Resistance in Australian employment services: a critical account

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Declaration Page

I certify that except where due acknowledgement has been made, the work is that of the author alone; the work has not been submitted previously, in whole or in part, to qualify for any other academic award; the content of the thesis is the result of work which has been carried out since the official commencement date of the approved research program; any editorial work, paid or unpaid, carried out by a third party is acknowledged; and, ethics procedures and guidelines have been followed.

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## Glossary of terms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Activation</td>
<td>The concept associated with the introduction of Active Labour Market Programs in which activity levels are prescribed for people on welfare payments.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Centrelink</td>
<td>Centrelink administers welfare payments. Centrelink’s role is limited to determining eligibility for payments. The organisation is responsible for applying welfare sanctions penalties if it is advised of non-compliance with social security requirements by employment services providers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conditionality (also welfare conditionality)</td>
<td>Conditionality embodies the principle that aspects of state support, usually financial or practical, are dependent on citizens meeting certain conditions, which are invariably behavioural (DWP, 2008: 1).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Department of Employment (DoE) (formerly known as DEEWR/DEWR)</td>
<td>The Department of Employment (DoE) determines and administers social security and workforce participation policy for working age people. There are cross-portfolio arrangements with the Department of Social Security, which administers policy for carers, the aged and people with disabilities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Department of Human Services (DHS)</td>
<td>DHS is responsible for the administration of social security payments. Centrelink acts as the street-level outlets to administer these payments in terms of social security eligibility.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment services</td>
<td>Employment services are the street-level delivery agencies contracted to implement Active Labour Market Programs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment Pathway Plan (EPP) or job plan</td>
<td>An official document that all job seekers must sign as a condition of receiving income support payments.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job Capacity Assessment</td>
<td>The assessment used to assess level of work capacity for job seekers affected by injury, disability or illness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>jobactive</td>
<td>The current name of the model of employment services delivered by a mixed market of for-profit and not-for-profit employment services agencies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job Network</td>
<td>The Job Network was the original employment services contract, which extended from 1998–2009. There were three significant versions of this contract (ESC1, ESC2 and ESC3).</td>
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</table>
Job seeker  
A job seeker is an individual on welfare payments who has been activated by social policy.

Job Services Australia (JSA)  
The name of the employment services contract from 2009–2015.

Job Seeker Classification Instrument (JSCI)  
An assessment tool used to measure relative labour market disadvantage and risk of long-term unemployment.

Long-term unemployment (LTU)  
Job seekers are classified as long-term unemployed after one year of unemployment.

Newstart Allowance (also Newstart)  
The major activated welfare benefits in Australia are called Newstart (the unemployment benefit); Disability Support Pension (for people with permanent disabilities) and Parenting Payment (for single parents and low-income partnered parents).

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)  
The OECD provides economic advice to member countries and has played an important advisory role in the development of active labour market programs.

### About Job Services Australia

The data collection for this research occurred during the Job Services Australia contract of employment services (2009–2015). The Job Services Australia (JSA) contract contained significant continuities with earlier and later employment services contracts, including a competitive procurement process and a star rating system. There were 103 organisations that provided JSA services. The organisations ranged in size from small community-based organisations to large church-affiliated agencies, and a growing presence of international Welfare to Work agencies. The funding for JSA was $1.2 billion per year.

During the JSA contract, the 2006 Welfare to Work reforms were cemented in employment services guidelines and practices. The main features of the 2006 Welfare to Work reforms included redefining single parent pension eligibility to youngest child of eight and the introduction of an activity test at six years of age. The eligibility criteria for entrance to the Disability Support Pension (DSP) became tougher with recurrent assessments. Since then, recipients of the DSP under 40 have been subject to annual eligibility reviews that, in some cases, involve reassessment of entitlements. There are several other pension categories involving smaller numbers of citizens that have undergone similar eligibility criteria changes, including carer allowance and a former Veteran widowers allowance.
Jobs Australia

Jobs Australia is a peak body for not-for-profit employment services agencies. Jobs Australia provides representation for employment services agencies during consultations on the design of employment and related programs. It seeks to influence the way in which employment services are provided and contracted by engaging with the political and bureaucratic bodies through which this policy is made. I was employed as a policy worker at Jobs Australia while conducting this research. This job has provided me with access to knowledge about the consultation process underpinning employment services design, the forms and nature of changes to activation and conditionality policy, as well as detailed knowledge about operating conditions, resourcing formulas, procurement and contract administration.
Abstract

This thesis is a critical account of resistance in employment services. The research was undertaken between 2013-2014 when employment services, then called Job Services Australia (JSA), were increasingly shaped by a neoliberal reform agenda that prioritised marketisation and individual responsibility. It was in this context that Australia’s marketised employment became the street-level agencies responsible for policing the rules of welfare conditionality. When job seekers fail to comply with the rules of conditionality, employment services use financial sanctions to discipline them. Reports of interpersonal conflict from employment services agencies suggested the use of financial sanctions was contributing to antagonistic street-level relations. This interpersonal conflict at the street level suggested that employment services rules were being met with some resistance by job seekers.

The investigation was guided by the question: How can resistance in employment services be understood?

The research question was intended to allow for the examination of resistance in terms that are relevant to critical scholarship about street level relations in employment services. The research focused on moments involving the use of sanctions to examine street-level relations in the context of an advanced liberal welfare regime of Workfare. Through exploring the forms of resistance that arise in employment services, the investigation was intended to develop critical understandings of the effects of sanctions on relations in employment services. It was also intended to provide an approach to developing an account of agency and resistance in dominating social conditions.

The research objectives necessitated situating employment services within a critical analytic framework in which marketisation and individualisation were understood as strategies of advanced liberal regimes of welfare governance. From a critical perspective employment services can be described as a public service designed to commodify job seekers in which sanctions are used to discipline and penalise the unemployed. This perspective contrasts with a mainstream perspective in which employment services are viewed as a public service that helps connect unemployed people to jobs as a form of benevolent assistance, and which considers sanctions a necessary form of ‘tough love’.

The research comprised narrative interviews with job seekers and employment services workers about incidents involving threat of sanction. These incidents were the focus of the inquiry because sanctions have been, and continue to be, used to discipline non-compliant or ‘resistant’ job seekers. The notion of a resistant welfare subject is important because it implicitly informs the strategies of activation and conditionality administered through employment services agencies.
This thesis applied a critical orientation drawing on Bourdieu’s theory of practice (Bourdieu, 1977, 1990) and Peillon’s sociology of welfare (Peillon, 1998) to develop a critical account of resistance in employment services. The use of a Bourdieusian perspective contrasts with other critical examinations of the social relations of Workfare, and was employed specifically to explain how job seekers and workers negotiate interactions where welfare conditionality imposes controls on their behaviour.

The findings draw attention to the limitation of sanctions in employment services. Through the analysis of interactions involving sanctions, the notion of the resistant welfare subject is challenged because job seekers were identified as exercising complex rationalisations in decisions relating to welfare and work. These complex rationalisations add support to the need for welfare subjects to be understood as complex actors whose behaviour and decisions reflect the constraints of their relational contexts. This thesis also contributes observations to social and public policy scholarship about the role of third sector organisations as agencies contracted to enforce disciplinary social policy like that associated with Workfare. A contribution of this research is to draw attention to the role of these agencies in the administration of disciplinary social policy.

An interest-based perspective is used to explain the forms of resistance that arise in employment services. This interest-based perspective reinforces the view that the interests informing employment services reflect the market-oriented rationality of neoliberalism rather than the interests of the unemployed. By taking an interest-based perspective on policy making itself, this thesis draws attention to the ways in which all those involved in creating policy are implicated in reproducing social conditions in which neoliberal interests dominate. The thesis argues that there is a need for stronger linkages between research and policy advocates so that critical perspectives are employed as legitimate forms of knowledge about the effects of social policy. For their part, researchers can engage with policy making processes and practices, in order to insert their knowledge into broader debate about the reproduction of inequality and provide ‘resources for rethinking and renewing democratic struggles’ (Wacquant, 2005: 4).
Chapter 1 – Introduction to this thesis

This thesis is an account of social research that used resistance to gain access to critical understanding that would provide insight into conflict at the street-level of employment services. The research was motivated by feedback I had received in my role as a policy worker at Jobs Australia, a representative body for not-for-profit employment services agencies. In my work at Jobs Australia, I heard anecdotal reports of interpersonal conflicts at the street-level of employment services. The conflict was identified by employment services agencies as an effect of the use of financial sanctions to enforce the rules of welfare conditionality. This was a concern, because over the period of the 14 years I have been employed at Jobs Australia, reports of interpersonal conflict at the street-level had been persistent. Reports of interpersonal conflict have now been documented in a survey in which almost half of employment services frontline staff reported having been threatened with physical violence by job seekers (Lewis, et al., 2016).

This conflict interested me because it seemed to reflect a paradox about the role of employment services. In the mainstream discourse used by the Department of Employment (DoE), employment services are described as performing a public service that helps connect unemployed people to jobs, and that the work they do provides assistance intended to help unemployed people by getting them into jobs. The purpose of employment services is framed as helping the unemployed get jobs that will ‘lead them out of poverty’, and that a job is ‘the best’ form of welfare.

The paradox of employment services can be simply captured in a question: if employment services were helping job seekers in ways they perceived to be in their own interest, why is there so much conflict at the street-level? Since most of the conflict reported to me arose in the context of the administration of the rules relating to mandatory activity tests, enforced through threat of sanction, I believed there was a relationship between the conflict at the street-level and the use of sanctions. This was the initial premise of the research in which I sought explore the conflict apparent in employment services in more depth.

For reasons that will be explained in more detail below, I used the idea of resistance to gain access to critical understanding that would provide insight into conflict in employment services. This is because I took the view that sanctions exist to discipline notionally resistant welfare subjects, and that the conflict at the street-level arises because of employment services role in the administration of activity tests and sanctions. I set out to explore the conflict apparent in employment services from the perspective of the actors, namely job seekers and employment services workers. This is because their perspectives are under-represented in mainstream policy development, yet the views of street-level conflicts are critical for an understanding of the nature of employment services.

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1 The Request for Tender for Job Services Australia said ‘The objective of JSA is to prepare Job Seekers to secure sustainable employment. JSA focuses on the needs of the most disadvantaged Australian Job Seekers and assists them to achieve greater social inclusion (DEEWR, 2012)
actors are useful for understanding the impact of policies like welfare conditionality (Barnes & Prior, 2009; Bevir, 2007). This thesis therefore combines the perspectives of the actors engaged in street-level conflicts with my policy knowledge and develops critical insight into ‘resistance’ in employment services.

As an introduction to the study, this chapter provides an overview of the research objectives and locates the investigation within critical scholarship about employment services. The research problem is explained along with a summary of how a critical orientation informed the research methodology. The analytic progression of the findings is explained as having led to the development of an interest-based perspective on resistance in employment services. An interest-based perspective is a unique contribution of this thesis to critical scholarship about employment services. There follows an overview of the structure and a summary of the content of the chapters of this thesis.

The context of this research

The research was undertaken during the Job Services Australia (JSA) contract of marketised employment services which operated between 2009-2015. In this period employment services were shaped by a neoliberal welfare reform agenda of marketisation and individual responsibility. Neoliberal welfare reforms inform the employment services context in two important ways. The first reflects the introduction of activation strategies and welfare conditionality enforced through financial sanctions. The second is through a concurrent shift to marketised service provision. Both of these reforms reflect neoliberal economic strategy that involves divestment in public services and an increasing shift of costs into the sphere of individual responsibility (Beck, 1992; Connell, Fawcett, & Meagher, 2009). The effects of both individualisation and marketisation therefore inform the scholarly concerns of this investigation.

The marketisation of employment services reflects the objectives of neoliberal economic management because it shifted the resources provided to employment services agencies into payment-by-results contracts. Australia’s employment services were marketised in 1998 as the Commonwealth Department of Employment (formerly DEWR/DEEWR) adopted the outsourcing strategies of New Public Management (NPM). NPM introduced the ‘quasi-market’ mechanisms of payment-by-results contracts, which have been in operation in Australia since the launch of the Job Network in 1998 (Considine, Lewis & Sullivan, 2011). Marketised employment services have now existed for 19 years, and contracts for services are awarded through a competitive procurement process. The ‘quasi-market’ has been shrinking, as the effects of marketisation have been to introduce conditions in which only the most successful and well-resourced agencies survive (Considine, et al., 2017). If employment services agencies do not place as many people into jobs as the other employment services agencies against which they are competing, they risk losing their business. The outcome-based funding model
drives the imperative for employment service providers to monitor job seekers’ to ensure they are meeting the behavioural requirements of the activity test.

Over the same period in which marketisation changed the way employment services were resourced, the use of activation and conditionality as strategies of individualisation intensified. The OECD’s landmark Jobs Study recommended the reform of active labour market programs and economic strategies bundled as the Jobs Strategy (OECD, 1994, 1995). The level of support provided through the employment services model has been rationalised to prevent investment in employment support strategies considered by the OECD to have low impact on employment outcomes (Martin & Grubb, 2001). This shifted the nature of the model of employment services away from human capital development towards Workfirst particularly as associated with the welfare to work reforms of 2006.

The terms Workfirst and Workfare are often used synonymously. Yet while Workfirst signifies a particular programmatic setting, it is a strategy of a Workfare regime which prioritises work before human capital development by providing incentive to employment services agencies to get people into jobs quickly (Peck & Theodore, 2000). Workfirst as programmatic policy limits the options available to job seekers and employment services agencies because only a limited range of work insertion activities are funded by the policy making agency. Workfirst can therefore be understood as the programmatic settings for employment services policy, through which a broader Workfare regime operates. The distinction between the terms can be understood as the different between an operational set of policies and a broader political and ideological focus.

In the Australian context, Workfirst has been actively pursued through programmatic settings since the welfare to work reforms of 2006, because pre-employment programs were disbanded and more benefit recipients were activated. The shift to Workfirst programmatic settings was accompanied by a neocconservative influence on social policy particularly in the Howard era of welfare reform in the 1990s (Martin, 2007). It is in this era that social policy became more paternalistic and reflected the ‘bad agency’ construct of the welfare subject (Wright, 2012) and underclass accounts of welfare dependency (Martin, 2007). This is the paternalistic premise that informed the use of sanctions to discipline job seekers perceived as being morally deficient and resistant to actively seeking work. Due to the possibility that job seekers might not exhibit the right behaviours towards getting jobs, they are subject to the high levels of supervision mandated by paternalism. This supervision is policed by employment services agencies whose capacity to help job seekers with vocational and personal support has shifted towards the goal of Workfirst (Carney, 2007; McDonald & Marston, 2005).

Employment services have emerged as the street-level agencies responsible for policing the behavioural relations of a Workfare regime. The emphasis has shifted to the management of the behavioural relations of welfare conditionality in which welfare recipients can no longer expect to be supported when they are in financial need (McDonald & Marston, 2005). It is in this context, and
particularly in the JSA contract, that the purpose of employment services shifted from providing employment assistance to enforcing activity tests and financial sanctions. At the street-level, employment services agencies and their workers enforce the rules of conditionality, which function to maximise job seeker exposure to the labour market by making them actively seek and take jobs. This has resulted in a shift to a sanction-based culture which has been captured in surveys of street-level workers, which showed a persistent long-term tendency towards employment consultants using sanctions to ‘engage’ job seekers (Lewis, et al., 2016).

Sanctions are regarded by employment services agencies as the most effective tool they have to engage job seekers to attend appointments\(^2\), despite known damaging effects of sanctions on case management relationships (McDonald & Marston, 2005). Hasenfeld (1999) demonstrated that sanctions interfere with the trust necessary to build effective client–worker relationships. These effects are reflected in street-level research into the client–worker alliance and employment services case management (Giuliani, 2015; Marston & McDonald, 2008).

Conflict at the street-level of employment services emerged at the same time as intensified activation strategies, involving both mandatory engagement with employment services and participation requirements. The activation strategies had been observed as not being reciprocated by useful services. In Australia, research into marketised employment services found that job seekers became disillusioned because they found the services they received irresponsible and inflexible. The lack of flexibility of both the Job Network and JSA model has been reported as a ‘waste of time’ because the services had no relevance to individual goals and preferences (Carney and Ramia 2002; Nevile 2003; Sawer 2006; Carney 2007; Ziguras, Considine & Dufty, 2003). The counter-productive effects of activity for the sake of activity, inefficient use of resources and the demotivating impacts of ‘hoop-jumping’ has been identified in a number of studies (Carney, 2006; Horn & Jordan, 2006; Sawer, 2006; Marston & McDonald, 2008; Ziguras, 2004).

Further, in service contexts, interpersonal conflict has immediate consequences for behaviours such as disagreement, negative emotion, and interference (Barki & Hartwick, 2004). The use of behavioural supervision has been associated with frustration, resentment and loss of relational autonomy particularly in single parents (Blaxland, 2008; Grahame & Marston, 2012). The conflict at the street-level of employment services reflects the interaction between individual job seeker willingness to engage in services, the forms of activation they activities they are exposed to, and the quality of the services they receive. Since the welfare to work reforms involved the activation of more job seekers, and the extension of the job seeker compliance regime this conflict has intensified.

\(^2\) Department of Employment Submission to the Senate Inquiry into Job Seeker Compliance (Parliament of Australia, 2014). It should also be noted that threat of financial sanction is far more prevalent than the figures on actual penalties indicate.
Street-level research had identified that coercive social policy has resulted in some job seekers exercising both tactical and discursive forms of resistance. These tactical forms of resistance were expressed as reactions to ‘the regulation that engulfs them’ (Watkins, 2006: 36); the unreciprocated obligations associated with being a job seeker (Marston & McDonald, 2008); or single mothers’ resistance to the imposition of a mother/worker role identity (Brady, 2011; Bodsworth, 2012). These tactical forms of resistance are the forms Scott (1986) identified as the ‘weapons of the weak’. These forms of resistance are not scaled to change the nature of social relations, but to provide respite, relief and in some cases revenge on those who seek to dominate (Dean & Melrose, 1997).

