 2002; Dwyer, 2001, 2000b and Dwyer, 2002, 2000a) with different groups of welfare service users and moves on to consider the ways in which users themselves seek to legitimise their own (and certain other) claims to public welfare, whilst at the same time justifying the exclusion of other individuals or groups from collective support. In line with dominant Third Way theorising, many users discriminate between what they see as ‘welfare dependants’ and ‘active citizens’ when making decisions about who deserves the right to public welfare. It is argued that this approach is deeply flawed for three reasons. First, because the dichotomy between passive dependant and active citizen is false (Williams, 1999). Everyone of us is welfare dependant in some way at some time (Titmuss, 1958); but some are more visible than others (Mann, 1992, Sinfield, 1978). Second, it prioritises certain types of ‘responsible’ agency above others. Third, it fails to adequately acknowledge that a person’s ability to act in an approved manner is highly dependant upon the social and economic resources that they have at their disposal (Mann, 2001; Taylor-Gooby, 2001). Finally, in conclusion it is asserted that a society of ‘positive welfare’ (Giddens, 1998) will only become a reality when (if) two important elements are adequately acknowledged. First, the continuing significance of structural factors in enabling or constraining the ability of individuals to become active agents. Second, the importance of prioritising our collective *interdependence* when theorising welfare and enacting social policies in the future.

### **New times, new welfare?**

Societies in Western Europe are undergoing a number of economic, political and social changes that have, potentially, profound implications for welfare states and the social rights of citizens (Mann, 2001; Wetherly, 2001; Ellison, 2000; Taylor-Gooby, 2000, 1993; Williams, 1999; Giddens, 1998, 1994; Walters, 1997). In recent years (most notably but not exclusively in the UK), there has been much talk of a new ‘Third Way’ politics. Advocated by Giddens (1998, 1994), and subsequently embraced with some enthusiasm by New Labour in Britain, (Blair, 1998, 1995) a brief examination of the ideas and values that underpin the ‘Third Way’ for welfare provides a suitable starting point when considering the emergent ‘new’ welfare settlement. A central theme within such theorising is the assertion that welfare states and individuals will best meet the challenges they face only if future welfare policies primarily concentrate on ensuring individual agency.

### *'Third Way' welfare*

In 'Beyond Left and Right', Giddens (1994) asserts that the solidarity promised in the post war welfare settlement (PWWS) has been eroded by two interlinked factors. First, the (perceived) inability of the state to effectively meet the welfare needs of its citizens. Second, the 'egoistic refusal' of the middle classes to continue playing their part in the welfare game. The increasing affluence of some sectors of society, accompanied by a reduction in the quality and quantity of state services, and, the simultaneous expansion of alternative private provision, has encouraged middle class opt out from public welfare. After all why would someone agree to contribute if they have little interest or need to claim?

The fact that state welfare promotes and sustains a welfare dependant 'underclass' is, however, Giddens' greatest concern. Within his work there is stress upon the importance of both individual and group agency as a counterbalance to the dependency that he associates with *some* state led programmes of welfare. Arguing that we must ditch the outdated, state led, top down approach to welfare, he believes that this will facilitate greater levels of individual autonomy and encourage a new 'positive welfare' in which individuals recognise their personal responsibilities both to themselves and wider society. However, this stress on political participation, of citizenship in its most active sense, coupled as it is with a rejection of a fundamental role for the state in the provision of welfare is not without its problems.

Although aware of the problem of solidarity within his theorising Giddens (1994) maintains that the possibility of social renewal rests upon individual agents recognising the importance of obligations to others that are binding and authoritative. A centrally important question, however, remains unanswered. In a world of disparate views and needs, and the inevitable disagreement that ensues, we must ask which voices will endure and come to dominate? His approach appears to rest on the highly contentious view, "that for the first time in history we can speak of the emergence of universal values" (Giddens 1994 :20). The twin problems of differential power and conflicting values remain unresolved and seriously weaken his analysis.

More recently Giddens (1998) has revisited the above themes. Once again he outlines a new role for the 'social investment state' that will meet its future commitments to social justice and equality via the redistribution of 'possibilities' (primarily the opportunity to work and the right to education), rather than wealth. A government's role in relation to welfare is to encourage an 'entrepreneurial culture' that rewards 'responsible risk takers'. Giddens is also unequivocal in making a reciprocal relationship between rights and responsibilities central to his approach.

*"One might suggest as a prime motto for the new politics , no rights without responsibilities...As an ethical principle 'no rights without responsibilities' must apply not only to welfare recipients, but to everyone..... because otherwise the precept can be held to apply only to the poor and needy as tends to be the case with the political right" (Giddens, 1998 p 65-66).*

Although the above declaration that the new rights/responsibilities rule must be evenly and universally applied is commendable, it fails to reflect reality. In relation to the social element of citizenship it is almost exclusively the rights of the poor and

needy that are being reduced whilst simultaneously the attendant responsibilities required to access those rights are being increased (Dwyer, 2002, 2000a, 1998).

A further, and perhaps more worrying, aspect of Giddens' theorising is the general lack of vision when considering 'welfare' and the 'problem' of dependency. Titmuss (1958) reminded us long ago that we are all welfare dependants to a certain extent. Giddens' analysis would perhaps have greater authority if he also considered the fiscal and occupational benefits available to the better off rather than (taking his cue from the New Right), concentrating solely on the more visible 'social welfare' element discussed by Titmuss (Mann, 1998). This narrow focus when discussing dependency has, as later discussions illustrate, profound implications for any subsequent theorising of agency and dependency amongst differentially sited welfare service users.

#### *From 'welfare society' to 'active society'*

Whilst Giddens optimistically endorses welfare which prioritises *responsible* individual agency as a panacea for dependency, others are more sceptical about the current direction of welfare reform. Walters (1997) argues that the 'welfare society' of the past that promised, theoretically at least, a common citizenship status which guaranteed a universal minimum of welfare rights has today been superseded by the 'active society' in which increasingly individuals can only access social rights if they are willing to become workers in the paid labour market (PLM). Walters is not asserting a naive view that all was well in the past. He is aware of the 'false universalism' (Williams, 1992) of the PWWS and the fact that that a person's participation and position in the highly stratified PLM has long been of central importance in defining the quality and extent of an individual's access to public provisions. His key point is that a fundamental shift has occurred. Although imperfect, the state defined people in the 'welfare society' of the past according to various categories with certain 'inactive' groups exempted from PLM participation; either because they were making what were recognised as socially valid contributions elsewhere (e.g. women engaged in informal/familial care work) or because they had previously contributed (e.g. retired senior citizens). Today such assumptions are increasingly challenged. Whereas welfare society,

*"...imagined [as] a collective enterprise in which workers and non-workers make their respective contributions...many of these assumptions about the specifically social obligations and consequent rights of the citizen no longer apply in the active society.....The active society makes us all workers"*  
(Walters, 1997 :223-4).

Activity in the PLM is, therefore, seen both as *the* badge of individual integrity and also the only way for governments to address poverty. In contrast policies that seek merely to improve public welfare benefits are seen as entrenching welfare dependency. The state should equip those outside the PLM to embrace change, to actively manage the risks and challenges that confront them, by providing education and (re)training as required. If necessary, reluctant individuals should be forced into activity by the application of benefit sanctions. Only those who 'take charge' of their own lives are deemed to be responsible 'active' citizens (Wetherly, 2001).

This is certainly an agenda that Giddens and New Labour have been keen to endorse and such ideas enjoy more extensive support. Increasingly they inform policy across Europe (Lódemel and Trickey, 2000; Van Oorschot, 2000) and in the USA (Deacon, 2002; Prideaux, 2001) Also when tracing three contrasting attempts to rework welfare in the face of contemporary social change (i.e. the New Right, New Labour and new social and welfare movements) Williams (1999) notes, that while the three use various approaches and have different end results in mind, they are all looking to encourage and endorse the 'active welfare subject'. Such an approach obviously has its attractions and it would be too simplistic to see people as passive victims of circumstance and/or oppressive social structures, nonetheless, as critics point out it is not without its pitfalls. As Wetherly (2001) notes, on one level 'active society'/'active welfare' theories and policies are to be commended because they counter the negative image of welfare claimants as powerless victims. However, he also goes on to state that they are also inadequate because the risks that individuals confront are "structural in origin" (Wetherly, 2001 :164). Whilst 'Third Way' type welfare policies centred on equality of opportunity may help certain individuals to make more of themselves and may well be positive for some they fail to engage in any meaningful way with the *structural* causes of unemployment and poverty. The 'active society' approach 'desocialises' the causes of poverty and individualises the problem of unemployment. Those who are reliant on public welfare benefits are seen as inactive dependants who passively rely on public handouts as a result of either idleness or bad management of the risks that confront them (Walters, 1997). They are, therefore, seen as lacking any legitimate claim to collective support. Where once ideas of social justice and legitimacy were used to endorse claims to public welfare they are now often used to deny such claims (Bauman, 1998).