In addition, existing street-level research identified complexity in the ways job seekers negotiate the forms of welfare conditionality administered by employment services. This results in the form of resistance identified in behaviours that Dunn referred to as ‘choosiness and diversity’ (Dunn, 2016: 802) and the ways in which unemployed people avoid ‘crap jobs’ (Bodsworth, 2010; Crisp, 2010; Murphy, et al., 2011). These reactions reflect tensions between policy makers’ use of disciplinary mechanisms, the resistant welfare subject, and the complex rationalities of job seekers whose actual motivations do not conform with the assumptions made about them by policy makers.

There were similar observations about resistance in policy implementation studies which showed that resistance is not exercised in isolation; it is also the outcome of negotiations between citizens and workers in public service interactions. This kind of co-produced resistance was observed in policy implementation scholarship exploring the interactional outcomes of service exchanges (Barnes & Prior, 2009; Bevir, 2007). These contributions understand resistance as the outcome of interactions in which both citizens and street-level workers contribute to the generation of resistance. Focusing on these interactions provides access to the locations at which policy implementation outcomes are co-constructed at the point of service delivery, not only through the influence of street-level discretion (Lipsky, 1980), but also through the interactional behaviour and interpretation of citizens and public servants (Barnes & Prior, 2009; Bevir, 2007).

**Research aims and objectives**

Gaps in existing scholarship left room to undertake this investigation to better understand resistance in the context of welfare sanctions in employment services. The research was guided by the exploratory research question: *How can resistance in employment services be understood?* The research question was intended to allow for the examination of resistance in terms that are relevant to critical scholarship about street level relations in employment services.

The research objectives reflect critical scholarly concerns about the direction of welfare systems in a context of advanced capitalism. There are two distinct perspectives on resistance that informed the research aims and objectives. The first is the public policy perspective on resistance which implicitly
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inform the strategies of activation and conditionality administered by employment services. These strategies are deployed to activate the notionally resistant welfare subject whose behaviour is managed because of the paternalist influence on public policy which reflects the ‘bad agency’ construct of the welfare subject (Wright, 2012). This is the premise of paternalism that has informed the use of sanctions to discipline welfare subjects who are perceived as morally deficient. This the notionally resistant welfare subject who has been targeted in policy measures with the intention of transforming passive welfare dependents in to active citizens.

The objective in this respect was to develop understanding of the effects of sanctions on relations in employment services. The research focuses on moments involving the use of sanctions to examine these effects of sanctions in respect of the assumptions of choice and motivation that inform the discourse of activation, individualisation and marketisation. The focus on resistance was intended to explore tensions in the construal of human motivation inherent in the discourse of individualisation and marketisation.

The second objective critically examine resistance in the context of advanced liberal strategies of governance like individualisation. The examination of resistance provided opportunity to explore interactions between human actors and dominating structures like disciplinary social policy which had generated conflict in street-level interactions. Further, the interrogation of resistance provides a way to explore the ways in which job seekers exercise agency in contexts that are dominating.

Theoretical orientation

In contrast to governmental accounts of the social relations of Workfare (see for example Brady, 2011; Marston & McDonald, 2005) this investigation employed a Bourdieusian perspective. Bourdieu’s theory of practice (Bourdieu, 1977; 1990) is a relational theory of action as well as a theory of cultural reproduction (Grenfell, 2012). The decision to draw on the theory of practice was based on the view it can be used to explain how human actors exercise forms of resistance in social conditions in which control is exerted through the instrumental rules of conditionality. The point in employing Bourdieu’s theory of practice was to be able to explain how human actors access and deploy resources that enable them to exercise resistance albeit within the constraints of the relational context. A Bourdieusian perspective benefited the analysis by inserting the behaviour of welfare subjects like job seekers into the broader relations constraining their action, like the welfare regime of Workfare. This insertion provides explanatory power in which it is possible to link subjective reactions to the objective conditions that provide limits on action.

The thesis draws on Peillon’s adaption of Bourdieu’s theory of practice to the welfare field, which was elaborated as a ‘sociology of welfare’ (Peillon, 1998). Peillon argued that Bourdieu’s concepts transfer to the welfare field, which he described as a unique field involving struggles for economic
resources, effected through social policy that determines the nature of the welfare regime (Peillon, 1998). By drawing on Peillon’s orientation on the welfare field, this study situated employment services as a site of a conflict reflecting social policy struggles over the legitimacy of the needs of unemployed people. The broader social struggle is reflected in employment services in terms of the resources that are made available to support unemployment directly through welfare payments, and indirectly through the resources available to the agencies who support them. Ultimately this struggle is over control of economic resources and the role of employment services in helping unemployed people get access to these.

Peillon (1998) demonstrated how Bourdieu’s theory of practice can be used to describe the welfare field as the location of struggle over the distribution of economic resources. The actors in these struggles are controlled using strategies of individualisation, such as activation and welfare conditionality (Peillon, 1998). Further, these strategies are administered by marketised agencies in which the funding for contracts like employment services obliges them to enforce strategies of individualisation (Berkel, 2014; Brodkin & Marston, 2013; Shutes & Taylor, 2014). Since these strategies involve rationing of economic resources and the use of financial sanctions, street-level interactions become the locations in which the struggle for access to economic resources manifest in the interpersonal forms of conflict and resistance, like those that have been arising in employment services.

Peillon (1998) explained how Bourdieu’s theory of practice can be used to examine how broader power arrangements are reflected in the behaviours of welfare recipients and in the practices of welfare agencies. As an observational approach, Peillon called this kind of analysis ‘field analysis’. It involves understanding how broader power arrangements are reflected in interactions that take place in welfare services contexts. The field analysis employed in this study involved identifying the actors who, in the case of the employment services field, were job seekers and employment services workers and focusing on interactions that reflect the forms of control inherent in the conditions of field.

**Research methods**

To meet the requirements of Bourdieusian field analysis the research methods comprised narrative interviews with job seekers and employment services workers about incidents involving threat of sanction. There were two interview cohorts. The first cohort of job seekers (n=14) were interviewed in late 2013. The second cohort of employment services workers (n=5) were interviewed in early 2014. The ratio of job seekers to workers (14/5 respectively) was weighted to provide emphasis on the experiences of job seekers, as their experiences had been the original concern of the research. The views of workers were collected after it became apparent that they could add depth to the findings, particularly in relation to intersubjective recognition.
The research involved purposive recruitment of job seekers and workers, who described incidents involving sanctions in narrative interviews. Job seekers were recruited to tell a story about an incident where they had been threatened with a participation failure. These incidents were the focus of the inquiry because sanctions have been, and continue to be, used to discipline non-compliant or ‘resistant’ job seekers. The workers were recruited to talk about incidents of resistance they had observed in their employment services case work. The interview questions centred around their observations of resistance and how it was handled in their workplace.

These incidents provided the focus for two semi-structured narrative interviews with both cohorts. These two interviews comprised an initial interview to collect data, followed by a second to expand on the stories provided, and to check, clarify and extend the process of co-construction of the narratives with the participants’ involvement.

The experiences reported in this research reflect the impact of the 2006 Welfare to Work reforms as administered through the Job Services Australia employment services contract. In this era, there were activation measures for single parents, people with disabilities and mature age people. There had also been changes in activation for mature age job seekers and eligibility to the Disability Support Pension, which affected some of the younger people who disclosed mental health issues as a barrier to employment. The high sample of single parents reflected the impact of recent changes to parenting payment eligibility in which they had been transferred to the significantly lower payment of Newstart and had been activated as job seekers.

The interview data was edited into narratives and provided the resource for the case studies and analysis that informed the development of this thesis. The analysis was attentive to the ways the job seekers and workers reflected on the constraining aspects of conditionality and how they negotiated these interactions.

**Critical perspectives on employment service**

Government employment services originated as labour exchanges and have continued to provide a service to supply and match unemployed people to jobs to the present day. These services are of interest to social policy scholars because they reflect the dynamics of the welfare system and the labour market. The function of employment services can be inserted into broader critical debate about the role of welfare states in the era of advanced capitalism. In critical terms, employment services can be characterised as public institutions responsible for administering forms of social control intended to achieve the commodification of labour (Offe, 1984). This function of commodification is a requirement of the capitalist system to maintain the surplus of unemployment which in turn, secures the cheap supply of labour. This is the contradiction of decommodification, in which welfare systems are described as mechanisms to subordinate the poor and weaken the power base of labour (Offe, 1982).
Since Offe, in an era of advanced capitalism and the governance achieved through the discipline of an advanced liberal welfare regime, the contemporary contradictions of the welfare state are amplified in employment services. Since Offe’s (1984) observations of the tensions between commodification and decommodification, perspectives on the welfare state have shifted so that the contradictions reflect the effects of advanced capitalism (Pierson, 1998) and its relationship to advanced liberal forms of governance (McDonald & Marston, 2005). Governmental scholarship provides a critical perspective on employment services because it focuses on the ways in which advanced liberalism governs through ‘freedom’ and the ‘conduct of conduct’ (Dean, 2009; Rose, 2006). The governmental perspective focuses on the ways in which forms of social control are embedded in practice and thought, in the language and discourses that are used to express and define the nature of a social problem. In this perspective, activation projects are sophisticated strategies of governance (Dean, 1995; McDonald & Marston, 2003; McDonald & Marston, 2005).

The contradictions of the welfare state in advanced capitalism become apparent in critical analysis of the effects of individualisation and marketisation. The first contradiction is essentially a contradiction of the discourse of individualisation relating to “choice” and motivation. The contradictions of individualisation are apparent in the justifications assigned to the functions of government policy like the rhetoric associated with activation and economic participation. These contradictions are reflected in the rhetoric associated with activation and labour market programs in which an active liberal self is constructed as having choice and being motivated in terms of public choice theory (Le Grand, 1997).

The use of discipline conflicts with the rhetoric of choice associated with individualisation and marketisation. While the strategies of individualisation draw on liberal constructs of the economically rational self, the use of disciplinary conditionality is known to have counter-productive effects on autonomy, self-efficacy and are not aligned to intrinsic motivation (Carney, 2006; Sawer, 2006; Marston & McDonald, 2008; Ziguras, Considine & Dufty, 2003). For single mothers in particular, compliance with onerous activity tests has had counterproductive effects on autonomy and recognition (Blaxland, 2009) and relational autonomy and well-being (Grahame & Marston, 2012). Compliance with employment services rules are experienced as forms of interference with the capacity of single parents to make their own choices about the care of their children and decisions relating to welfare and work.

Offe’s contradiction of decommodification has been extended in critical scholarship in forms such as Wacquant’s (2001) penalisation thesis. This penalisation thesis postulates that Workfare functions as part of the penal apparatus of neoliberal governance that ‘serves to discipline the fractions of the working class that buck at the new, precarious service jobs; it neutralises and warehouses its most disruptive elements, or those considered superfluous with regard to the transformations of the demand for labour’ (Wacquant, 2001: 406). The penalisation thesis can be used to understand why unemployed people are treated badly, and punished for being unemployed.
This points to tensions in the purpose of employment services in which they have become complicit in the administration of commodification which functions through the discipline of sanctions. This motive reflects the effects of marketisation, which have implicated civil society organisations whose financial survival is dependent on successfully commodifying and disciplining the unemployed. This has undermined the purported aspirations of New Public Management contractors to innovatively case manage long term unemployment because of the effects of quasi-marketisation itself (Considine et al, 2017; Gallet, 2016; Olney, 2016). This has eroded the capacity of the civil society organisations who run employment services to exercise their own agency in the solution of social problems.

In a critical perspective, the marketisation of employment services can be argued as functioning to implicate civil society organisations in the penalisation of the unemployed because their dependency on government funding neutralises their capacity for dissent (Dean, 2009; Wacquant, 2001). The agencies engaged to enforce this discipline are intentionally contacted at arm’s-length because private providers are able to implement more coercive strategies than their government predecessors (Dean, 2009; Rose, 2006). The surveillance reflects the form Wacquant (2001) called ‘social panopticism’. This panopticism involves employment services in surveillance and behavioural compliance, while themselves being subject to surveillance through the administration of their contracts (Wacquant, 2001).

Peillon’s (1998) conceptualisation of the welfare field is consistent with Offe’s (1984) perspective in the respect that commodification functions as a form of control. In employment services, this control is effected through the use of financial sanctions. In the language of Offe, sanctions are the primary tools used to control the behaviour of unemployed people. In critical terms, sanctions are instruments of discipline and their use can be seen as indicative of the commodifying imperatives of Workfare. The use of sanctions to discipline job seekers draws attention to the contemporary manifestation of Offe’s contradictions in a context in which welfare agencies are increasingly used to administer the form of social control associated with strategies of advanced liberal welfare regimes. The location of this study was therefore associated with the manifestation of the contradiction of Australia’s employment services in an era of advanced capitalism, where unemployed people are disciplined to become workers and punished for being poor.

Contribution of this thesis

The research is premised on a critical perspective in which employment services are situated as performing a commodifying function in which unique contradictions are reflected in the transformative rhetoric of individualisation. When Offe (1984) identified the contradictions of the welfare state in the mid-1980s, there was some optimism that the struggle between social-democratic- and capitalist-based interests could branch into three possible directions. These included the potential for the interests of the New Right and associated neoliberal economic and social policy to dominate;
or for social democratic influences to moderate the impact of capitalism; and finally, Offe (1984) identified the potential of the third sector in which capitalist interests would be mediated through the rationalities and interests of bureaucracies and civil society organisations.

Of these three potential directions for welfare, this thesis pursues the position that neoliberalism has come to dominate. The research therefore extends critical analysis of the contradictions of the welfare state in an era in which neoliberal interests dominate and have acted to neutralise the potential of the other influences. The contradictions of the welfare state are amplified in Australia’s marketised employment services. The location of this research is at the heart of one of these contradictions where it is now possible to see the effects of 20 years of individualisation, and marketisation of employment services in a context of advanced capitalism.

If the role of the social scientist is to identify crisis tendencies, then this research contributes to understanding the evolution of a crisis in welfare provision that Offe identified 30 years ago (Offe, 1984). There is a crisis in employment services, reflected in the conflicts at the street-level in which sanctions are threats to basic financial security that make job seekers fear employment services. In this respect then, the interests of this investigation are with the manifestations of the crisis of the welfare state in advanced capitalism. The manifestations of this crisis are conflict and resistance at the street-level. This conflict reflects the effects of disciplinary social policy services and the neoliberalisation of social and economic policy, which functions to discipline and penalise the poor.

This thesis contributes to critical social policy because resistance in employment services is examined from an interest-based perspective. An interest-based perspective extends the use of a Bourdieusian analysis to explain resistance in the context of the social relations of Workfare. By taking an interest-based approach, it is possible to see that interests motivate human behaviour at the level of individuals and the processes via which local struggles convert into political struggles. An interest-based perspective reinforces the view that the interests informing the employment services field reflect the market-oriented rationality of Workfare rather than the interests of job seekers.

An interest-based perspective draws attention to the way interests inform how policy is made and the interests it reflects. By taking an interest-based perspective on policy making, this thesis aims to draw attention to the ways in which all those involved in creating policy are implicated in reproducing social conditions in which neoliberal interests dominate. Through taking an interest-based perspective on the practice of policy making, attention is drawn to the stakes of the organisations involved in the battles for dominance in policy making.

**The structure of this thesis**

The following chapters all play a role in the development of this thesis about resistance in employment services. The literature review in Chapter 2 provides a contextual background about Australia’s marketised employment services and role they play in the administration of welfare
conditionality. This scholarship reflects a shift in citizen–state relations driven by neoliberal divestment in direct government service delivery to marketised services; as well as an increasing reliance on activation and conditionality in social policy strategies relating to unemployment.

Chapter 3 describes the theoretical orientation and introduces Pierre Bourdieu’s theory of practice (Bourdieu, 1977, 1990). There follows a section which describes some limitations of Bourdieu’s theory of practice, particularly in relation to agency, and the adaptations to his theory used in the analysis of the research problem. The concluding section explains how Michel Peillon’s sociology of welfare (1998) transfers to employment services which is defined as a field where the conditions governing interaction are determined by a welfare regime of Workfare.

Chapter 4 describes the research methodology and explains why narrative inquiry was used to collect data about incidents involving sanctions. The chapter firstly outlines the epistemological justification for employing narrative inquiry and then outlines the empirical research methods. Attention is given to describing the analytic strategies used to identify findings with salience to the research objectives as well as the limitations of the research methods.

Chapter 5 presents the job seeker findings and employs concepts from Bourdieu’s theory of practice to describe how job seekers negotiate the rules of conditionality in employment services. In these findings Bourdieusian field analysis is used to situate job seekers in the employment services field. The findings explore the effects of both the objective and subjective conditions of fields like employment services in which instrumental rules and discursive associations inform worker disposition and treatments of unemployed people. These findings proceed by explaining interactions in employment services using concepts from Bourdieu’s field theory that are useful for understanding how job seekers negotiate the employment services field.

In Chapter 5, the job seeker findings are presented in three parts. This first part of the job seeker findings situates job seekers in the employment services field in terms of field relations. Incidents involving sanctions provided the focus of the research and were used to understand how job seekers negotiate sanctions, and their effects on relations in employment services. These findings examine job seekers’ experience of the activity test and its relation to the use of sanctions and then explore the impact of the ‘any job’ imperative of Workfirst on relations. The findings provide examples of the effects of meeting these behavioural requirements on relations by reporting on the ways job seekers described how this made them feel. The findings are structured to report on the feelings that included distrust, disrespect, fear and disempowerment because of the intrusion.

Part 2 of the job seeker findings employs concepts from Bourdieu’s theory of practice to describe how job seekers negotiate the rules of conditionality in employment services. The findings illustrate the effects of field conditions in terms of the way in which capital is deployed as a resource in social negotiations. This aspect of Bourdieu’s theory is illustrated by showing how capital is deployed and
helps job seekers negotiate the conditions of the employment services field. The findings firstly illustrate the way in which capital functions as an enabling resource. The findings also capture the ways in which job seekers negotiate these conditions using active reflection. This focus on active reflection draws out the relationship between active reflection and field conditions. Then, attention is paid to the ways in which the field conditions dominate job seekers by providing low levels of recognition for other forms of capital and prioritising the acquisition of economic capital.