### **Agents in action: principles, moral judgements and meeting needs**

The discussions in this section draw on two qualitative studies with different types of welfare users. In many ways the paper was motivated by nagging questions concerned with the theorisation of agency and dependency in current welfare debates and how different users, in different settings, made sense of such questions and also actually set about meeting their own needs. As Beresford (2001) points out, we are all welfare service users but in different ways. Routine visits to an NHS doctor or attending a state school are not the same as being a disabled person who is unable to control their personal care package, or living a hand to mouth existence on benefits. Certain users encounter, "long-term regulatory, intimate and segregating contact with welfare services" which regularly result in them experiencing "stigma, discrimination, poverty and exclusion" (Beresford, 2001 :507). Overall the respondents in the first study (rf Dwyer, 2002, 2000a) were people at the sharp end of British public welfare provision who were often heavily reliant on social welfare benefits for their day to day survival (see box 8.1).

Ten focus groups were convened.

FG 1 Benefit Claimants and a Worker	(6 men, 3 women)
FG 2 Residents Association	(1 man, 5 women)
FG 3 Disabled Benefit Claimants	(6 men, 2 women)
FG 4 Senior Citizens	(4 men, 2 women)
FG 5 Lone Parents	(1 man, 4 women)
FG 6 Local Charity Group	(3 men, 1 woman)
FG 7 Women Benefit Claimants	(8 women)
FG 8 Informal Mosque Group	(5 men)
FG 9 Asian JSA Claimants	(10 men)
FG 10 Muslim/ Pakistani Women	(8 women)

69 respondents took part in the research; of these 36 were men and 33 women, with ages ranging between 19 and 80 years. Forty three of the respondents could best be described as white, 23 as Asian and a further 3 as African Caribbean. Ten respondents were in work (5 full-time and five part-time) and a further 8 respondents were largely dependant on various retirement pensions for their upkeep. 59 of those involved were outside the paid labour market at the time of the study and 17 people (16 of whom were female) identified themselves as having caring responsibilities within a family. Those respondents without paid work (excepting the retired pensioners noted above) were reliant on a range of state benefits which included JSA, various disability benefits, a war pension, and income support. The focus group interviews took place between March and October 1997 at various locations around central Bradford, Yorkshire, England (for further details see appendix in Dwyer, 2000a).

### **Box 8.1 Outline of study with British welfare users**

The second study (rf Ackers and Dwyer 2002; Dwyer 2001, 2000b) focused on retired nationals from six EU Member States who had, at various times, migrated internationally within the EU. They were generally more affluent than the respondents in the first study and around a third had taken early retirement. Many had quite substantial occupational pensions and a good number who had no doubt benefited from various occupational and fiscal welfare arrangements were able to call upon considerable personal wealth and assets as and when required (box 8.2).

The research objectives of the study demanded a broad approach encapsulating the experiences of the range of international retirement migrants (post retirement migrants, returning workers, and returning retirees) from across the EU. Locations were as follows:

- Greece: mainly Athens and the island of Corfu with a small number from Macedonia in northern Greece
- Italy: Trieste and the surrounding rural area, also around Lake Garda
- Portugal: Lisbon and the municipalities of Sintra and Caiscais (historic resort areas south of Lisbon)
- Sweden: the whole country
- The UK: England and Wales
- Ireland: Dublin and County Roscommon

A purposive non random, sampling technique was adopted and interviews were carried out during 1998/99. A total of 210 semi-structured qualitative interviews were held; 100 with post retirement migrants living in host EU countries and 110 with returnees who were resident in their country of origin (see appendix in Ackers and Dwyer, 2002 for further details).

### **Box 8.2 Outline of international retirement migration in the EU study**

Although the two studies engaged with two essentially different groups of users they did share some common ground. First, the overwhelming majority of respondents in both studies were located outside the paid labour market, but usually for very different reasons. Second, all the respondents, were in their own ways and in a variety of settings, actively trying to engage with various welfare institutions to maximise the satisfaction of their needs at any given time. The ways in which they did this, and also the ways in which they looked to legitimise their own claims and the claims of others, to public welfare are outlined below. They are important because they help to illustrate many of the problems and limitations of the welfare reforms currently being mapped out.

#### *Principles of welfare and inclusion/exclusion*

As Taylor-Gooby (1998: 39) states, “social justice is concerned with who ought to get what.” The following discussion highlights the diverse and often contradictory ways (cf Dean, 2000, 1998) in which respondents seek to resolve an issue at the heart of any notion of social justice i.e. the principles that underpin rights to access public welfare provisions. In the first study (rf Dwyer 2002; 2000a), whilst the respondents did not categorically speak in terms of the principles that underpinned their views, analysis of the interviews revealed that they regularly made implicit references to three differing principles when justifying rights to welfare. These were categorised as a *universal* principle, a *contributory* principle, and a *social assistance* principle. Let us take as an example discussions on a right to healthcare. Primarily, this was justified according to the first two principles of universalism and contribution. The former, as

David's quotation below illustrates, has at its core a universal right to treatment in which the needs of an individual override issues of past contribution.

*I was brought up to believe that the Health Service should be a universal service... available to those who require those services, not dependant on their income; it should be dependent upon need. David. (Benefit Claimants Group).*

When invoking a contributory principle users emphasised the previous payment of financial contributions and an understanding that in agreeing to fund collective health provision individuals then had a right to access such services e.g.

*I have worked all my life so I have paid in all my life. Linda. (Women Claimants Group).*

A number of respondents approved of a social assistance principle and the application of a means test, with tapered and or exempted contributions, in certain areas of public health provision. For example,

*Sorry but I have to say this before I explode. I have to pay £5.50 for my prescriptions and I cannot afford to go to the dentist... I don't mind having to pay but there should be a grading system and I think that £5.50 for somebody on £20,000 a year is all right but we as people who are on a minimum wage should pay something like £2.50... We are not all on the same pay but they seem to think that everybody has to pay exactly the same, and it is wrong. Millie (Residents Group).*

It should come as no surprise that users made regular references which reflect these three differing principles as much public welfare provision has been delivered according to such rules.

A central element of the research was also to explore the opinions of users on a fourth principle i.e. the principle of conditionality. This approach, which explicitly links access to welfare rights and entitlement to compulsory duties or approved patterns of behaviour, is central to the active welfare reforms being mapped out. This principle was perhaps the most controversial of all with approval or disapproval amongst the respondents varying dependent upon the context and manner in which it was applied. However, even in a sample dominated by people who were reliant on social welfare benefits, a little over 50% supported linking rights to unemployment benefits to compulsory behavioural and/or work or training conditions. These respondents believed it was vital that people made a contribution in return for benefit. If they were unwilling to do so benefit sanctions were deemed to be reasonable.

*There are a lot of people who don't work and I don't see why we who have worked all our lives, who have paid our dues...why these young ones should not put their bit into community work. Jane (Senior Citizens Group)*

*There is nothing wrong with having to do something to get your money...and if that means you have a kick up the behind from the state, then so be it Jarvid, (Informal Mosque Group).*

Throughout the study this idea of individual contribution is the most prevalent principle used to justify the inclusion or exclusion of individuals from publicly provided welfare. It was particularly strong amongst those who endorsed a highly conditional and exclusive view of welfare citizenship. They believed that individuals who they deem to be unwilling, or in certain cases unable, to contribute to the

common good should be denied access to welfare rights; the indolent because they will not contribute via paid work and those beyond the nation's boundaries because they have not contributed. In short, these respondents are making essentially moral judgements about those who are passive dependants and those who are active agents.