This part of the findings also provides examples of the way in which intersubjective recognition influences the outcomes of interactions. The examples provided focus specifically on job seeker observations of the way in which intersubjective recognition informs interactions with employment services and manifests in variations in judgements they make about the worthiness of job seekers. The following section provides examples of the forms of social suffering caused by the misrecognition associated with the constraints of the Workfare field.

Part 3 of the job seeker findings in chapter 5 builds on the theoretical analysis in Part 2 and presents a typology of resistance. This typology elaborates different forms of resistance, the nature of the resources that enable this resistance, and the conditions in which strategies of resistance are escalated beyond personal interactions to change the nature of society more generally. These findings provide the foundation for the interest-based perspective on resistance presented in the discussion in Chapter 7.

Chapter 6 draws on the interviews with the workers and describes their observations of resistance in job seekers, and how their employment services agency treated job seekers who were regarded as resistant. The findings from the workers reflect their experiences during the settling in of Job Services Australia (JSA) arrangements, as well as experiences they had as workers during the Job Network period. During the transition to JSA, employment services programs that had primarily support roles, like the Personal Support Program, were disbanded. The worker perspectives extend understanding of the effects of sanction on relations between job seekers and employment services. The perspectives of the workers also provide insight into how Workfare-type conditionality affects them as human actors with their own interests and aspirations on the welfare field, as well as the role they play in understanding how new forms of governance like sanctions and welfare conditionality are practiced in street-level settings. Consequently, these findings draw attention to the impact of intersubjective recognition on discretion and the presence of discriminatory attitudes towards job seekers.

The discussion in Chapter 7 is presented in two parts that reflect the overall objectives of the investigation. The first part discusses the findings in terms of the assumptions underpinning activation and conditionality premised on the rational actor and bad agency constructs of the welfare subject. This analysis draws out the normative and theoretical implications and highlights tensions in the construal of the welfare subject in public policy. Here the discussion highlights concerns about the use
of sanctions to motivate job seekers and the limitations of social and public policy assumptions of human motivation and choice. The second part of this chapter discusses the implications of the findings in terms of the theoretical objective of this research. This section of the discussion introduces the interest-based perspective on resistance as a sociological account of resistance generated from analysis of the theoretical findings of this investigation.

Chapter 8 is the final chapter and sets out how the research objectives were examined in this thesis. It proceeds by providing an overview of how the research progressed, a brief summary of the findings, and the theoretical elaboration developed from the findings. From there, the implications of these findings for social policy making are explained, along with some insights drawn from the theoretical elaboration informing this thesis on the practice of policy making itself. The chapter concludes with a summary of opportunities for further research.

Chapter 1 conclusion

This chapter provided an overview of the thesis. It identified the motivation for this research as originating from reports of high levels of interpersonal conflict at the street-level of employment services. The research question was intended to provide scope for the question of resistance to be examined in a way that is relevant to public policy scholarship about job seeker choice and motivation; as well as to theory about resistance in the context of advanced liberal governance where strategies like individualisation have transformative intentions. The theoretical orientation was explained with some introductory observations on the way it employs Bourdieusian field analysis, as informed by Peillon’s sociology of welfare.

The research methodology was explained as comprising narrative interviews with job seekers and workers about their experiences of incidents involving sanctions. Interviews with job seekers and workers were explained as offering potential to obtain richer understanding of interactions in employment services and the effects of intersubjective recognition. There followed an overview of the thesis structure, along with some preliminary comments on the relationship of this research to existing scholarship about the function of employment services in advanced capitalism.

Ultimately, this thesis aims to contribute to social and public policy debate about employment services. The ways in which employment services are resourced and the formula of employment support provided by these agencies are matters of critical concern to the social and public policy scholars interested in welfare reform. In the treatments of unemployment, there are important questions about the ways in which governments deploy strategies of governance to effect policy goals and the ways in which the agencies employed to implement these policies are resourced and utilised. The literature review in the next chapter will further contextualise this thesis in scholarship related to welfare reform and employment services.
Chapter 2 – Literature review

This chapter reviews the welfare reforms that have accompanied the shift to neoliberal economic management and social policy and their relevance to employment services. The argument informing this chapter is that due to the effects of these welfare reforms, employment services perform a disciplinary role associated with the supervision of job seeker behaviour.

The chapter begins by providing an overview of the role of employment services within a critical perspective on welfare systems in the era marked by the ascendency of neoliberalism. It then provides an overview of welfare reform in the 1980s and 1990s when the strategies of individualisation and marketisation gained strength. The chapter then reviews critical perspectives on the role of employment services as part of the welfare service infrastructure. It summarises the existing street-level research on the effects of disciplinary social policy and the forms of resistance that have already been noted in those studies. This leads to a discussion of the nature of the gap in critical understanding of resistance in employment services and an explanation of the perspective from which resistance is interrogated in this thesis.

Employment services in the context of welfare regimes and social policy

When viewed in an historic context, unemployment has always been a central concern of social policy. TH Marshall described the way the post-war welfare state was negotiated through the establishment of the rights of citizenship and social citizenship (Marshall, 1950). Marshall argued citizenship guided the path ‘which led directly to the egalitarian social policies of the twentieth century. It also had an integrating effect, or, at least, was an important ingredient in an integrating process’ (Marshall, 1950: 150).

Welfare reform scholarship draws attention the ways in which post-war welfare regimes have shifted in the wake of global capitalism and economic conditions. The formulas for the extent of this support are identified in the concept of a welfare regime. The variations in welfare regimes were described in Esping-Andersen’s ‘three-world typology’ (Esping-Andersen, 1990). There are clear ideological and historical informants of welfare regimes. Deacon (2002) illustrated this by mapping welfare regimes to policies that reflected the moral and political philosophical informants of policy. The treatments of unemployment have changed over time in response to the unique conditions of each state, with some ideological influences being more pervasive in some countries than others. Dean (2007) illustrated the ways in which countries with stronger histories of social democracy approached the problem of unemployment through approaches more dependent on social protection and demand side approaches to creating employment. Where social policy has been inflected by more authoritarian and competitive ideologies, the corresponding welfare work model becomes more coercive, and the obligation to work overrides the liberty of the individual (Dean, 2007).
Australia’s welfare regime had its genesis as the wage earners’ welfare state (Castles, 1994). The wage earners’ welfare state reflected the discursive and political emphasis on the protection of workers’ rights, even during unemployment, and this provided the justification for unemployment benefits (Smith, 2017). The wage earners welfare state reflected the use of Keynesian monetary policy, which enabled economic growth to occur based on borrowing (Smith, 2017). In Jessop’s famous characterisations of the impact of global capitalism on welfare state formations, he identified this period as the ‘Keynesian welfare national state’ (or KWNS) (Jessop, 1999: 349).

Employment services and related welfare to work policy framework are an extension of a welfare regime and are instrumentalised as active labour market policies (Bonoli, 2010). Active labour market programs (ALMPs) provide support for the unemployed by imposing job search and participation requirements on inactive target populations and are usually accompanied by work preparation and job search services. At a broad level ALMPs can be segmented into two broad categories, the first being capability development and activation strategies (Dingeldey 2007). Bonoli (2010) defines four ideal type active labour market policies and distinguished between incentive reinforcement, employment assistance, occupation and human capital investment. The actual programs delivered as active labour market interventions have been grouped into four main types: job search, counselling and case management to increase job matching efficiency; job creation schemes in the public and non-profit sector; wage subsidies for employers and investment in human capital formation (Cook, 2008).

**Workfare and neoliberalism**

In many advanced capitalist democracies, the function the welfare system has been subordinated to the dominance of capitalism, and into becoming what Jamrozic (2005) referred to as a ‘post-welfare state’ or others as a Workfare regime (Carney, 2007; Dean, 2006; McDonald & Marston, 2005). At its fundamentals Workfare is an ideological position that favours market forces as Jessop famously characterised (Jessop, 1999). As such it is strongly associated with neoliberal shifts in economic management and social policy.

Neoliberalism is a contested term that signifies an era in which governments adopted strategies to reform economic systems and social policy. The term neoliberalism was originally adopted by the New Left to describe the shift from Keynesian economic management, to the deregulation associated with the Thatcher and Reagan eras (Brenner & Theodore, 2005). However, it is important not to over generalise about neoliberal strategies as Brenner and Theodore (2005) noted the forms they take occur within ‘inherited frameworks of institutional organization, political economic, regulation, and sociopolitical struggle’ (Brenner & Theodore, 2005).

Brady (2014) also emphasized ‘the cumulative impacts of successive ‘waves’ of neoliberalization upon uneven institutional landscapes (Brady, 2014:16-17). Brady identified how neoliberalism can be both understood as a dominant ideology “disseminated by hegemonic economic and political groups”
in order to “restore capitalist class power,” or as governmentality. In the first ideological sense, neoliberal reforms are associated with Hayek (1962) who resurrected liberal ideas of citizenship and the individual in free states. The neoliberals argued that the welfare state was incompatible with the primacy of markets and individual freedoms. The “withering” of the welfare state” is designed to prevent governments from over-investing in the infrastructure of services to maintain “dependence” (Connelly & Hayward 2012, Clarke & Newman, 1997).

The governmentality perspective on neoliberalism draws attention to the shift in modes of governance Foucault identified as bio-political transformation. Bio-power functions through subjectification in which standards of behaviour and conduct are normalised. These have been described as sophisticated forms of governance involving the adoption of approaches from behavioural economics that seek to transform subjectivities (Stenner & Taylor, 2008; Whitehead, et al., 2011; Cromby & Willis, 2014).

Here the bio-political transformations of neoliberalism function by shifting economic responsibilities into the realm of the personal. The strategies identified as individualisation are those of advanced liberal governance, in which state apparatus seek to transform subjective orientation on issues like unemployment so that the problem of unemployment is located in the behaviour and orientation of individuals rather than located in externalities. In the governmental perspective the shift to individualisation involve shifts in behavioural requirements intended to transform passive into active citizens. Through the normalisation of individualisation strategies, the title of job seeker is extended and symbolises deficit, to include any individual on welfare benefits who has activity requirements. Through these discursive effects, the expectation of job seeking is normalised, and governance is achieved through subjectification.

**Economic rationalism and neoconservatism**

In the context of this research, the term neoliberalism is used to identify the eras of economic and social policy associated with the active society reforms that commenced by the 1980s. As noted in many places elsewhere, these neoliberal economic management reforms accompanied a shift in social policy intended to reduce expenditure on government services, and welfare in particular.

As applied to the Australian context neoliberal economic and governmental restructuring has had specific impacts on Australia’s welfare system and social policy. In the case of the unemployed, the need has been to shift the welfare burden and responsibility for becoming employable has become more manifestly the obligation of the citizen, signalling a renegotiation of citizenship based on neoliberal ideas. In general, as applied to the Australian context neoliberalism has entailed an increased focus on welfare rationing more generally as responsibility associated with the provision of services has been transferred to citizens. The role of government is to play only a residual role in social service provision while the risk of failing to become employed has been transferred to unemployed people.
Despite this common imperative, the forms of neoliberalism adopted by successive Australian governments have varied, due to political disposition and global economic conditions. Since the 1980s in particular, Australia’s welfare regime has been restructured as successive governments adopted neoliberal economic and social policy and divested in public services (Green, 2002). Welfare provision has progressively been segmented and analysed in terms of the ways it can effectively be privatised and shifted to the domain of personal rather than social responsibilities. The ways that responsibility for risk has shifted from the state to the individual has been described in by Beck (1992) as individualisation, along with the heightened focus on the nature of post-industrial identity and individualism.

The first wave of neoliberal inspired reforms was adopted by the Federal Government during the Hawke–Keating Labor Government (1983–1996) where a new era of economic and social policy identified as economic rationalism (Stokes, 2004). The shift to economic rationalism in Australia was argued as a necessary response to changing economic and social conditions of the 1970s, where long-term unemployment had been growing (Stokes, 2004). The new economic management of economic rationalism adopted in Australia reflected the influence of neoliberalism, specifically in relation to the separation of government from the domain of the personal. Economic rationalism involved strategies to transfer a range of social and economic costs and risks from government to citizens.

Economic rationalism informed the design of labour market program policy since the early 1980s, when risk and cost benefit analysis were used as rationing devices to optimise spending outcomes (Bessant, et al., 2003). These were the ‘active society’ reforms and signalled a social policy shift towards individualisation, in which the idea of activation informed strategies intended to transform passive welfare recipients into active welfare agents (Wright, 2016).

In the early 1990s, the shift to economic rationalism was reinforced by the OECD’s Jobs Study (OECD, 1994). The subsequent Jobs Strategy contained recommendations to reform active labour programs and social security benefits (OECD, 1995). The OECD’s recommendations were adopted in the Working Nation package of 1994, where higher activity levels, and welfare conditionality measures informed employment services in the Job Network.

**Individualisation, activation and conditionality**

The shift to individualisation was further cemented in the reforms of the conservative Howard government (1996–2007). The Howard era was a significant chapter in welfare reform because it resulted in the consolidation of the individualisation and economic rationalist shifts with a neoconservative twist. In this respect, Australian welfare reform reflects the discourses of welfare reform in the USA, where the influence of paternalism is indicative of the influence of neoconservative constructions of welfare dependency (Green, 2002). The influence of neo-
conservatism was apparent in the underclass thesis of welfare dependence, which was appropriated in the paternalist public discourse that accompanied the Howard era of welfare reform (Martin, 2006).

The paternalist discourse became apparent in the neoconservative tone of the public debate that accompanied the McClure review of the Social Security System in 1999. This review concluded with the publication of the McClure Report (2000), which acted as the vehicle for the articulation of the principle of Mutual Obligation (McClure, 2000). The McClure review reframed the ‘social contract’ and reinforced the idea of reciprocity: that those of working age who can should work, and that welfare should be the preserve of only the most disadvantaged and worthy of this support.

Contractarian thinking informed the discourse of Mutual Obligation used to justify the introduction of unpaid work experience in the form of Work for the Dole. A distinguishing feature of the contractarian moral discourse is the obligation citizens owe the community for welfare, rather than it being seen as an acceptable norm during periods of unemployment (Dean, 2006; Saunders, 2004). Australia’s Mutual Obligation is identified as a contractarian expression of paternalism because it imposes explicit obligations on people receiving benefits to give something back in return for their welfare (Carney & Ramia, 2001).

The Australians Working Together policy wave of reforms (2001) reflected the recommendations of the McClure review. These strategies resulted in the development of the Active Participation Model, which further strengthened activation strategies for single parents and young people. In this tranche of reforms, the idea of Work for the Dole as Mutual Obligation was extended. Although Work for the Dole was mooted as early as 1987 under the Labor Government, it was not until 1997 that legislation was passed by the Liberal Government (Yeend, 1994). Originally targeted as an activity for at risk young people, it was following the McClure review that Work for the Dole became a mainstream Mutual Obligation activity. In 2009, full-time Work for the Dole was introduced as part of the Welfare to Work reforms of 2006 to target job seekers considered to be work avoiders. These activity levels are rationalised through the contractarian discourse of Mutual Obligation, in which the unemployed are required to demonstrate their willingness to work and ‘repay’ society for being unemployed. Importantly, these reforms were accompanied by the discursive justification for this shift in the discourse of Mutual Obligation, which served to reinforce the reframed social contract of Workfare.

**Workfare and Workfirst**

The terms Work first and Workfare are often used synonymously. The distinction between the terms can be understood as the different between an operational set of policies and a broader political and ideological focus. Yet while Workfirst signifies a particular programmatic setting, it is a strategy of a Workfare regime which prioritises work before human capital development by providing incentive to employment services agencies to get people into jobs quickly (Peck & Theodore, 2000).
distinction was captured by Peck who identified Workfare as the assemblage of practices which emphasise the primary objective of employment as opposed to other social activity (such as caring, community work and volunteering) or inactivity (Peck 2001: 10).

Australia’s welfare regime has been described as a Workfare regime because it reflects neoliberal orientation so that job creation is dependent on economic management and job seekers are commodified as entry level labour for a deregulated labour market (Carney, 2006; 2007; Dean, 2006; McDonald & Marston, 2005). As Dostal (2008) noted, Workfare is a contested term, and the forms it takes can be categorised according to a taxonomy of four major normative justifications: the social democratic, labourist; social conservative and the neoliberal discursive frame. Each of the four positions grant different justifications that provide legitimacy for workfare as a policy. Furthermore, workfare may be characterised by either ‘market workfare’ or ‘make work’ workfare (Dostal, 2008). Similarly, the OECD suggested that activation programmes may be thought of as “workfare”, a job-creation or work-experience programme that pays unemployment benefits or an equivalent wage level but without delivering further services (OECD, 2005). Australia’s welfare to work strategies draws features from the market workfare approach since it seeks to align the availability of a low skilled workforce (excess labour) to employer demand for low waged (contingent) labour. It is also ‘make work’ workfare because of the centrality of Work for the Dole and other work-like activity mandated as necessary for receipt of unemployment benefits.

The term Workfare was applied to the Australian context when Work for the Dole was expanded in the 2006 welfare to work reforms. (Carney, 2006; 2007; Dean, 2006; McDonald & Marston, 2005). In the Australian context, Workfirst has been actively pursued through programmatic settings since the welfare to work reforms of 2006, because pre-employment programs were disbanded and more benefit recipients were activated. These reforms were implemented by shifting program funding away from personal support and human capital development towards Workfirst. Workfirst as programmatic policy limits the options available to job seekers and employment services agencies because only a limited range of work insertion activities are funded by the policy making agency. Workfirst can therefore be understood as the programmatic settings for employment services policy, through which a broader Workfare regime operates.

The features of Workfare in Australia include low levels of unemployment benefits; activation strategies and high levels of activity enforced by financial sanctions; and behavioural supervision provided by marketised employment services agencies. Unemployment benefits are maintained at low rates to discourage welfare dependence, and investment in social insurance is one of the lowest in the OECD despite Australia’s relative prosperity (ACOSS, 2011; OECD, 2007). In Australia, the policy settings of Workfare have been optimised to induce unemployed people to accept any job offer because of the low rate of benefit payments and the low personal utility of complying with the activities and the penalties for noncompliance. Job seeker activity levels are actively monitored, and
behavioural compliance is enforced through financial sanction. If job seeker behaviour is judged as non-compliant, employment services use financial sanctions to make job seekers comply with the rules of conditionality.

**Marketisation of the Workfare regime**

The marketisation of employment services is a critical feature of Australia’s Workfare regime. When the conservative Howard Government was elected in 1997, it implemented the agenda to completely privatise employment services. This was the largest foray into the privatisation of public employment services in the world and was heralded as a ‘radical experiment’ by the OECD (Eardley, 2002). The marketisation of employment services reflected the shift in governance and public administration to New Public Management (NPM) and the adoption of post-Fordist decentralised governance (Considine, 1999). The NPM intent behind the shift to marketised employment services was signalled in the political justification that accompanied the changes, such as Prime Minister Keating’s announcement that ‘healthy competition will lead to service improvement’ (Keating, 1994). It was anticipated that privatised employment services would be more able to case manage unemployment by adopting the practices drawn from social work (Eardley & Thompson, 1997).

When adopting NPM theory, governments introduce neoliberal fundamentals such as competition between providers, and choice for unemployed people by establishing quasi-market mechanisms (Considine, Lewis & Sullivan, 2011; Le Grand & Bartlett, 1993). The marketisation of employment services reflects the objectives of neoliberalism because it shifts the resources provided to employment services agencies into payment-by-results contracts. Individualisation and marketisation therefore both function to activate people on welfare by making them job seekers, and by activating employment services agencies and their workers to enforce the rules of welfare conditionality (Brodkin & Marston, 2013).

The marketisation of employment services is distinguished by outcome-based funding and competitive performance-based survival. The outcome-based funding model means that employment services agencies monitor job seekers’ behaviour to ensure they are compliant with their activity requirements. This reinforces the observation of Shutes and Taylor (2014), who described outcome-based contracts like employment services as a form of conditionality. The conditionality of employment outcome payments drives employment services to place jobseekers into jobs quickly. This kind of conditionality has also been noted as the triple activation of agencies like employment services, ‘which reaches beyond the unemployed individuals who are policy’s official subjects, to the organisations which are policy’s implementers, and down to the street-level staff who are policy’s putative producers’ (Brodkin & Marston, 2013: 11).

The ‘triple activation’ and conditionality of outcome payments to employment services agencies have amplified their survival concerns. Payment-by-result contracts function to drive employment services
providers to prioritise their survival concerns over the needs of job seekers. The incentives drive employment services agencies to develop caseload level strategies that optimise the financial and performance rewards of the employment services contracts (Gallet, 2016; Olney, 2016).

Employment services agencies are responsible for monitoring compliance with the activation requirements of ALMPs. Compliance with the terms of these activation requirements is now identified as part of a broader trend towards ‘welfare conditionality’ (Dwyer & Wright, 2014). Welfare conditionality has a long history in Australia, as unemployment benefits were always dependent on job search activity (Green, 2002). However, as forms of welfare conditionality have become embedded in strategies of governance like Australia’s activation, their features have become more strongly defined.

The forms employment services conditionality has taken have also changed to focus on specific forms of behaviour other than just job search. This is described as signifying the onset of behavioural relations in which welfare payments are conditional on exhibiting the right kind of job search behaviour and interpersonal skills (Dwyer, 2014; McDonald & Marston, 2005). This is the form in which employment services welfare conditionality has evolved to function through particular technologies of governance (Dean, 2005; McDonald & Marston, 2003). The term employability has been coined to describe the shift towards focusing on the deficiencies of unemployed people and the need for them to change to suit the conditions of the labour market (Peck & Theodore, 2000). It is the responsibility of employment services to transform unemployed people into employable job seekers by identifying their labour market deficiencies and getting them into jobs quickly. Employment services providers are required to assess and address all of these potential barriers to help the unemployed person become ‘employable’.

Welfare conditionality is instrumentalised through eligibility criteria for welfare benefits and activity tests, which are captured in a document called a ‘job plan’. Eligibility criteria are used to shift welfare recipients off pensions and on to activated and lower-paying unemployment benefits, where they become classified as job seekers. The categories of welfare recipients targeted in the redefinition of benefit eligibility criteria are primarily single parents, people with disabilities and mature age people.

When participation in employment services becomes mandatory, job seekers are required to provide evidence of behaviour that meets the activity test. The activity test is an instrumental measure that determines the ‘conditions of conduct’ (Clasen & Clegg, 2007) that job seekers must meet in order to retain their benefit eligibility. For most job seekers, the activity test is 30 hours per week, which equates to the number of hours of activity required to get a job seeker off benefits at the minimum wage. For job seekers such as primary carers and people with disabilities, the activity test has been set at lower rates, usually 15 hours per week.
These forms of activity are now called Mutual Obligation activities (DoE, 2017a). These obligations are documented in a plan that job seekers must agree to that sets out what they will be doing to get a job (referred to as a job plan, or Employment Pathway Plan) (DoE, 2017a). The job plan documents the number of appointments job seekers must attend, the number of jobs they must apply for and other job search requirements, training or work experience activities, and Mutual Obligation activities such as Work for the Dole.

The conditionality of welfare benefit payments is enforced by threat of sanction, which is reinforced at every appointment. If job seeker behaviour is judged as non-compliant, employment services use financial sanctions to get job seekers to comply with the activity test. Financial sanctions are calculated on the number of days job seekers are judged to have been non-compliant. The minimum financial penalty is one day of payment, which equals approximately $35 out of the $256 weekly benefit payment. Tougher eight-week non-payment penalties are imposed when job seekers are judged as having behaved obstructively towards getting a job, or having left a job without a reasonable excuse (DoE, 2017b). Employment services workers are directly responsible for assessing if job seeker behaviour is compliant. This involves decision making about whether job seekers have provided reasonable excuses for non-compliance, such as missing appointments or leaving a job (DoE, 2017b). Since 2011, jobseeker payments are suspended immediately when they do not attend activities designated in the job plan. The intention of this change was to make the penalty for non-compliance affect job seekers more immediately instead of waiting for a review by Centrelink. Since this change, every quarter, one in eight job seekers receives a financial sanction3 and this trend remains constant at the time of writing.

In conclusion, the shift to the Workfare regime is the outcome of a 20-year process involving the adopting of neoliberal social and economic policy. It is the result of a shift in social relations towards a contractarian renegotiation of the social contract. The key influences underpinning Australia’s Workfare regime are the shift to economic rationalism as neoliberal economic strategy, the individualisation reflected in activation and welfare conditionality, and the neoconservative shift towards the contractarianism of Mutual Obligation. The contractarian social contract imposes obligations on citizen behaviour to be entitled to welfare payments, and authorises the use of coercive social policy (Carney, 2007; Dean, 2007). Together, these shifts have involved the renegotiation of the post-war welfare settlement and social citizenship, and reflect ongoing political and discursive struggles over the nature of welfare states.

These are the principle features of the Australian Workfare regime that emerged in the context of the neoliberal reforms of social policy. Employment services have become the street-level agencies

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³ Data on job seeker sanctions are available here: [https://employment.gov.au/job-seeker-compliance-data](https://employment.gov.au/job-seeker-compliance-data). In the Quarter Oct–Dec 2013 from the active caseload of 800,000 job seekers, there were 60,000 financial sanctions – 45,000 for one day or more, and 13,240 eight week penalties.
responsible for monitoring job seekers compliance with the rules of welfare conditionality. This responsibility is further reinforced by their own dependence on the funding associated with employment services contracts, which compel them to implement policy that has become increasingly coercive. This coercion is effected through the use of financial sanctions used to secure the behavioural conformity of the unemployed.

Contradictions of employment services

In Marshall’s analysis of social citizenship, he identified a paradox between the imperatives of the capitalist class system and citizenship that remains a central tension in social policy debates. The classic contradiction or paradox of the welfare state reflects the role governments play in mediating the demands of capitalist economy against efforts to maintain social cohesion. In effect, the welfare system provides compensation for the ‘diswelfare’ of capitalism’ (Dean & Melrose, 1997). Pierson (2002) argued that the welfare state is essentially a social democratic institution that has been threatened and restructured in the context of advanced capitalism. This view suggests that welfare systems and capitalism will never be happy bedfellows, and this is a classic crisis that persists in the era of advanced capitalism (Pierson, 2002).

The function of employment services can be inserted into broader critical debate about the role of welfare states in the era of advanced capitalism. In critical terms, employment services can be characterised as public institutions responsible for administering forms of social control intended to achieve the commodification of labour (Offe, 1984). This function of commodification is a requirement of the capitalist system to maintain the surplus of unemployment to secure the profitable supply of labour.

Since Offe, in an era of advanced capitalism and the governance achieved through the discipline of an advanced liberal welfare regime, the contradictions of the welfare state are amplified in employment services. A critical perspective highlights conflicts of ideology and perspective that are apparent in the discourse and justifications assigned to the functions of government policy. The mainstream discourses reinforce the justification for neoliberal social policy. This discourse is ideological because it has been designed to achieve certain purposes, which are normalised as public and social policy goals (Jamrozic & Nocella, 1998).

The contradictions of employment services are apparent in the basic descriptive differences between the normative function of employment services and the critical perspective. In the normative perspective, employment services can be described as performing a public service that helps connect unemployed people to jobs, and that the work they do is a form of benevolent assistance. This rhetoric is apparent in the discourse in which the purpose of employment services is framed as helping the unemployed get jobs that will lead them out of poverty.
Associated with this rhetoric is the idea that a job is the best form of welfare, as well as the bludger discourse of welfare dependence, which serves to normalise the activation imperative (Archer, 2009; Rueda, 2006). The most recent articulation of this discursive construction of welfare dependence as a problem of dependency was appropriated in the political discourse heralding the end of the age of entitlement⁴. This rhetoric is present in particular in the language used in the political arena relating to ‘ending of the age of entitlement’, and the bludger discourse. It serves to normalise the function of employment services and the strategies of marketisation in a way that Peillon identified as a form of misrecognition (Peillon, 1998).

**Individualisation and choice**

The contradictions of employment services can be explained in terms a paradox of liberalism, contractarianism and choice and the reproduction of inequality. These are essentially contradictions relating to choice and commodification. An example of the contradictions in the bureaucratic frame informing employment services can be drawn from the public policy perspectives that situate employment services in a discourse, endorsed by the OECD (2005), of behavioural economics. The normative purpose of employment services are explained and justified in behavioural economic terms in which exposure to employment services is often framed in terms of behavioural incentives such as ‘carrots and sticks’.

The behavioural economic perspective informs the normative explanation of the effects of active labour market programs and the related public policy perspectives on motivation and choice. In the behavioural economics sense, welfare agents are construed as rational actors who are capable of making responsible choices and who respond to behavioural incentives drawn from behavioural economics. This rational actor construct is present in the normative construal of a job seeker and provides the justification for activation backed by conditionality and sanction. From a behavioural economics perspective, the OECD describes activation as appealing to the mobilising elements of self-interest for economic advancement and avoiding activity with low personal utility (OECD, 2005).

Thus, it is assumed that unemployed people will exercise rational choices in which getting a job is a goal with which they agree. It is assumed that a job is a rational choice when, in fact, this limits the extent to which individuals might wish to engage in other activity or even idleness.

The design of conditionality in employment services reflected the use of a transformative discourse, which involves transforming ‘passive welfare dependents’ into ‘active welfare subjects’ (Williams, 1999; Wright, 2012; Wright, 2016). The transformative discourse functions to legitimise

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individualisation, normalised in terms of the public policy and behavioural economic rhetoric associated with activation and economic participation.

Yet even so, this normalisation fails to disguise some of the fundamental contradictions apparent within its own discursive frames. This is because the rational actor construct competes in discursive and public policy terms with the bad agency construct derived from the neoconservative underclass construal of welfare dependence (Martin, 2007; Wright, 2012). In contrast to a behavioural economic approach to human behaviour, the paternalist construct justifies coercive manoeuvres to shift behaviours regardless of the impact of the policy on free choice. New paternalism, Mead argued, does not pretend to offer welfare subjects choice; it operates on the basis that target populations are not responsible enough to be offered choice (Mead, 1997: 5). The potential for a ‘bad agency’ necessitates the management of the risks associated with job seekers who make ‘bad’ choices, or whose choices are compromised by the moral hazard of welfare dependence.

The construct of the welfare subject present in paternalistic arguments, such as that exemplified by Mead (1997), is that the decisions of welfare subjects involve the use of rational reflexivity that is compromised by moral hazard if they are not controlled or supervised. Paternalists argue that governments can directly intervene to change the incentives offered within welfare systems so as to reduce moral hazard, which create welfare dependency. In fact, according to the paternalists, to do otherwise is to create the conditions for moral hazard, because individuals exercising economic rationality will opt to remain on welfare rather than get a job. This is the premise of paternalism informing the use of sanctions as a form of discipline.

These contradictions of choice and commodification were identified in moral philosophical objections to the coercive nature of Workfirst and Mutual Obligation. Quinlan drew attention to the paradox of liberalism, which asserts that individuals should be able choose what is in their own self-interest. The paradox reflects the influence of neo-conservatism in paternalistic social policy strategies, where the risk of moral hazard legitimises the use of coercion and punishment (Quinlan, 2007). Lack of choice highlights concerns about the extent to which conditionality represents an erosion of welfare rights and, therefore, the rights of citizenship premised on the goals of citizens of equal standing (Deacon, 1994; Dwyer, 1998). Economists and philosophers have jointly questioned the ethics of coercive social policy, in which goals like equality and inclusion are sacrificed for the goals of keeping people active (Yeatman, 2004; White, 2013).

While the behavioural economic justification for activation strategies is presented in innocuous terms there is a debate over the extent to which neoliberal strategies should seek to change individual behaviours and choices. The debate here reflects the differences in views on state-citizen relations based on different construal and categorisation of citizen moral responsibilities. These moral philosophical concerns are present in the behavioural sciences particularly as new interventions such
as ‘nudge’ are debated. Behavioural science, particularly in the form of nudge, involves the construal of welfare agents who can exercise choices when they are persuaded these are in their own interest without changing the moral basis of their beliefs. Sunstein clearly distinguishes between behavioural influences that seek to intervene for reasons that promote objective well-being as judged by their reflective selves and strategies designed to inhibit choices that are not considered to offer social or personal improvements (Sunstein 2004: .54). Exponents of nudge argue they adopted a libertarian form of paternalism known as soft paternalism (Kurchin, 2017). Libertarian paternalists want to make choosers better off (Wilkins, 2013).

However, despite the libertarian intention of nudge policies, critics suggest it is often difficult to locate the boundaries between nudge and the interventionist paternalism because of variance in the subjective interpretation and treatments involved in the administration of these strategies (White 2013, Cromby & Willis, 2014). As paternalism seeks to change subjectivities it is criticised by scholars with libertarian interests (Ben-Ishai, 2008). The ethical conflict has strongly represented in feminist critique of welfare to work and paternalism (Ben-Ishai 2008). The conflict she identifies involves assertion of liberal rights of individuals to make their own choices based on an identity that has not been construed with the intention of being changed to comply with the active and moral model of the welfare regime.

In critical terms this unease reflects the disconnect between the paternalism which justifies coercive interventions and the supposedly empowering prospect of choice and control. This incoherence reflects the conflict inherent in policy designed with mixed politico-philosophies of the contractarianism associated with paternalism, and the liberalism associated with behavioural economics. On one hand we pretend and promote the capability of human actors to reflect on their contexts and act rationally toward their own improvement. Yet, when paternalism is justified it is because moral hazard interferes with this rationality and causes individuals to act in ways that contribute to their own harm, and which are destructive to the communities around them. The choice architecture is severely limited by the excessive forms of activation and conditionality associated with Workfare which reflects paternalistic influences.

**Governmentality and choice**

Governmental perspectives also highlight some of the fundamental paradoxes related to the contradictory discourses of activation and individualisation. The governmental critique of employment services provides another perspective on the contradictions of choice inherent in commodification. Anglo-Foucauldian scholarship provides a critical perspective on employment services because it focuses on the ways in which advanced liberalism governs through ‘freedom’ and the conduct of conduct (Dean, 2009; Rose, 2006). The governmental perspective focuses on the ways in which forms of social control are embedded in practice and thought, in the language and discourses.
that are used to express and define the nature of a social problem. In this perspective, activation projects are sophisticated strategies of governance. Welfare conditionality is regarded as a disciplinary strategy employing the bio-power of ‘techniques of the self’ such as activation, self-improvement and human capital development services to overcome the labour market deficiencies of unemployed people (Dean, 1995; McDonald & Marston, 2003; McDonald & Marston, 2005).

In an approach that bears similarities to governmental discourse analysis, Martin (2007) used a perspective that drew on Bourdieu’s theory of practice to examine the ways in which the underclass thesis informed the attitudes of young people and workers. In this analysis, blame for unemployment was located with the unemployed, rather than with any structural causes in the labour market (Martin, 2007). The power of the underclass thesis is that it results in a paradox of hegemonic reproduction which is evident in the way the welfare recipients have been shown to vilify others considered to be bludging or rorting the system (Crisp, 2010). Research with unemployed men in areas of high unemployment has shown they don’t identify as the bludgers and scroungers although they readily use those labels for their neighbours (Marsden, 1982). These observations of the discursive imposition of blame for welfare dependence was also captured in interviews in deprived neighbourhoods in the UK found that “getting” tough discourses dominate participant views even those who have experienced frustration at getting jobs (Crisp, Batty et al. 2009). This tendency is supported by recent Australian research in which the phenomenon of disassociation of benefit recipients and common stereotypes of bludgers and welfare cheats was reported (Bodsworth, 2010; Murphy, et al. 2011).

**Penalisation of the poor**

The second contradiction is about the purpose of employment services. The normative purpose of employment services is to help alleviate the poverty of unemployment by assisting unemployed people to get jobs. The second contradiction highlighted by the critical perspective relates to the area of critique associated with Wacquant’s (2001) penalisation thesis. This penalisation thesis postulates that Workfare functions as part of the penal apparatus of neoliberal governance that ‘serves to discipline the fractions of the working class that buck at the new, precarious service jobs; it neutralises and warehouses its most disruptive elements, or those considered superfluous with regard to the transformations of the demand for labour’ (Wacquant, 2001: 406). Similarly, this can be understood as residualisation in which social policy making reflects the neoliberal shift of blame for social problems to the unemployed (Martin, 2006; Jamrozik & Nocella, 1998).