The judgements noted above are not, of course, confined to the respondents in one study. Van Oorschot (2000) points out that there appears to be a sort of hierarchy of legitimacy in the 'deservingness criteria' used by the public when appraising various demands for collective support from different individuals and groups. In rank order (from most deserving of support) this runs as follows. 1). Senior citizens 2). Sick and disabled people 3). Families with children in need whose provider(s) are unemployed 4). Those on social assistance. In relation to his Dutch survey Van Oorschot concludes that,

*When confronted with somebody asking for their support the Dutch public is likely to ask first: Why are they needy?, Are you one of us?, and what have you done or can you do for us? (2000 :43)*

In asking such questions and asserting differing principles, the public, academics and politicians are defining the rules of inclusion and exclusion. These principles matter because how and where they are applied is often the decisive factor in the type of welfare system that develops. They are also central to decisions about why and how the welfare needs of certain groups prioritised whilst simultaneously others are inadequately recognised or ignored. As Mullard succinctly puts it "they provide the limits to what's possible" (2002 :562).

#### *Social divisions, welfare agency and visibility*

One of the primary concerns of those who extol the virtues of active welfare policies is to reduce 'welfare dependency' by encouraging individuals to actively help themselves, to become as previously noted, 'responsible risk takers' (Giddens, 1998). The emphasis on responsibility here is significant. In the new positive welfare society it is not enough for a person to be actively engaged with the risks and choices that confront them. It is also necessary that any such actions are deemed to be socially acceptable. A consideration of various types of agency using examples drawn from the two qualitative studies cited illustrates that such judgements are rarely straightforward.

*Well how can you be responsible on a low income you have got to dodge and be a deviant to survive haven't you. [Laughter etc] I have been in the past to survive... I mean there is deviants in all walks of life look at your millionaires, your tax evaders. We just try it on to know that we can put food in the kids mouths, put clothes on their backs. Personally, I would say with children, because I've had them and I've been there my money would never stretch out from Monday to Monday, it would never ever stretch out so I was one of those that was deviant to survive, I'm not saying everybody is but a lot are. I would get a little job here, get a little job there, or do a bit of shoplifting. It's survival isn't it. Molly (Lone Parents Group)*

Molly argues that some lone parents, including herself, have effectively been forced to behave in what many would view as an 'irresponsible' manner because of inadequate social benefits. Interestingly, she also draws a parallel with the tax evasion

of the extremely wealthy, a type of irresponsible behaviour that is often judged to be less damaging than shoplifting or benefit fraud. It could also be argued that although Molly is acting illegally she is essentially acting in a responsible manner; as a lone mother she is using the means at her disposal in order to ensure that her children are fed and clothed. Whether we view Molly's behaviour as responsible or irresponsible depends upon the particular moral perspective we bring to bear in judging her behaviour, nonetheless, she is an active welfare subject confronting and managing the welfare needs of her family (Dwyer, 2000a). Evidence from other studies suggests that many of those dependant upon inadequate social benefits perceive such behaviour to be both rational and/or morally acceptable given their day to day struggle to make ends meet (see Dean 2000, 1998; Dean and Melrose, 1997).

Now consider the following examples taken from qualitative research exploring the international migratory movements of retired European citizens within the EU (rf. Ackers and Dwyer, 2002; Dwyer, 2001, 2000b). Initially, many retired EU migrants were actively seeking to maximise their assets and the enjoyment of their later years by relocating in retirement.

*I'm better off here in [Corfu] with this pension I can manage twice as well as in France. (427 French male)*

*I wouldn't call us tax dodgers, but of course it's a great advantage. In the case of his pension I think we are paying 20% less [in France] (R218)*

Putting together a package of welfare services that met what they considered to be their personal requirements and needs was also an important element in these respondents' migratory decisions and subsequent movements; both permanent and temporary. Many were resourceful in getting the best welfare deal for themselves.

*One thing was my wife's health - her arthritis improved greatly because of the sun and the dry climate but it started getting worse again, and we realised we wouldn't be able to afford the proper treatment for it in Greece, so we had to re-establish ourselves with an address in England so we could then become recognised by the NHS. We went to live with my step-daughter in Bristol. We wrote to everybody saying we are back, officially we are now English residents. (R017 English returnee)*

A number of southern European respondents who were permanently resident in their country of origin at the time of interview, were also keen to 'work the system' in order to continue to access what they perceive to be the better public healthcare provisions of their previous host country.