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5 This is the paradox of misrecognition, a concept closely related to Marxist alienation and domination that will be explored in following chapters.
Scholars interested in the intersection of neoliberal labour market management and employment services have identified concerns about the function of employment services. Building on Offe (1994), these critics have identified suspect alignment between measures designed to produce labour market deregulation and Welfare to Work as a coincidence of capitalist interests (see, for example, Bourdieu and Nice, 1998; Grover, 2009; Standing, 2011; Wacquant, 2001). These critics have viewed employment services as the delivery mechanism to enforce the supply of cheap labour for a rampantly deregulated labour market (Carney, 2007; Grover, 2009). This necessitates the creation of a supply of unemployed people that, in Australia, functions in economic terms through the ‘non-accelerating inflation rate of unemployment’ or NAIRU (Mitchell, 1998).

Even more critical, Grover suggested that the privatisation of employment services creates a profit incentive where the trade of job seekers supports the capital-based interests of employment services agencies (Grover, 2009: 500). This is a concern that is amplified in the context of the growth of profit-based international Welfare to Work agencies.

In this view, employment services are considered to contribute to the ‘precariatisation’ of the labour force to support the interests of global capital rather than individual welfare (Carney, 2007; Grover, 2009). Similarly, Standing, in the UK (Standing, 2011), and Mitchell, in Australia (Mitchell, 2001), provided strenuous critique of the disingenuity of market reliance as a mechanism to create full employment. The growth of the precariat is at once a strategic dismantling of the labour movement, and a risk for higher levels of social cohesion (Standing, 2011).

The precariatisation of Australia’s labour force is supported by the growth in casualised work (Campbell, 2004, 2005) and, more recently, by the share and platform economy – a phenomenon known as on-demand work provided by independent contractors (De Stefano, 2016). While casualisation is attributed to labour market deregulation (Campbell & Brosnan, 2005), ‘gig economy work’ is associated with the growth of platform economies and digital disruption. For unemployed people, this means there has been growth in jobs that are insecure and which provide minimal industrial relations protection. Growth in Australia’s labour market is projected to continue to shift from traditional forms of full-time work to contract-based jobs (Hajkowicz, et al., 2016). Dunlop (2016) mounted the argument that the future may be workless, thus drawing attention to further contradictions of capitalism and the welfare system, in which demand on the welfare system will grow unless there are shifts in the recognition provided for contract-based and gig economy work.

Empirical research and the penalisation thesis

The evaluation of employment services can be seen to reflect the effects of residualisation and penalisation. The penalisation perspective on employment services suggest they serve the function of
enforcing the rules of welfare conditionality, in which poverty is treated with threat of more poverty. In the independent evaluation, activation policy and marketised employment services are described as not being effective at supporting long-term unemployed people and those who are the hardest to help (Davidson, 2011; Finn, 2011; Fowkes, 2011; Koutsogeorgopoulou, 2011). Two thirds of the unemployed are classified as long-term unemployed, meaning job seekers survive on low payments for extended periods (Davidson, 2011).

The psychological effects of unemployment include anxiety and depression, which can exacerbate or precipitate mental illnesses (Murphy & Athanasou, 1999). Long-term unemployment compounds these effects, and has a number of known deleterious effects on employability, including loss of confidence, self-esteem and motivation; loss of self-efficacy; poor physical and mental health; the decay of social capital and deterioration of skills; and economic and social isolation (Caddy, Mortimer, et al., 2010; Chapman & Kapuscinski, 2000; OECD, 2011). Cole (2006) developed an integrated model that demonstrates the combined impact of a number of psychological and social factors on well-being, which creates a vicious downward circle that entrenches long-term unemployment (Cole, 2006).

Beyond 12 months of unemployment, the longer a person remains unemployed, the less likely they are to find a job (Carroll, 2006). Labour market disadvantage is highly correlated to duration of unemployment in a cycle known as unemployment duration dependence or hysteresis (Chapman & Kapuscinski, 2000; OECD, 2011). The theory of disengagement derived from social gerontology has recently been advanced to explain the apparent withdrawal of some unemployed people from the labour market (Caddy, Mortimer, et al., 2010). This theory focuses on the deterioration of social capital as a result of reduced activity levels generally. The deterioration of social capital during unemployment, and negative employer attitudes towards people who have no recent work experience, are detrimental to job search effectiveness (Quiggin 2001).

This has resulted in job seekers experiencing the long-term effects of unemployment scarring while they subsist on very low incomes well below the official poverty line (ACOSS, 2011; Morris and Alan, 2014). The low rate of Newstart has been justified because it is intended as a transitional payment for those in between jobs. However, it is officially recognised as insufficient to meet basic needs and the costs associated with job searching, for example, attending interviews on public transport (ACOSS, 2011).

The poverty and suffering of long-term unemployment results in forms of exclusion documented in UK literature by Edmiston (2017), who collated research findings about the experiences of people in the UK in the era of welfare reform known as the austerity period. The findings suggested that austerer welfare was ‘undermining the “ universality” of social citizenship in the UK’ (Edmiston, 2017: 267). Similar effects were recorded in Australian research into the experiences of people living on low

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incomes (Murphy, et al., 2011). Nevile (2008) identified a common theme of job seekers feeling disrespected because of the inflexibility of employment services agencies.

Since its introduction, scholars have regarded Work for the Dole as punitive (Nevile and Nevile, 2003; Marston & McDonald, 2008), particularly since it has not been associated with significant improvements in employment outcomes for job seekers who have been required to participate in it (Borland, 2004). Further ethical and rights-based perspectives have highlighted concerns about the extent to which Work for the Dole disqualifies job seekers from the rights of paid workers and the protections of working conditions (Gough, 2000; Paz-Fuchs & Eleved, 2016). Work for the Dole is a clear contradiction in the design of employment services. It is a contradiction of commodification because job seekers are made to work in unpaid work purely for the purpose of being kept active. This work, provided by third sector organisations, is assigned the status of non-work, because it is not provided commercially.

Work for the Dole therefore occupies a contradictory and ambivalent role in capitalist economies, in which neoliberal social policy assigns the unemployed essentially to bondage because of their failure to be commodified as economically productive workers. If job seekers are construed as seeking or needing jobs, Work for the Dole punishes job seekers because it does not result in improvements to their economic circumstances. It also assigns them to an unworthy category relative to the priorites of labour markets driven by capital-based interests.

It is not surprising then that Work for the Dole has been found not to engender higher levels of motivation, because it is regarded as activity for the sake of activity (Ziguras, 2004). This was a finding of research involving analysis of the key components of motivation theory in relation to the requirements placed on unemployed people undertaking Work for the Dole (Ziguras, 2004). Similarly, Marston & McDonald’s research found ‘that, contrary to paternalistic theory, employment services processes based purely around keeping people active does not improve self-esteem, self-control and motivation and that people were churned through an indifferent system’ (Marston & McDonald, 2008).

Although the chief architect of activation strategies, the OECD has provided limited advice on the extent to which sanctions are effective in labour market programs. The advice it has produced warns that sanctions can have detrimental effects on welfare if they are punitive (OECD, 2005), and that they may produce a ‘hazard effect’, which causes the diversion of welfare payment claims to other less rigorously policed benefits, such as disability pensions (Carcillo & Grubb, 2006; Koutsogoeorgopoulou, 2011). These hazard effects are not fully understood, but the OECD (2005) suggested governments aim to strike a balance between the cost benefits of Workfare policies that deter benefit claims and the purpose for which welfare benefits were originally created such as to maintain social cohesion and reduce poverty.
The OECD’s concerns were echoed in a systematic review in the UK, in which sanctions were identified as having other negative social impacts when conditions were too onerous (Griggs & Evans, 2010). These effects, such as withdrawal from welfare claims, are of concern because they mean vulnerable people may not access services that could help them. In the UK, empirical research has reinforced concerns that welfare conditionality can have unintended consequences, such as ‘distancing people from support; causing hardship and even destitution; displacing rather than resolving issues such as street homelessness and anti-social behaviour; and negative impacts on “third parties,” particularly children’ (Watts, et al., 2014). Dwyer and Bright (2016) found ‘limited evidence of welfare conditionality bringing about positive behaviour change in terms of preparing for or finding paid work and/or ending irresponsible behaviour’ (Dwyer & Bright, 2016: 5). Furthermore, these scholars found that ‘applying behavioural conditionality appeared to push some people away from available support, sometimes with grave consequences, including having little to eat and worsening health problems’ (Dwyer & Bright, 2016: 6). Further research challenged the use of sanctions because they were identified as being erosive to ‘ontological security,’ ‘inner confidence’ and the ‘self-respect’ necessary for self-actualised engagement with life challenges (Wright, 2016: 15).

These empirical findings highlight questions about the appropriateness of sanctions in the context of employment services because they do not help people who are unemployed get jobs. If employment services are intended to help people transition from poverty, financial sanctions compound the effects of poverty. Financial penalties are distressing for people already surviving on low incomes (Murphy, et al., 2011; Disney, 2010); can make it harder for them to meet the costs of looking for work; and increase their dependency on kinship networks or crime (Disney, 2010; Ziguras, Considine & Dufty, 2003).

In the market orientation of Workfare, job seekers absorb responsibility for failing to achieve the prize of paid work, and being on welfare itself is a state of ongoing punishment. Ruth Lister explained how non-recognition, misrecognition and disrespect are the typical experience of those in poverty, especially when labelled negatively as an ‘underclass’ or as inhabiting a ‘dependency culture’ (Lister, 1998: 46). The failure of the reflexive self to transform into a commodifiable job seeker has psychological impacts such as depression and anxiety (Honneth, 2004). These effects reflect Dean’s (2003) concerns that Workfarist configurations of social policy would place vulnerable people … substantively at risk by aggressively instituted work-first approaches or may be driven to corrosive self-recrimination by unsuitably designed human capital approaches (Dean, 2003). Workfare punishes those who do not transform into workers, through mechanisms that prioritise the acquisition of paid work.
Gendered contradictions

Single parents have been identified and targeted by activation and welfare conditionality strategies specifically because of the risks of long-term benefit dependency, and the associated imputed intergenerational disadvantages of low income. The targeting of single parents highlights contradictions based in feminist critique of the effects of Welfare to Work strategies on single parents. The contradiction relates to the protection of the individualised rights of parents, as well as the role of the family in maintaining social cohesion.

Gender-focused research identifies Workfare-type coercion as a serious ethical issue for single parents forced to sacrifice or compromise their parenting to the demand to become workers (Dean & Melrose, 1999; Dean, 2003). Critical feminist scholars have long pointed out that paid work is only one form of work, and the value of other forms of work, such as caring and volunteering, have not been prized, or recognised (Cox, 2008; Lynch, 2009; May, 2001). These ethical concerns are reflected in Dean’s concern that only paid work is prioritised ‘over other kinds of useful, or indeed essential, work’ (Dean, 2010: 8). UK analysis on this impact of the New Deal for Lone Parents supported the argument that women are subject to cultural domination in which their identities as women, and rights as parents, are subjugated for the androcentric prioritisation of paid work (Wright, 2011).

Australian research findings support the view that Workfare-type policy settings expose single parents to forms of cultural and economic domination (Bodsworth, 2012; Grahame & Marston, 2012). Grahame and Marston highlighted the ways in which the intrusion and control reported by single mothers had negative effects on their relational autonomy and well-being, ‘based on the disrespect evident in the lack of recognition of their mother/worker identities’ (Grahame & Marston, 2012: 84).

Independent evaluation of the benefits of the 2006 Welfare to Work reforms has highlighted the negative consequences of the increased working hours of single parents (Bodsworth, 2010; Bodsworth, 2012; Phillips, 2015). This growing body of research has also stressed the negative impact of the requirements on subjective well-being and quality of life (Cook, et al., 2009) and quality of job (Cook & Noblet, 2012). This research supports other studies that indicate that single mothers’ experiences of Welfare to Work primarily involve ‘hoop-jumping’ (Blaxland, 2009; McArthur, et al., 2013). For single parents seeking to recover from the loss of material security caused by domestic violence, there is strong qualitative evidence that Welfare to Work strategies have been damaging to family welfare (Cortis & Bullen, 2016; Winter, 2014).

Critical perspectives on marketisation, commodification and penalisation

Finally, in the critical perspective, marketisation itself can be seen as playing a role in commodifying job seekers. Offe (1984) was optimistic about the role of the third sector or civil society in providing potential for renewal of the welfare state. This kind of optimism was reflected in the debate that accompanied the third way reform in the Blair era in Britain and, on a lesser scale, in Australian
speculation about the innovative potential of NPM (Jordan, 2004; Le Grand, 1997; Parton, 2000). The vision was for a third sector of social entrepreneurs who would be able to transform public services and welfare delivery (Parton, 2000; Jordan, 2004). The role of the agency and third sector workers were conceived as being able to exercise discretion to provide solutions to intractable social problems (Parton, 2000; Jordan, 2004).

The marketisation that has occurred can be situated as part of the penal infrastructure identified by Wacquant. Dean (2003) warned that rather than shifting the locus of power to the third sector, marketisation would shift the instrumental power of the state to outsourced providers who would lose the capacity to maintain an independent position. The governmental perspective on marketisation was captured in the observation that the transfer of responsibility for the implementation of Workfare policy to the quasi-market of employment services enables the adoption of more disciplinary policy (McDonald & Marston, 2003). The agencies engaged to enforce this discipline are intentionally contacted at arm’s-length because private providers are able to implement more coercive strategies than their government predecessors (Rose, 2006).

These concerns about the use of employment services in the penal state have been expressed in mainstream public policy evaluation of marketisation. Now, 20 years since marketisation, the NPM ‘radical experiment’ has been subject to criticism from a public policy perspective. In the public policy evaluation, the weaknesses in the NPM experiment have been described as originating from the design of quasi-marketisation itself. This scholarship has argued that quasi-marketisation has produced conditions in which the survival of employment services agencies has come to be prioritised over the needs of job seekers (Considine, Lewis and Sullivan, 2011; Considine, et al., 2017; Gallet, 2016; Olney, 2016). This is because the survival of these agencies is based on contracts for services that are outcome-based, increasingly payment-by-results, and this means their survival depends on the ability to get people into jobs quickly. The scholarship has been critical of the extent to which marketisation has improved employment services capability in terms of the capacity to work innovatively with disadvantaged job seekers (Considine, Lewis and Sullivan, 2011; Gallet, 2016) and has identified concerns about the extent to which they have prevented long-term unemployment by acting more innovatively than their government predecessors (Olney, 2016; Whiteford, 2011).

The limitations of quasi-marketisation have resulted in a range of behaviours that run contrary to the intentions of NPM. The unintended behaviours have been summarised as having created ‘a “herd” of profit maximisers who are highly responsive to threats to their viability and who embrace standardisation of services to minimise risks’ (Considine, Lewis & Sullivan, 2011: 826). This means the ‘black box’ benefits expected through the extension of a hands-off approach to contracting ‘facilitates under-servicing of some job seekers and agency profiteering’ (Considine, O’Sullivan & Nguyen, 2017: 1). The lack of investment in unprofitable caseloads leads to behaviours called cherry-picking and parking, and a tendency to ‘game caseloads’ to maximise profit and star rating.
performance (Considine, 1999; 2004; Eardley, 2002; Eardley, 2003; Finn, 2011; Fowkes, 2011; Nevile & Lohan; 2011, Ziguras, Considine & Dufty, 2003). The use of selective case management has been identified as contributing to long-term unemployment because of the incentives that drive the behaviour of employment services (Gallet, 2016; Olney, 2016).

Public policy scholars identified a link between marketisation and diminishing levels of innovation in the street-level delivery of employment services (Considine, Lewis & Sullivan, 2011; Considine, et al., 2017; Gallet, 2016; Olney, 2016). Rather than becoming more innovative, tendencies towards convergence in service delivery have been identified (Considine, 1999; Considine, Lewis & Sullivan, 2011; Eardley, 2003; Gallet, 2016; Olney, 2016). The lack of innovation is attributed to the administrative scrutiny of the contracting agency, the Department of Employment, which closely monitors compliance with contract rules. Gallet explained that ‘the outcome is a highly prescriptive contract that dictates the service approach and inhibits innovation and cooperation between provider organisations’ (Gallet, 2016: 34). This surveillance has resulted in the agencies becoming more risk averse and unwilling to innovate.

It is possible to identify a relationship between sanctions used to discipline job seekers and the survival of employment services agencies. Employment services workers are responsible for assessing job seeker compliance and enforcing rules relating to welfare conditionality. This drives the street-level behaviour of these organisations to focus on job seeker behaviour rather than employment support. If job seeker behaviour is judged as non-compliant, employment services use financial sanctions to make job seekers comply with the rules of conditionality. This provides a strong incentive for employment services agencies to use sanctions to survive rather than in ways that help job seekers get and keep jobs they want or need.

The competitive focus of the employment services contract has been identified as having contributed to the erosion of the capability of the employment services workforce. The erosion of the capability of the employment services workforce has been noted in the successive frontline staff surveys conducted by public policy scholars (Considine, Lewis & Sullivan, 2011; Lewis, et al., 2017). It is also supported in a report undertaken by the employment services workforce union, which found that the employment services workforce possesses lower levels of qualifications relative to their peers in comparable human services roles (Kun, 2011).

Wacquant described this as social panopticism that involves employment services in surveillance and behavioural compliance, while themselves being subject to surveillance through the administration of their contracts (Wacquant, 2001: 408). These effects of quasi-marketisation on employment services reflect the predictions of Dean (2009) and Wacquant (2001) that marketisation leads to the ‘warehousing’ of the capability of social service as an independent mission-based sector. Marketised
social services agencies like employment services are described as having lost the independent voice to defend the interests of the disadvantaged against the interests of politicians (Smyth, 2014).

**Conflict and resistance at the street-level**

Interpersonal conflict arising as a reaction to disciplinary social policy has been identified in street-level research. Active labour market programs and concomitant conditionality of welfare payments have been accompanied by street-level conflicts for many decades. Conflicts were reported by Marsden (1982) and Willis (1977) where unemployed people resented activation services, particularly because of the lack of jobs. In Australia, research into marketised employment services found that job seekers became disillusioned because they found the services they received irresponsible and inflexible. The lack of flexibility of both the Job Network and JSA model has been reported as a ‘waste of time’ because the services had no relevance to individual goals and preferences (Carney & Ramia 2002; Sawer 2006; Nevile 2003; Ziguras, Considine & Dufty, 2003). The counter-productive effects of activity for the sake of activity, inefficient use of resources and the demotivating impacts of hoop-jumping is supported by a series of studies (Carney. 2006; Horn & Jordan, 2006; Sawer, 2006; Marston & McDonald, 2008; Ziguras, Considine & Dufty, 2003).

Further conflict at the street-level may be inferred as a form of resistance to activation strategies for a range of reasons reflecting the job seekers work orientation. Motivational segmentation has shown that job seekers have different orientations and are sometimes reluctant to engage in job search, work preparation and work experience activities because they have other interests and social attachments. Motivational profiling studies in the UK and in Australia provide quantitative reinforcement for segmentation of job seeker work orientation. These profiling studies are reinforced by research observations of what Dunn term ‘choosiness and diversity’; and Wright (2003) identified as categories of job seekers as viewed by workers; what Bodsworth (2010) identified in single mothers as the prioritisation of caring.

Resistance can be observed in job seeker willingness to engage in services, the forms of activation they activities they are exposed to, and the quality of the services they receive. Since the welfare to work reforms involved the activation of more job seekers, and the extension of the job seeker compliance regime this conflict has intensified. Throughout the 2000s, breach rates escalated, and researchers noted the impact on attitudes of their cohorts who repeatedly reported feeling loss of rights, persecution and punishment (Carney, 2007; Horn & Jordan, 2006; Ziguras, Considine & Dufty, 2003). This conflict has now been quantified in surveys of street-level workers, which have noted that almost half of employment consultants have been threatened with violence by job seekers (Lewis, et al., 2016). The pervasiveness of a sanction-based culture is reflected in repeated surveys of street-

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6 It should also be noted that threat of financial sanction is far more prevalent than the figures on actual penalties indicate.
level workers that showed there has been a long-term reliance on sanctions to ‘engage’ job seekers. The conflict at the street-level of employment services reflects the interaction between individual job

The qualitative costs of sanctions are reflected in the high levels of conflict reported in street-level interactions. From a psychosocial perspective, the threat of sanctions is destructive to the relationship between worker and client (Hasenfeld, 1999). Hasenfeld based this view on research in the USA that preceded the introduction of Welfare to Work strategies in Australia. Hasenfeld explained that ‘we know from research on compliance that the threat of sanctions fosters distrustful and evasive relationships’ (Hasenfeld, 1999: 194).

The use of sanctions has eroded the capacity of employment services workers to maintain effective relationships with job seekers (Giuliani, 2015). The working alliance is described as a psychological contract between workers and clients that is maintained through the development of trust-based relationships. The quality of the alliance is dependent on the capacity of workers to engage job seekers in trust-based relationships and of job seekers to trust the service and their workers. The research indicates that threat and imposition of financial penalties causes irreparable damage to the relationship between job seekers and employment consultants (Carney, 2006; Marston & McDonald, 2008).

This conflict can be understood as a reaction to the behavioural supervision and intrusion job seekers experience in employment services contexts (Grahame & Marston, 2012). These behaviours are related to responses to the lack of flexibility observed in both the Job Network and JSA employment services models, which were identified by job seekers as a waste of time with no relevance to individual goals and preferences (Carney & Ramia, 2002; Carney, 2007; Nevile, 2003; Sawer, 2006; Ziguras, Considine & Dufty, 2003). The counterproductive effects of activity for the sake of activity, inefficient use of resources and the demotivating impacts of hoop-jumping are supported by a series of studies (Carney, 2006; Horn and Jordan, 2006; Marston & McDonald, 2008; Sawer, 2000; Sawer, 2006; Ziguras, Considine & Dufty, 2003).

Empirical research has identified issues such as welfare traps and structural flaws in the tax transfers system, which mean that paid jobs do not always result in significant higher levels of income than welfare payments (Bodsworth, 2010). Other reasons include avoiding low-skilled, low-paid and insecure jobs (Crisp, et al., 2009; Bodsworth, 2010; Murphy, 2011); or prioritisation of caring, unpaid and voluntary work because of the social benefits this confers to individuals and their communities (Bodsworth, 2010; Crisp, 2010; Crisp, et al., 2009; Murphy, et al., 2011). This group of research findings supports the view that unemployed people operate a level of discretion and choice rather than take any job. These are tactics of resistance associated with what Dunn (2016) calls ‘choosiness and diversity’ in decision making about welfare and work.
The tactical forms of resistance identified by existing scholars can be classified as forms similar to Scott’s (1986) ‘weapons of the weak’. These tactics are not scaled or intended to change or subvert welfare interactions, but rather to provide local relief to job seekers otherwise feeling economically dominated or culturally marginalised. The everyday forms of resistance undertaken by dominated groups and in the context of employment services include behaviours such as concealment and avoidance (Watkins, 2006; Bodsworth, 2012). The weapons of the weak are also reflected in Dean & Melrose’s (1997) study of minor acts of welfare fraud called ‘fiddling’. They classified resistance in three forms as ‘defiance’; ‘deviance’ in the forms of rule-breaking; and cultural ‘resistance’ or counter-hegemony (Dean & Melrose, 1997: 113). They identified fiddling as ‘manageable discord’ that was usually survival-based rather than a strategy intended to challenge the hegemonic order.

These tactics were identified in research that observed reactions of job seekers in the USA who resisted ‘the regulation that engulfs them’ (Watkins, 2006: 36). Watkins identified the concealment strategy involving ‘the calculated presentation of information regarding one’s case to a welfare caseworker’, which is ‘not simply an economically driven choice, but also a form of resistance to the increasing social supervision of the women’s lives’ (Watkins, 2006: 5-6.).

These scholars have suggested that resistance is an effect of moral or ethical discord between the beliefs of job seekers and their interactions in welfare services like employment services. This moral discord reflects the gap between expectations job seekers might have of employment services – for example, a service that helps them get jobs – and the treatments they actually experience. Some insight into the reactions like conflict and resistance were captured in Hartley Dean’s analysis of Welfare to Work strategies and the ethical harmony between policy makers and citizens. Dean’s analysis suggested that in contractarian premised social policy, ‘compliance becomes a matter of civil duty and conditional obeyance, rather than a matter of social responsibility and moral obligation’ (Dean 2006: 9). Dean argued that there is less conflict where there is harmony between the ethical beliefs of policy targets and the policy maker (Dean, 2007). Similarly, Braithwaite explained that the reasons for the ineffectiveness of the paternalistic approach are situated in the contrast between the harmony and security value systems (Braithwaite, 2002: 237).

These forms of discord are reflected in the discursive forms of resistance that manifest ‘amongst job seekers who refuse to act as “recipient, dependent or job seeker” and advanced liberalism’s orientation to the problem of dependency’ (McDonald & Marston, 2005: 397). Similarly, with single mothers, there was evidence of resistance to the imposition of a mother/worker role identity (Brady, 2011; Bodsworth, 2012). Bodsworth’s account captured examples of resistance that were discursive as well as tactical, where single mothers refused to accept the worker identity implicit in their interactions in employment services contexts (Bodsworth, 2012). These forms of resistance involve the rejection of the worker identity and stronger attachment to other roles such as parenting.
In Australia, the public and social policy discourse on the welfare subject is limited by the dominance of the rational actor and bad agency constructs. The constraints of these perspectives were highlighted by scholars who promote a counter-view of the welfare subject as an alternative to the rational actor and bad agency constructs (Martin, 2006; Wright, 2016; Williams, 1999). The counter-model draws together a range of perspectives on human motivation neglected in mainstream social and public policy discourse. The counter-model promotes a perspective in which welfare subjects’ decision making about welfare and work are informed by complex relational factors. This complexity is captured in empirical studies, which found that gendered moral rationality and socially constituted or patterned arrangements of interdependency are the chief drivers of decision making (Duncan & Edwards, 1999; Duncan & Irwin, 2004).

The scholarship identified the complexity of work orientations and highlighted the extent to which public and social policy construal of the welfare subject have a limited focus. In public policy strategies in employment services, welfare subjects’ behaviour is construed as either resistant to either becoming active or demonstrating the right behavioural dispositions. This highlights the contradictions of the economic rationalist and bad agency constructions of the welfare subject in social and public policy. These are essentially contradictions of the way in which constructions of choice are limited by the dominant discourse of rational choice theory and paternalism and involves the use of behavioural controls designed to a narrowly defined range of behaviours.

Further forms of resistance have been identified in the work of interpretive social policy scholarship, which identifies resistance generated in interactions at the street-level. This area of empirical and theoretical scholarship highlights the way that resistance is not just action at a local level, but also a reaction that is generated in service interactions. Focusing on these interactions enables the identification of situations in which policy implementation outcomes are co-constructed at the point of service delivery, not only through the influence of street-level discretion (Lipsky, 1980), but also through the interactional behaviour and interpretation of citizens and public servants (Barnes, 2009; Bevir, 2007). Interpretive policy accounts of resistance and subversion serve to highlight the complexities of governance relative to the complexity of citizens themselves.

The forms of resistance these scholars have identified are negotiated and situated, and reflect the interactions of human actors at the street-level. Prior suggested that there are three forms of resistance to public service policies and practices that can be expressed by public officials and citizens alike: revision, resistance and refusal (Barnes & Prior, 2009: 5). The negotiated outcomes of the interactions of citizens and officials result in counter-agency (Barnes & Prior, 2009). Similarly, Bevir argued for a constructivist approach for the analysis of subversion in which analysts ‘examine the ways in which citizens’ reasoning and beliefs constitute a type of resistance to government policies’ (Bevir in Bevir & Trentmann, 2007: 13). Bevir described this as ‘situated agency,’ which should not be understood as
the exercise of autonomy, but as a production in which new meanings are created and conferred as they are reconstituted through the process of rationality.

Although these scholars adopt different ontological and epistemological positions on the nature of agency in welfare contexts, the approaches provide insight into the ways in which resistance affects the outcomes of policy implementation. These scholars have argued that there is a need for interpretive analysis of governance that takes seriously both culture and agency, as well as how this informs interactions at street-level service delivery. These scholars reinforce the counter-model of the welfare subject and emphasise the complex interplay of the motives of individual actors and the intersubjective dimensions of street-level interactions.

**Research gap and question**

The critical perspectives on employment services in the era of individualisation and marketisation highlight the contradictions of the welfare state in the context of neoliberal economic and social policy. In the language of Offe, sanctions are the primary tools used to control the behaviour of unemployed people. In critical terms, sanctions are the instruments of discipline, but their use can be seen as indicative of the contradictions inherent in the commodifying imperatives of Workfare. In public policy terms, the use of sanctions is premised on the assumption that the behavioural deficiencies of job seekers need to be managed. These behavioural deficiencies are justified in the discourse of moral hazard, and paternalism, which serve to reinforce blame for unemployment in the unemployed.

Therefore, the use of sanctions in employment services highlights contradictions in employment services relevant to critical scholarly inquiry. The first contradiction relates to competing constructs of the welfare subject in which a paradox between the rational actor and bad agency constructs is apparent. This contradiction highlights the extent to which an assumption of a resistant welfare subject informs disciplinary social policy. It is fundamentally a contradiction between the liberal construction of individual rights and choices, and the limits imposed through both instrumental and discursive modes of advanced liberal welfare regimes.

The second contradiction is about the purpose of employment services. The normative purpose of employment services is to alleviate the poverty of unemployment by assisting unemployed people to get jobs. Yet when the disciplinary aspects of these relations are highlighted, employment services function to enforce the rules of welfare conditionality in which poverty is treated with the threat of more poverty. This is the contradiction of penalising the poor in an era of advanced capitalism.

These contradictions are explored by using incidents involving sanctions to understand the ways in which job seekers respond to the threat of sanction and how this affects relations in employment services. The findings will provide the opportunity to explore the contradictions of the welfare state as it functions through disciplinary social policy in an era in which welfare conditionality is increasingly
used as a strategy of neoliberal governance. As a form of critical social research, this study examines issues relating to the role of employment services in the era of advanced capitalism.

The research aimed to explore these issues with the research question: “How can resistance in employment services be understood?”

**Chapter 2 conclusion**

This literature review provided contextual background about employment services and their role in the administration of welfare conditionality in an era of welfare reform characterised as Workfare. The shift towards Workfare in Australia reflected the transition to the marketisation and conditionality now entrenched in employment services contracting arrangements and in the models of activation with which job seekers must comply. These two influences reflect the ongoing political and discursive struggles that have been reshaping welfare states in the post-war period.

The contradictions of the welfare state are emphasised when concentrated on employment services and in Australia on marketised employment services. The location of this research is at the heart of one of these contradictions where it is now possible to see the effects of 20 years of individualisation, and marketisation of employment services in a context of advanced capitalism.

The intensification of welfare conditionality in Australia’s welfare regime reflects both the individualisation and the neoconservative construal of welfare dependence. Due to the possibility that job seekers might not exhibit the right behaviours towards getting jobs, they are subject to the high levels of supervision mandated by paternalism. This supervision is policed by employment services agencies whose capacity to help job seekers with vocational and personal support has shifted towards the goal of Workfirst.

The empirical research findings surveyed in this chapter reflect the extent to which recent welfare reforms have shifted the problem of unemployment into a problem of welfare dependence. The scholarship about citizenship and welfare rights highlights concerns about the ethical treatment of citizens and the new forms of governance such as conditionality informed by Workfirst and Mutual Obligation.

These critical perspectives locate employment services at the intersection of neoliberal economic and social policy. The role they perform is to discipline job seekers with the ultimate intention of commodification, and to neutralise their disruptive potential. In a critical perspective, individualisation functions to commodify and pacify job seekers through the use of strategies intended to shift work orientations and dispositions to employability. Welfare conditionality and sanctions are identified as the technologies of governance used to enforce behavioural regularity in the forms of being active and becoming employable.
When the disciplinary aspects of relations in employment services are highlighted, the rules of welfare conditionality function to treat poverty with more poverty. This has been described as the tendency of advanced capitalism and Workfare regimes to function as a penal apparatus that immobilises the disruptive potential of the working class and protects capital-based interests (Standing, 2011; Wacquant, 2001). The strategies used to achieve this commodification and control are those of individualisation and marketisation.

The strategies associated with this commodification are interwoven in the contradictions of neoliberalism and individualisation. These contradictions are most apparent when the individualisation discourses associated with the normative purpose of employment services are contrasted with their role in the commodification of labour and the penalisation of the unemployed. These contradictions are amplified because the marketisation of employment services results in the generation of profits for profit-making agencies and surpluses for not-for-profit organisations. For even these not-for-profit mission-based organisations are not immune to mission-drift (Gallet, 2016). In fact, as the function of employment services is to serve the role of commodification of labour, the mission and potential of this third sector suffers the inevitable compromises of marketisation.

Recent public policy scholarship identified problems with the effectiveness of marketised employment services. The independent evaluation identified concerns about the extent to which these services have long-term unemployment by acting more innovatively than their government predecessors. From a public policy perspective, the scholarship raises questions about the benefits of employment services marketisation, in terms of the effects this has on addressing the problem of unemployment, and long-term unemployment, in particular.

Three main areas of critical debate inform the context of this investigation. The welfare reform debate highlights concern about the shift to Workfare-type welfare conditionality and its implications for social citizenship; tensions in the welfare subject debate and public policy construal of human motivation; as well as a growing body of independent public policy research that identifies problems with the effectiveness of marketised employment services.

The conflict reported at the street-level of employment services reflects the impact of disciplinary social policy at the street-level of employment services. The next chapter progresses the development of this thesis by explaining how the theoretical orientation informed the interrogation of resistance described in this thesis.
Note about the Australian system of job seeker sanctions

Financial sanctions are calculated on the number of days job seekers are judged to have been non-compliant. The minimum financial penalty is one day of payment, which equals approximately $35 out of the $256 weekly benefit payment. Tougher eight-week non-payment penalties are imposed when job seekers are judged as having behaved obstructively towards getting a job, or having left a job without a reasonable excuse (DoE, 2017b).

Since 2011, jobseeker payments are suspended immediately when they do not attend activities designated in the job plan. The intention of this change was to make the penalty for non-compliance affect job seekers more immediately instead of waiting for a review by Centrelink. Since this change, every quarter, one in eight job seekers receives a financial sanction⁷ and this trend remains constant at the time of writing.

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⁷ Data on job seeker sanctions are available here: https://employment.gov.au/job-seeker-compliance-data. In the Quarter Oct–Dec 2013 from the active caseload of 800,000 job seekers, there were 60,000 financial sanctions – 45,000 for one day or more, and 13,240 eight week penalties.
Chapter 3 – Theoretical orientation

This chapter describes the theoretical orientation used in the analysis of resistance in employment services. It firstly introduces Pierre Bourdieu with some short biographical information to help the reader place him within a theoretical tradition. The chapter then elaborates the elements of the theory of practice (Bourdieu, 1977, 1990) that will used in the analysis of the research problem. This leads to a discussion of the way in which Michel Peillon’s sociology of welfare (1998) has been adapted for the analysis of the research problem in employment services. The final section describes some limitations of Bourdieu’s theory and the adaptations to his theory used in the analysis of the research problem.

My reading of Bourdieu’s ideas is informed by eminent scholars such as Grenfell (2012), Jenkins (2002, 2010), Wacquant (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) and Shusterman (1999), who provide contrasting critical insights into his historical context and his overall theoretical contributions as a sociologist, social theorist, philosopher, academic and activist. This reading is also informed by critical accounts of Bourdieu’s theory by scholars who have elaborated his ideas in relation to power and the cultural reproduction of inequality (for example, Crossley, 2003; Jenkins, 2002; Lovell, 2007; Goldberg, 2008; Grenfell, 2012; Peillon, 1998; Shusterman, 1999). These ideas are important to the research because they identify the mechanisms via which social policy gains legitimacy.