*I have medical care here but officially I do not appear as a permanent resident in Greece. I haven't transferred my rights from Germany. My children live in Germany so officially I appear as living with them there. Sometimes I go and visit them for a couple of months...when I return from Germany I get a document which entitles me to medical care here. I also have the IKA insurance but I don't use it. I go to Germany for my check-ups. I have been doing this for 13 years now. R416*

Respondents were not averse to bending the rules if or when altered circumstances demanded such action. If detrimental changes to their medical or financial circumstances indicated that further movement would enable them to better meet their

changed circumstances respondents would pursue their goal single-mindedly. In the words of one respondent:

*When you move abroad, you have to be curious and daring, but when it comes to returning to your home country you have to be very calculating and well organised. It's a kind of conflict I suppose. (R220 Swedish returnee)*

Respondents generally, are creative in the way that they go about managing their welfare in order to maximise its potential and secure the best deal for themselves. Some will become officially resident in a host country if it is in their best interests whilst others, who to all intents and purposes are resident in host countries, decline to formally declare residence and retain bank accounts and/or property and assets in their country of origin, or elsewhere, if such arrangements best suit their needs. They are not adverse to manipulating tax and residency regulations for their own benefit. Whilst, to some extent the above migrants are operating in the 'shadows' of the law, the divide between benefit shopping/welfare tourism and 'reflexive/active citizenship' of the kind envisaged by Giddens, (1994) would seem to be finely drawn.

How do the illustrative examples drawn from the two qualitative studies add to our understanding of active/third way type welfare policies and in particular the ways in which dependency and agency are theorised? The first point to note is that of a common dependency on public welfare in very different settings. This runs counter to assumptions that underpin Third Way theories which view welfare dependency in very narrow terms i.e. dependency on social welfare benefits. Second, many people are actively engaged in managing the risks that confront them. They are not passive spectators of formal rights and policies. Both Molly and the respondents in the migration study are all seeking to play the welfare game and attempting to maximise their well-being. Why then, if we are all dependant upon public welfare and we are all in a variety of ways actively trying to get the best deal for ourselves, are only certain types of welfare dependency and risk management considered to be irresponsible? The insights here of Titmuss (1958) and others (Mann, 2001, 1998, 1992; Rose, 1981; Sinfield, 1978) who have developed his 'Social Division of Welfare' thesis are relevant.

In his essay 'The Social Division of Welfare' (1958), Titmuss argues that the state has a duty to meet the varying needs of its citizens. This it attempts to do, not with a single approach but through three parallel systems of welfare, 'social,' 'fiscal' and 'occupational,' each of which must be considered in any discussion of the welfare state. 'Social welfare' consists of the publicly provided funds and services (social security benefits, local authority housing, the NHS, personal social services etc.) that are often the single focus of dispute when the welfare state is discussed. In addition Titmuss emphasises the importance of 'fiscal welfare' (tax allowances and relief,) and also 'occupational welfare' the perks derived from advantageous employment in the labour market (pensions and fringe benefits such as cars, meals, private health schemes etc). The healthcare, education, social services and other wide ranging and significant benefits, that the welfare state provides, help to meet the varying needs of many different individuals and groups. By redefining welfare in a wider context Titmuss illustrates that differing welfare provisions, fully sanctioned by the state, are delivered to different groups within British society and that the middle classes gain substantially from the public welfare in the wider sense.

By focusing their attention almost exclusively on Titmuss' 'social' component it has been easy for certain politicians and commentators to set a narrow agenda when debating welfare (Mann, 1998). This agenda which concentrates on both the pressing need to reduce the social security budget and the necessity to control and remoralise members of a welfare dependant and deviant 'underclass' is a central feature of active/Third Way type theories. Shifts in welfare policy noted by Taylor-Gooby (1993) are now essential components of the new welfare settlement.