Situating Bourdieu

Bourdieu’s primary oeuvre includes his theory of practice (Bourdieu, 1977, 1990), also later elaborated as a theory of action (Bourdieu, 1998), and as an approach to sociological methods (Bourdieu, 1990; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Bourdieu’s theory has been described as a branch of the critical theory that developed in parallel with the Marxist branched theory of the Frankfurt school (Grenfell, 2012; Shusterman, 1999). Bourdieu’s theoretical contribution maintains links to neo-Marxist branched theory due to continuity in the conceptualisation of cultural reproduction and the class struggle (Crossley, 2003). The key difference is that rather than power manifesting in material terms and domination being achieved primarily through the ownership of property and labour (the means of production), Bourdieu identified social control in terms relating to the way in which different forms of capital (economic, social and cultural) gain recognition and legitimacy (Crossley, 2003).

The key debates of the critical school relate to understanding the mechanisms of cultural reproduction and the respective weight given to the subjective and objective nature of social structures (Seidman, 1998). The degree to which human actors are considered as holding the capacity for agency depends on the perspective on the way in which structures are reproduced and maintained (Dennis & Martin,
There is a contention between those who see social structures as having objective properties and those who see it as having subjective properties.

Bourdieu’s theory does not conform to either the structuralist or post-structuralist directions of post-Marxist scholarship, but his theoretical contribution lays claim to straddling interactionism and structuralism. Bourdieu’s theory of practice provides a model that enables the reconciliation of these perspectives by viewing agency and structure as inevitably and inextricably intertwined (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1998; Shusterman, 1999). In later years, Bourdieu defined his theory of practice as ‘structural constructivism’ (Bourdieu, 1989b: 14). The use of the expression structural constructivism extended his earlier conceptualisation of genetic structuralism because it placed more emphasis on cultural transmission and reproduction as the chief mechanism through which social structures are reproduced. The use of structural constructivism means that Bourdieu argued for the intertwinement of human agency, culture, interaction and social structures. In developing a theory that straddles the structuralist/interactionist divide, Bourdieu focused on the ways in which cultural reproduction involves forms of embodiment in *habitus*.

Bourdieu’s sociological and theoretical output documented the forms of social suffering associated with cultural and economic domination (Bourdieu, 1999). Bourdieu promoted the need for strong links between academia and policy, and he became an outspoken commentator on inequality and poverty in France’s public social policy discourse (Grenfell, 2012). He was particularly outspoken about the effects of global capitalism on workers and the unemployed until his death in 2002 (Bourdieu & Nice, 1998).

While subject to much scepticism and fierce academic criticism during his lifetime, Bourdieu’s theory has become a popular theoretical framework in many areas of the social sciences because it has the potential to explain both the subjective and objective properties of social interaction. It is important to note that Bourdieu described many of his concepts as thinking tools (Grenfell, 2012: 2), and the concepts used in sociological exploration of social phenomenon are drawn primarily from his theory of practice. It is these concepts that I will draw on in the theoretical aspects of the analysis.

**Bourdieu’s field construct**

The analysis involves the applied use of Bourdieusian field analysis to understanding interactions in employment services, and this section provides an overview of the primary concepts that will be employed in the analysis. The theory of practice was developed as a sociological model to explain the enablers of human action relative to social structures, as well as a theory of cultural reproduction.

The decision to use concepts drawn from Bourdieu’s theory of practice was based on the view that this theory can be used as a sociological approach to examine how human actors exercise forms of
resistance in social conditions in which there is a degree of control exerted through the instrumental rules of conditionality. It benefits the analysis of the research problem by inserting the behaviour of welfare subjects, like job seekers, into the broader relations providing constraint on their action, like the welfare regime of Workfare. This insertion provides explanatory power in which it is possible to link subjective reactions to the objective conditions that provide limits on action.

According to Bourdieu, the interrelated concepts of field, *habitus* and capital capture the relational properties of interactions in social contexts (Bourdieu, 1990b). In Bourdieu’s theory of practice, a field is a concept employed to describe a social context where the conditions in which action occurs are obtained from processes of cultural reproduction:

> A field consists of a set of objective, historical relations between positions anchored in certain forms of power (or capital) (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992: 16).

Although the concept suggests a physical metaphor, the idea of a field is identified as a context where the positions occupied by agents are inherited through cultural reproduction. In the Bourdieusian usage here, ‘fields’ comprise the objective structures that determine the properties of social contexts.

Bourdieu used the metaphor of a game of rugby to describe actions in fields (Bourdieu, 1990). When a game is in play, the space in which it is being played is transformed into a field where certain rules apply. The players of the game assume positions in the field and know the rules of the game. There are different rules for different games, and different players have different functions within the game, depending on the unique rules of each game. The game metaphor transfers to fields of social interaction more broadly, where there are different rules that govern the game. The rules of the game are called ‘illusio’, and the role of players in the game is known as ‘doxa’ (Grenfell, 2012). The rules of the game are reproduced because the players (or human agents) are exposed to the game during their socialisation, and again as they interact to play the game.

The way in which human actors learn the rules of the game is through the formation of a *habitus* that gives them ‘a feel for the game’. The concept of *habitus* is similar to the concept of identity, yet Bourdieu emphasised it as having an interactional quality, at once referring to conditioned automatic responses, as well as to dynamically generated behavioural responses. The concept of *habitus* describes how class, social status, knowledge of social rules and capital are acquired and are deposited in agents. Thus the idea of *habitus* is defined as ‘a set of historical relations “deposited” within individual bodies in the form of mental and corporeal schemata of perception, appreciation, and action’ (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992: 16).

A key difference between Bourdieu and other theorists of action is the focus on the interactions between human agents and social structures as the practical mechanisms through which cultural norms are reproduced and adapted (Elder-Vass, 2010). Habitus is both historic and generative as it is
co-produced by the interaction of agents and structure. Thus *habitus* is dynamically reconstituted in the process of learning how to be in and part of the world:

Habitus is neither a result of free will, nor determined by structures, but created by a kind of interplay between the two over time: dispositions that are both shaped by past events and structures, and that shape current practices and structures and also, importantly, that condition our very perceptions of these (Bourdieu 1984: 170).

Through the acquisition of a *habitus*, human actors have inculcated intrinsic and tacit knowledge of the rules of the game. Human actors internalise assumptions and beliefs that reinforce the rules and proscribe knowledge of acceptable behaviour. Rules, therefore, create some intrinsic limits to what we do because, by knowing the rules, or playing by the rules, human actors reproduce the limits on permissible behaviour. In this way, by playing by the rules, human action and interaction is the process via which they are recreated. *Habitus* is therefore a powerful determinant of behaviour in the fields in which human agents interact. *Habitus* is both historic and generative, as it is co-produced by the interaction of agents and structure.

Through the relational concepts of field and *habitus*, Bourdieu incorporated the idea that social structures are at once objectively and subjectively reproduced. In straddling the structuralism/interactionism divide, Bourdieu focused on the ways in which cultural reproduction involves forms of embodiment and *habitus*. This is the ontological dilemma that Bourdieu’s theory aimed to resolve by accommodating the conflicting interactionist view of social structure, which tends to locate structure within subjectivities. Through these relational ideas, Bourdieu laid claim to being able to incorporate the idea that social structures are at once objectively and subjectively reproduced.

**Capital**

The practical constraints and enablers of social action are captured in Bourdieu’s concept of capital (Bourdieu, 1986). Capital is the idea Bourdieu employed to designate the power that agents have to function effectively within different fields. Human agents acquire capital through socialisation, during which they inherit, or have inculcated through education or social connections, certain advantages and disadvantages. Human actors learn the value of capital through their exposure to social contexts in which cultural and behavioural rules are transmitted during socialisation. Roles and positions in the social field are designated by the forms of capital that agents possess – that is, their symbolic distinctions – and assume varying degrees of power according to what is valued.

There are some variations in the names for the forms of capital used by Bourdieu and scholars who employ these concepts depending on the nature of the field under observation. The primary forms that contribute to the effectiveness of agent action fit within the categories of economic, social and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986). Economic capital is the command of economic resources (money, assets, property). Social capital is the actual and potential resources linked to the possession of a durable
network of institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition. Cultural capital is based on a person’s education (knowledge and intellectual skills) that provides advantage in achieving a higher social status (Bourdieu, 1986).

A game of chess provides a useful analogy for understanding how capital function in fields (English and Bolton, 2015). The different capabilities of the chess pieces reflect their mutually assigned and recognised power to move in certain ways. In Bourdieusian terms, they represent certain forms of capital that have the power to influence or change the outcome of the game. Importantly, it is only because the players mutually recognise the moves the pieces can make that they have legitimacy in the game of chess. Capital thus has to be recognised in the field because of the instrumental rules of the field, as well as the extent to which it is recognised by the players of the game.

These observations draw attention to the extent to which intersubjective recognition is an important element in Bourdieu’s theory of practice. The idea of practice is emphasised because of the extent to which recognition occurs in interactions in social contexts where they come to life as part of the field. Human actors reproduce and validate field conditions through interactions involving intersubjective recognition. Fields are governed by implicit rules that have objective properties only to the extent that they are acknowledged and reproduced through intersubjective relations. The symbolic value of capital exists only to the extent that it is socially legitimated and has value in the eyes of others (Siisiainen, 2003). This emphasis on intersubjective recognition as a variable influencing field conditions means that while there may be some externally imposed constraints on action, fields are in fact the sites of negotiation as agents attempt to improve their field positions by deploying valued forms of capital.

**Power and knowledge – Field conditions and classifications**

This section draws together the additional concepts I have drawn from Bourdieu’s broader theorising about the structures of social systems and the mechanisms of cultural reproduction. This ‘genetic structuralism’ is social theory because it refers to the mechanisms by which social structures are reproduced (Bourdieu, 1990: 14). This aspect of his theory is also a conflict theory because it relates to the ways in which fields are reproduced in ways that reflect the interests of the dominant. The key difference is that rather than power manifesting in material terms and social control being achieved through the ownership of property and labour (*the means of production*), Bourdieu identified social control in terms of the way in which different forms of capital (economic, social and cultural) and interests gain recognition and validity. In elaborating Bourdieu’s theory as a conflict theory, I will describe the concepts of classifications, interests, symbolic capital, domination and misrecognition. In this section, I will review how these concepts are used by Bourdieu and explain their relevance to the research problem.
Interests and domination

In the reading of Bourdieu applied to the analysis of the research problem, I have emphasised the role of interests as part of the conflict elements of his genetic structuralism. Interests did not feature in the theory of practice, but according to Grenfell were emphasised in Bourdieu’s later thinking (Grenfell, 1990: 151). Bourdieu identified the critical role of the interests of the dominant being strategically and intentionally reflected in field conditions (Grenfell, 1990).

Foucault influenced Bourdieu’s theory because there are tacit, although not overtly acknowledged, similarities between elements of Bourdieu’s theory of practice and Foucault’s governmentality (Grenfell, 2012; Rieger-Ladich, 2010). The similarities are present in two respects. The first similarity is the relationship between the idea of bio-power and habitus in which power structures are subjectively internalised. On this matter, there is convergence between Foucault and Bourdieu, particularly as governance is centred to the subjectivity of agents.

The second similarity is reflected in which social conditions involve struggles for control of the cultural capital of the field. These struggles are informed the way in which knowledge is produced and reproduced to maintain the legitimacy of the dominant. These ideas of Bourdieu are present in the idea of classifications. In this respect, Bourdieu’s use of the idea of classifications resembles Foucault’s ideas on governmentality and the ways in which discourse is used to transmit and reify constructs that reflect the interests of power arrangements (Rieger-Ladich, 2010; Schlosser, 2013). Bourdieu used the concept of classifications to refer to the instrumental technologies that control conduct through explicit and overt forms of power, and which become internalised over time as cultural norms.

Bourdieu’s focus on the intentionality of interests in cultural reproduction reinforces the continuity of his theory with Marxist conflict theory. In this conflict theory, interests drive the formation of fields and the appropriation of the forms of capital that protect the interests of the dominant. Bourdieu described the ways in which the conversion of capital is governed as: struggles for control of the symbolic capital of a field involving the appropriation of the forms of capital to protect the interests of the dominant. The intentionality of interests means that conflict in social relations figures prominently as a causal factor in cultural reproduction. In this reading, a rank is assigned to capital through the legitimating processes associated with the reproduction of field conditions that favour the interests of those able to influence field conditions.

Interests are reflected in classifications. The most potent form of instrumental power resides in the capacity of government institutions to define classifications that legitimate social conditions. In the focus on the concept of classifications reside the social technologies that control conduct through explicit and overt forms of power, and tacitly as expectations relating to validity are internalised in habitus. Classifications are technologies of governance that inform instruments of assessment and
measurement of social validity and entitlement. Classifications enacted through policy changes introduce new configurations of the way institutional capital is mobilised to achieve different ends.

Bourdieu’s ideas on classifications were reflected in his views on the way social policy is made. Policy making agencies and bureaucracies compete for dominance in the fields in which they interact such as academic disciplines like social policy and public administration. He described academics, policy makers and bureaucrats as competing for control over classifications through their contributions to the knowledge that is used to make policy (Bourdieu, 1988). For Bourdieu, struggles over the legitimacy of classifications are the locations in which social divisions and inequality are reproduced:

At stake in classification struggles is the power to make people see and believe, to get them to know and recognise, to impose the legitimate definition of the divisions of the social world and, thereby, to make and unmake groups (Bourdieu, 1991: 221).

The most potent form of instrumental power resides in the capacity of dominant social institutions to define classifications relating to the legitimacy of citizenship. Goldberg noted how classification struggles often emerge as the result of changes in policy settings in which they ‘provide a window of opportunity to define the status and rights of the policy’s clients relative to other clients in the field’ (Goldberg, 2008: 89). Goldberg argued that social citizenship itself can be seen as the outcome of a classification struggle, and that the consequent shift to different welfare states reflects the ongoing outcomes of these struggles.

While the rules of fields privilege the interests of the dominant this does not prevent the growth of interests that are counter to these rules. Where these rules are “alien” to the interests of the dominated, they can be clearly observed in their externally expressed forms because of the conflict that is associated with them.

Crossley (2003) also noted that classification struggles are the source of crises which result in collectivisation of interests and the mobilisation of capital in pursuit of new political arrangements. This provides a way of using Bourdieu’s ideas on conflict to understand protest and collective action. Bourdieu described these reactions as arising as a result of classifications struggles in which,

People can find that their expectations and ways of living are suddenly out of step with the new social position they find themselves in... Then the question of social agency and political intervention becomes very important (Bourdieu 2000: 19).

In Bourdieu’s view the history of society is based on conflict over power. The dominant impose rules to serve their interests which may involve the subordination of the interests of minorities. The interests of the dominant constrain the efficacy of capital to the extent it reflects the symbolic values prevailing through habitus and which are enforced through legislative and administrative mechanisms.
Fields can therefore be understood as being unstable and locations in which the struggles between the interests of the dominant and subordinate continuously reshape field conditions. Fields are reproduced but also adapted as a result of conflicts over interests.

But there is also change. Conflict is built into society. (Bourdieu, 2000: 19)

The (re-)structuring of social “structure” therefore occurs within a trans-historical process of inter-subjective recursion. The processes of cultural reproduction inform field conditions therefore the validation of the interests and forms of capital that are recognised within certain fields.

**Misrecognition**

Misrecognition, as used by Bourdieu, refers to the appropriation of the field for the benefit of the dominant, rather than specific forms of cultural and economic domination and recognition such as with Fraser’s use of the term. Fields are configured to result in domination, especially when interests and identities are refused recognition. In these conditions, fields are experienced as having very low tolerance for the impact of variables in either capital or inter-subjective recognition of capital. For agents with weak field positions the potential to exercise the forms of capital they possess or can access are invalidated. The denial of legitimacy in these struggles causes misrecognition.

Bourdieu’s use of the concept of misrecognition refers to structures of domination (Peillon, 1998). This is reflected where he wrote:

> Misrecognition of the dominated by the dominant takes the form of a legitimated refusal to grant any but inferior standing to the dominated or to recognise them other than on the terms of the dominant culture on which their own claims to distinction are based in (Bourdieu, 2000: 240).

Bourdieu used the concept of misrecognition to reflect the ‘symbolic violence’ that arises because of the intentional appropriation of fields by the dominant.

The recognition and respect that the dominant require of their ‘inferiors’, in addition to that secured from their peers, may also yield them rich symbolic profits. But the misrecognition and disrespect inflicted on the dominated is deeply harmful to them and it constitutes symbolic violence in proportion to its legitimacy (Bourdieu, 2000: 240).

In Bourdieu’s view, symbolic violence is closely associated with misrecognition because the value determined by the dominant, involves some form of subordination of other contrasting values and interests which are poorly recognised. Bourdieu captured the forms of harm associated with misrecognition in sociological studies, such as the collection *Weight of the World* (1999). In this work, Bourdieu’s team of researchers focused on the everyday forms of social suffering, which provided a broader perspective on the way in which inequality functioned in France in the 1990s.
These forms of social suffering are the symptoms of the economic and cultural marginalisation of minorities (Fraser, 1997; Lovell, 2007) and which have physical and psychological consequences for the dominated, who are usually minorities (Fraser and Honneth, 2003). Misrecognition is discernible as a subjective experience as expressed in feelings of emotional harm, such as disrespect, stigma and shame. Honneth (2004) described the effects of misrecognition as causing depression and anxiety, which directly affect the capacity for self-actualisation.

In this respect Bourdieu’s use of the concept of misrecognition is useful in the analysis of structures of injustice and inequality. Furthermore, experiences of misrecognition are a tool used by social researchers to expose the forms of injustice and bring them to the attention of the broader community (Lovell, 2007:74). These are the ‘kinds of ordinary suffering’ or ‘la petite misère’ Bourdieu described as ‘unexpressed and often inexpressible malaises’ (Bourdieu, 1999: 627). Bourdieu’s use of misrecognition is useful in understanding the broader implications of inequality. Rather than existing solely as a measure of poverty, the concept of misrecognition provides explanatory power in which the experiences of harm can be directly linked to structures of domination experienced by the poor.