*If the trend in relation to mass welfare provision in areas such as health, social care, and pensions is greater selectivity coupled with shifts in the welfare mix in the direction of a pluralism in service delivery, policy for the new poor has moved in the reverse direction. The keynote here has been a strengthening of the apparatus designed to control the behaviour of people of working age who are marginal to the labour market" (Taylor-Gooby 1993:467).*

Organisational changes in the delivery of public welfare and the emergence of the selective application of a principle of conditionality have undermined any previous notion of common citizenship that the SDW thesis implied. Against this backdrop it becomes easier for those who already enjoy substantial, but relatively concealed, benefits from social (the public healthcare and education sectors), occupational, fiscal welfare to denounce those with the most visible claims (i.e. those who rely on social welfare benefits) as passive welfare dependants. This,

*Inequality in the visibility of benefits is an important and integral part of the social division of welfare. The hierarchy of benefits moreover is clearly considerable providing very different amounts, under a wide range of conditions that may reinforce or strip the recipients of their status. (Sinfield, 1978 :136-7)*

Third Way welfare policies fail to adequately theorise welfare dependency and individual responsibility. The dependency of the majority enjoying the benefits of occupational and fiscal welfare, "which they have done nothing to earn" (Goodin 2000: 13), is basically ignored. The dependency of a minority reliant on meagre social welfare benefits is used to castigate claimants as irresponsible and undeserving of support presumably because they will not help themselves by engaging in the PLM. Such approaches, that legitimise certain claims to welfare by prioritising crude ideas of claim and contribution and moralistic ideas of individual agency and responsibility are flawed.

Vincent (1996) reminds us that rich and poor are actively engaged in managing their risks but that wealthy citizens are more effective in ensuring they get what they want due to the advantages that they have accrued in the past. It not just the retired EU migrants noted above who exploit a lack of visibility and/or their assets and the ability to relocate to maximise the benefits that public welfare may offer. The promotion of themes like opportunity and choice, central to ongoing welfare reforms, reaffirm more generally the advantage of more affluent citizens who use their economic and social capital to relocate to areas with the best schools, childcare, healthcare facilities. It is unlikely that those involved will be denounced as irresponsible, despite the fact that their active agency, their exercising of choice, compounds the marginalisation of "worst off citizens [are] left in districts with the worst public services, as well as highest rates of crime, drug use, violence and other social problems" (Jordan 2001: 529). Against this backdrop of increased marginalisation and the 'enforcement ethos'

of various 'new deals' those at the sharp end of public welfare are active themselves in using a variety of methods, including claiming social security whilst working, to ensure that their needs are met (Jordan, 2001). The key question is who are the responsible, reflexive citizens, who are the calculating, irresponsible, self interested welfare dependants?

Across Europe, less universal and more conditional and selective welfare arrangements are being put in place (Van Oorschot, 2000) and it is increasingly difficult for individuals and groups to have their claims to welfare recognised as deserving of public support. Contemporary academics, politicians and users alike all make judgements about who has, and has not, got a legitimate claim to public welfare and why one claim is more deserving than another. As active/Third Way welfare starts to dominate, principles of need and entitlement become marginal and notions of desert and individual responsibility start to dictate our deliberations. Such ideas are poorly suited to the development of systems of public welfare that will best meet the needs of people marginalised and disadvantaged groups. In reality who gets what from the welfare state, and when and how they get it, has little to do with personal responsibility and desert. If necessary people will mobilise various 'deservingness criteria' (Van Oorschot, 2001) to make or validate a claim for public welfare services/benefits even if they have previously spent a lot of time and energy trying to minimise their contributions to collective welfare in the past (White, 2000). It is often the most skilful operators, rather than the most deserving claimants, who operate most successfully within the maze of rights, rules and administrative discretion (Adler, 1997) that make up contemporary welfare states.

A more sophisticated understanding of agency is required than the one offered by Giddens and Third Way supporters. As people are confronted with the realities of social change and the risks that it entails they are willing to take chances. They will consider certain actions on the boundaries of formal legality as legitimate because they offer the best way for them to meet their needs within a real situation. As Voruba notes,

*With the widening gap between institutionalised normality and real living conditions some kinds of life chances emerge that might be illegal but are seen as legitimate by the people in question...thus people's strategies for coming to terms with reality collide with official offers of inclusion (2000 :608-11).*

Empirical evidence suggests that the majority of those of working age who are reliant on social benefits are as keen as the rest of the population to engage with the PLM and thus meet their wider responsibilities (Dean, 2000, 1998; Dwyer, 2000a; Bryson 1997). Orton, similarly, argues in chapter XX that a lack of required council tax payments was indicative of people trying to cope with poverty rather than a deficit of citizen responsibility. In their own ways and from different positions within our highly stratified and unequal societies everybody (with varying degrees of success), is trying to secure the best welfare deal for themselves. Recent social, political and economic changes mean, that most citizens are effectively pursuing either 'proactive' or 'defensive' strategies in relation to their welfare needs at any one time. These are two different types of activity.

*The distinction lies between those whose power location creates an 'ability' to intervene in ways that can transform their position in a particular area of the public sphere, and those lacking access to relevant power networks who find*

*themselves engaged in efforts...simply to preserve existing interests and entitlements (Ellison, 2000 :para 1.4).*

As Taylor-Gooby (2001, 2000) notes 'risk' is differentially experienced by different social groups in contemporary society. Active/Third Way welfare works to the advantage of more privileged citizens and to the detriment of vulnerable groups. Social/economic divisions still matter in relation to welfare risks and an individual's ability to manage them.

### **Conclusions: positive ways forward**

It is not the intention of this paper to criticise or condemn the various tactics used by different groups of welfare service users to ensure that their needs are met. We are all dependant on public welfare systems at various times throughout our lives. It is important that we as academics assert more sophisticated understandings of agency and welfare dependency than those currently the vogue. As theorists concerned with the SDW point out narrow conceptions of social rights/responsibilities and dependency are wrong. Furthermore, the simplistic dichotomy between two ideal types; the independent, responsible active, (full-time) paid worker and the irresponsible, passive, welfare dependent who do not to engage with the PLM, at the heart of many current welfare reforms, fails to recognise more complex social reality in two ways. First, the extent to which a functioning market economy and formal public welfare systems depend upon gendered, informal welfare for their continued successful operation Second, the extent to which many so called dependants assume such burdens of informal care yet remain unrecognised and undervalued (Lister, 1997, 1990; Rose, 1981). Active/Third Way theories which dominate contemporary welfare reforms are built around the principle of highly conditional social welfare rights and limited notions of socially valuable contribution and agency. They lead us towards exclusive and coercive welfare systems in the future. It is important to recognise the limited potential of such approaches for meeting the needs of marginalised social groups (cf. Taylor-Gooby, 2000; Dean, 2000). Welfare to work policies, so often identified as being of central importance, appear better at meeting the requirements of industry and capital rather than poor citizens (Peck, 2001; Prideaux, 2001).

Given the serious shortcomings of active/Third Way welfare outlined in this paper how then do we move forward positively in relation to welfare reform? Clearly, it would be as wrong to view the PWWS as a golden age to be recaptured. Social change and the well documented shortcomings of past policies make such an aim undesirable and inappropriate. Today, by many, welfare dependency is narrowly defined as a stigmatising signal of individual failure (Batsleer and Humphries, 2000). This view needs to be countered. Simplistic debates that contrast dependence and independence are flawed; we are all socially interdependent. Our very sense of self, who we are, is constructed overtime through our links and relationships with other human beings. We all exercise choice and agency in relation to welfare against the backdrop of the complex and changing welfare institutions. These may provide both opportunities or constraints to particular groups at different times (Twine, 1994).

It has been suggested that in the UK, New Labour's Third Way has seen the introduction of a range of policies some of which "attempt to level the playing field and some of which are designed to activate the player" (Deacon, 2002 : 117).

Supporters of Third Way welfare such as Deacon, however, also recognise that in spite of recent significant commitments to fund healthcare and education through increased national insurance contributions (rf. Taylor-Gooby et al, 2002 for details), not enough emphasis has been placed on tackling existing, unacceptable material inequalities. Greater levels of economic redistribution in favour of poor citizens must be a central feature of future welfare policy, because as Twine notes, “redistributing resources also redistributes freedom and choice” (1994 :12). The promotion of policies that prioritise the notion of *interdependence* also need to be to the fore, not least as a counter to the fallacy of the celebrated, independent self reliant citizen. As Williams states,

*We need to recognise that we are all necessarily dependant on others, but at the same time challenge the institutions, structures and social relations which render some groups unnecessarily dependant (1999:667).*

This may be hard for some people to accept because it means that we are faced with the reality that our progress, or elevated social status, is often achieved with the help of, or at the expense of others. It may well be time to prioritise values such as need and interdependence when theorising welfare. Positive welfare will only become a future reality if academics, politicians and users adequately acknowledge that the best starting point for meeting the diversity of needs that exist in modern societies is a recognition of ‘our common humanity’ (Harris, 2002).

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