**Resistance, domination and Bourdieu**

It is important to acknowledge a distinction between domination and resistance so that they are not understood as binary opposites. Bourdieu did not locate a clear differentiation between domination and resistance, since individual habitus reflects the impact of cultural transmission, which serves to reify the interests of the dominant. For example, Wacquant explained:

> Bourdieu resists the alternative of submission and resistance that has traditionally framed the question of dominated cultures and which in his view, prevents us from adequately understanding practices and situations that are often defined by their intrinsically double, skewed nature. If on the other hand, these work to effect everything that is likely to reveal my origins, or to trap me in my social position (an accent, physical composure, family relations), should we then speak of submission? (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992: 24).

In this respect Bourdieu’s ideas again converge with Foucault. Foucault says resistance is implied, in fact, is the necessary condition of control (Balan, NY). That is, where there is something to control, it exists for the purpose of negating the potential for resistance. Or one could say, one exists because of the other because it is the necessary precondition of the other. In fact, both Bourdieu and Foucault agree the potential for resistance, is the reason for the existence of the domination in the first place.

The post-structuralist account of resistance, suggests that resistance is in fact a condition facilitated by structure, and that the dilemma of Bourdieu’s double-skewed structuralist stance means there is ‘an “unresolvable contradiction” inscribed in the very logic of domination. Resistance can be alienating
and submission can be liberating. Such is the paradox of the dominated and there is no way out of it’.
(Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992: 24).

When Bourdieu wrote about resistance as being alienating, his reflections were based on observations
of the domination of the minority cultures he observed. The resistance Bourdieu observed in the
Algerian peasant minorities was a form of reaction of the subordinate relative to relations of
domination He was therefore reflecting on the kinds of resistance described as the weapons of the
weak (Scott, 1986), rather than strategies enabled by access to significant forms social power. This
suggested that Bourdieu’s perspective use of the concept of resistance was descriptive and related to
his theorising on misrecognition. It was not used to explain what resistance is, and the forms it takes.

This view of resistance persisted in his career, particularly as he observed and responded to the
ascendency of neoliberalism. In Bourdieu’s writing on the Parisian uprisings of the early 1990s, he
expressed surprise that the disempowered unemployed could engage in protest, himself having
become convinced the effects of neoliberalism were to disenfranchise and disempower the traditional
power bases of the poor, such as the unions (Bourdieu & Nice, 1998; Reiss, 2011). Yet Bourdieu
maintained optimistic that these protests reflected the capacity of dominated groups to reflect on the
conditions of their oppression and to collectivise against them (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992;
Bourdieu, 2000).

Agency and determinism

There are similarities in the resistance-domination discussion to the criticisms of Bourdieu’s theory of
practice in relation to determinism and agency. As resistance may be conceptualised as a form of
action involving a reaction to dominance or oppression, the question of agency is important to the
theoretical orientation on the research problem. Bourdieu’s theory has been subject to criticism
because of a perceived absence of the rationality required for humans to exercise agency. Bourdieu’s
and capital suffer from analytic haziness that collapses into structuralism. Furthermore, critics take
issue with the extent to which the concept of habitus provides capacity for human actors to act in
ways that are not habitual, repetitive and taken for granted (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998).

Jenkins argues that while ‘Bourdieu may have intended to pass from structures to the principles that
produced them, what he in fact did was to find, in habitus, structured structures predisposed to
function as structuring structures’ (Jenkins, 2010: 99). These limitations mean that the dispositions of
actors are subject to the limits of a habitus that has been conditioned in the processes that govern the
reproduction of the field. In this reading, the capacity for human agency suffers from the determinism
imputed in those of structuralist theorists.
Bourdieu’s supporters have argued that critics misunderstand Bourdieu’s theory of practice, as it was not intended to explain rationality at micro-levels of decision making. Bourdieu’s concerns were to describe the overall relational properties of the social context and the ways in which human agents interact, and how this leads to the reproduction of social structures through practice. Bourdieu’s concerns were not to locate agency in the subjectivity of human agents because habitus reflects power relations insofar as inculcated dispositions are inherited from social structures.

Bourdieu’s theory of practice provides conceptual tools based on the relational conceptualisation of agency and structure, which are described as inextricably intertwined (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1998: 23). In Bourdieu’s defence, Wacquant argued the notion of practice which locates the reproduction of structure in inter-subjective re-enactment of the internalised disposition of habitus. While the intertwinnement: of structure and agency can be interpreted as being deterministic, Wacquant argued,

the concepts of habitus and field allow Bourdieu to forsake the false problems of personal spontaneity and social constraint, freedom and necessity, choice and obligation, and to sidestep the common alternatives of individual and structure, micro- and macroanalysis that forces a polarized, dualistic social ontology (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992: 23).

As such this intertwinment allows for the influence of individuals at micro-levels while binding their actions to a defined set of possibilities reproduced in social structures which are themselves subject to being reshaped in broader social conflicts.

Agency and resistance

The limitations identified in determinist readings of Bourdieu provide scope for emphasising the subjective and reflective capabilities of human actors. Such subjective and reflective perspectives of the agency of human actors have been described by theorists such as Sayer (2005) and Hoggett (2001). Hoggett mapped reflexivity to quadrants of self-awareness, arguing that behaviour is influenced by subjective factors such as emotions (Hoggett, 2001). Hoggett’s model was intended to explain the complexity of human decision making, in which exercises of judgement are influenced by the confluence of subjective forces, including emotions, states of psychological health and the contingency of the moment. This is the view adopted in this thesis in which human decision making is identified as being based on reflective action, which can be influenced by predisposition, but is also reactive, as Hoggett (2001) suggested.

However, in order to understand constraints on agency, human actors need to be situated in a context that reflects both the material and psychological limits inherited within social systems. As Greener (2002) pointed out, there are constraints on external action that do not reflect subjective reflexivity or rationality, in some cases due to the constraints embedded in consciousness itself. Greener (2002)
agreed with Hoggett’s argument that subjective factors are important determinants of actions. Yet Greener argued that the emphasis placed on subjective factors is strengthened when considered in conjunction with the relational context. Bourdieu’s field analysis achieves this because the concepts of field, habitus and capital capture these social relations. Greener argued that this approach could be used to situate agency within the constraints of Bourdieu’s field.

Accordingly, the analysis of the forms of resistance that will be identified in the findings draws on situating human actors as active reflectors on their social contexts who employ resources that provide them with forms of relational agency. This comprises a relational construct of agency that reflects the capacity of human actors to make choices – albeit within objective and subjective limits of fields. The subjective and objective limits of the field are described as the properties of the field, or conditions of the field. They reflect both the internalised dispositions of actors, intersubjective recognition and the externally imposed constraints on action.

The field itself has properties that limit the forms of action that are tolerated, on a spectrum like Hayward’s (1998) where domination is at one extreme, and at the other the capacity to reflect on the change desired and mobilise resources to bring about social change. Hayward argued that power can be conceived as a continuum with domination at one end point, and at the other social boundaries that are understood by all participants and that allow the maximum possible space, not only for action within, but also for effective action upon the boundaries themselves (Hayward, 1998: 21). Hayward’s continuum is a convenient approach for identifying how power operates at different frequencies and intensities depending on the level of domination implicit in field conditions.

Further, in sociological and social theoretical terms, resistance has been defined as a relational concept that reflects the interactional properties of social systems (Hollander & Einwohner, 2004). As a relational concept, resistance must always be described and observed in terms of a specific context and social relation. Furthermore, these scholars described it as also being relative to the position of the observer, with some forms of resistance being apparent to some observers and not others. What is observed as resistance therefore depends on the point-of-view of the observer as much as the context. As a relational concept, resistance must be observed in relation to the social system and power informing the context under observation.

Similarly, Barbalet (1985) analysed ways to conceptualise resistance in relation to power. This analysis concluded that ‘resistance can be understood to function through different types of social bases or resources, drawing upon or associated with different aspects of the social system, any adequate theory of power must incorporate statements of the systemic context and not simply the formal properties of power relations’ (Barbalet, 1985: 547). To summarise, both sets of scholars concluded that resistance is another form of social relation that reflects field intentionality and conditions of tolerance within the specific context in which it is being observed. Therefore, resistance
is not merely a property of power, since power manifests in different forms. It operates as form of pushback (Barbalet, 1985) against the forms of power extant in the social context under observation.

These observations about resistance and its relation to power and the context under observation were addressed by inserting the behaviour of human actors directly into the context of the power relations of Workfare. The power relations of Workfare manifest in the employment services field through the rules of conditionality, which reflect a broader social struggle about the use of state resources to remediate inequality. Conditionality is the technology of governance through which power is deployed to influence or control the behaviours of job seekers and workers to fulfil the objective of getting people off welfare. When job seekers and workers exercise resistance they are pushing-back the specific forms of governance and the rationality informing Workfare.

Yet the contextual insertion of job seekers and workers in the employment services field is complex because the field is informed by both the objective and subjective factors that are reproduced in interactions. This complexity was identified in Peillon’s adaption of the theory of practice to the welfare field, which will be discussed in the next section.

**Peillon’s sociology of welfare and the employment services field**

This section describes how Peillon’s sociology of welfare (Peillon, 1998) informed the theoretical orientation. There are two main perspectives drawn from Peillon employed in this thesis. The first is his perspective on the welfare field as a field with its own unique features, representing – on the whole – a struggle over the distribution of economic resources. The second is through adopting the way Peillon uses the idea of insertion to describe the way in which action occurring in the welfare field provides explanatory potential that links subjective experiences to broader power relations. Both these aspects of Peillon’s sociology of welfare provide insight into how to apply Bourdieu’s theory of practice to the employment services field.

According to Peillon, there are two primary struggles occurring in the welfare field. One is the social policy struggle, which informs welfare regimes and the distribution of economic resources. In terms of the social policy struggle, Peillon described the welfare field as a unique field in which the stake of the field is essentially a struggle about the legitimacy of the needs of the poor in capitalist economies (Peillon, 1998). The broader social struggle is about the welfare regime and the dominance of a certain welfare rationality. In the current period in Australia, this struggle reflects the shift from social citizenship to the market-oriented rationality of Workfare. In terms of interactions in welfare contexts, this becomes the field in which the agents affected by social policy determinations are immediately drawn into struggles in which the stake is access to economic resources.

The second struggle is a struggle between the agencies that influence the terms on which welfare is resourced. Peillon observed that policy makers are involved in struggles for legitimacy. The struggle
for those involved in developing the conditions of the field, such as policy making agencies and bureaucracies, is for dominance in the fields in which they interact, such as academic disciplines like social policy and public administration. The actors involved in this struggle have a stake in securing policy terms that align to their own interest in the field. The agencies and bureaucracies effectively compete for control of the political capital of the field, in battles for the prestige of their agencies, as well as legitimacy of point of view. In this way, Peillon drew attention to the way in which policy makers are involved in struggles for legitimacy and described this as the process through which capital is converted into political capital (Peillon, 1998: 217).

The outcome of these struggles results in the power to assign classifications of legitimacy of welfare entitlements. Those involved in the development of policy are involved in classification struggles for control of the welfare field. These are the classification struggles involving the appropriation of the cultural capital that determines the legitimacy of the needs of welfare recipients. The classification struggles reflect the transition from the post-war to the post-welfare state of advanced liberalism and reflects the struggle between social democratic and neoliberal control of the welfare field.

Peillon’s sociology of welfare is also used as a theoretical orientation that provides for both the ‘insertion and specificity’ needed to identify the dual perspective required to understand the welfare field. Peillon argued that Bourdieu’s field theory addresses the need for a sociological approach that provides insertion and specificity (Peillon, 1998: 225). Insertion means situating the welfare field in the broader terms of the welfare regime; and specificity means the ways the concepts of Bourdieu’s theory of practice link the experiences of welfare subjects to these broader effects.

Peillon argued that this approach holds analytic integrity because it overcomes some of the shortcomings of other theoretical approaches to the sociology of welfare, such as Foucault’s biopower and Habermas’ communicative spaces. Peillon’s criticism of other sociologies of welfare is that they focus on providing macro-level understandings of processes at work in society as a whole. In so doing, they neglect the specificity to grasp the ‘internal logic’ of the welfare field, which is ‘manifested by the configuration of agents which operate within it, the resources which are mobilised, and by the stakes around which struggles develop’ (Peillon, 1998: 225).

Furthermore, Peillon argued that resistance arises in interactions in welfare agencies because of the forms of control present in welfare arrangements. He argued that ‘a system of control is immediately transformed into a site of struggle: such a struggle develops at the interface of the interaction between welfare agencies and welfare recipients’ (Peillon, 1998: 222). The way in which misrecognition manifests in the experiences of actors in the welfare field therefore becomes a sociological approach through which to access subjective accounts of the impact of domination.

Peillon elaborated Bourdieu’s field theory, explaining how it can be used to examine how broader power arrangements are reflected in the *habitus* of welfare recipients and in the practices of welfare...
agencies. As an observational approach, Peillon called this ‘field analysis’. It involves understanding how broader power arrangements are reflected in the interactions that take place in welfare services contexts. These effects can be understood by examining ‘the mechanisms of stigmatisation, the technologies of control and welfare policing, the rate of take-up of welfare benefits, the forms of resistance which develop in this context’ (Peillon, 1998: 227).

The employment services field

Peillon’s adaption of Bourdieu in his sociology of welfare suited the analytic requirements of the research problem. It enabled me to proceed with the analysis of resistance in the context of welfare sanctions with the conceptual tools to see interactions in which resistance occurs as reflecting the broader power relations that determine employment services conditions. These broader relations are the relations of Workfare in which employment services administer the ‘system of control’ of welfare conditionality.

This effectively situates employment services as a sub-field of the welfare field, in which welfare conditionality is the mechanism via which economic resources are rationed to the unemployed. The struggle informing the employment services field reflects the shift to a Workfare regime, in which governance is achieved through individualisation. In the period of advanced capitalism, this struggle reflects the market-oriented rationality of neoliberalism, in which the needs of the unemployed are subjugated to capital.

In employment services, the appropriation of the cultural capital is reflected in the discursive battle over the legitimacy of the needs of the unemployed. In the current era, the discourse of welfare dependence informs the treatments job seekers receive, and this reflects the legitimation achieved in the outcome classification struggles. The discursive construct of welfare dependence justifies the shift in classifications of welfare recipients to job seekers. As these are legislated, or used to inform funding for services or not, classifications manifest as the rules and guidelines used to govern the behaviour of employment services agencies, as well as the job seekers they work with. In employment services, classifications determine funding for agencies. For job seekers classifications determine benefit and service eligibility, activity tests and the nature of sanctions. Classifications have a profound impact on the forms of behaviour tolerated in employment services, where they are intended to promote economic participation.

Once classifications are normalised, there are shifts in social attitudes, which become internalised in the *habitus* of citizens so that these new configurations come to be accepted as the new norms of welfare entitlement. Classifications like that of ‘job seeker’ therefore serve the particular function of normalising welfare constructs for the purpose of legitimising the interests of the dominant. They become embedded as practice in the culture of agencies in the attitudes of workers, and in the
expectations of welfare clients (Martin, 2006). In the case of employment services driven by the market-oriented rationality of Workfare, the interests of the dominant have driven employment services conditionality to function to maximise job seeker exposure to the labour market in order to reduce welfare expenditure.

In terms of the forms of capital prioritised in a Workfare regime, employment services collect around the stake of a paid job. A paid job is the means to obtain economic security in a capitalist economy. An individual who works enough, or otherwise possesses economic capital, receives better treatment because they are not subject to the rules that provide behavioural constraints, such as those of conditionality. To this end, the symbolic capital of the informing employment services field collects around the prioritisation of the paid job. Associated with this is an ideal citizen type whose economic activity provides them with a socially meaningful identity and valued contribution to the community.

When applied to the employment services context, the concepts of misrecognition and symbolic violence reflect the appropriation of the economic and cultural capital of the welfare field to punish job seekers for failing to be active or to get paid work. The prioritisation of paid work also functions to subjugate cultural identities and attachments such as single parenting. The consequences for those who lack resources and are unable to change, such as those lacking the capital for the forms of self-improvement that might get them a job, are the forms of social harm associated with misrecognition. As such, misrecognition provides a useful tool for interrogating the experiences of actors whose interests are poorly represented within the Workfare configuration of the welfare regime.

**Doing field analysis**

Grenfell described the ways in which Bourdieu intended others to use his field theory in social research as a three-stage process (Grenfell, 2012: 73). This three-stage process involves analysis of the positions of actors in the field relative to the power relations of the field; mapping out the objective structures of the field in terms of the form of power of the field; and analysing the **habitus** of the actors to identify the way in which their action is limited by the power relations of the field.

There are some limitations in engaging in the analysis of **habitus**, particularly in social research. The way in which **habitus** can be analysed is problematic, as it refers to internalised dispositions, routinised action and generative and creative behaviour that is not readily accessible to social researchers. Such analysis would involve deep investigative analysis of repetitive and taken-for-granted habits of thought and action as, for example, might proceed as a form of discourse analysis of the subjective recursion of social structures.

It is apparent that Bourdieu did not intend for **habitus** to be analysed for its subjective content alone, but rather that this content be situated within the context from which it had been generated. The
situated nature of subjective experience is reflected in Peillon’s use of the terms ‘insertion’ and ‘specificity’ to draw out the relational constraints of the social system. This is the specificity in which Peillon explained *habitus* as carrying ‘the mark of power in two ways: they manifest the structure of domination which is embodied in the *habitus* and they participate in the struggle through which the structure of the field (the distribution of relevant capital) is maintained or transformed’ (Peillon, 1998: 221). Morrow and Brown captured this distinction when they identified social research strategies that draw on Bourdieu’s theory of practice as a form of socio-cultural mediation that ‘bridges the social psychological analysis of individual actors, on the one hand, and the macrostructural analysis of social systems on the other (Morrow and Brown, 1994: 222).

**Chapter 3 conclusion**

This chapter explained how Bourdieu’s theory of practice will be applied to the analysis of the research problem. As applied to street-level interactions in employment services, field analysis involves the identification of the actors, who are job seekers and employment services workers. Since there are unresolved tensions in Bourdieu’s conceptualisation of *habitus* and how it relates to rationality, the analysis will focus primarily on understanding how actors negotiate field conditions and the nature of the constraints they encounter. The way in which job seekers and workers interact and negotiate the employment services field will draw on the relational agency described as reflective and reactive by Hoggett (2001). Critical reflection on field conditions and the exercise of rationality, alongside emotional reactions will be emphasised to understand these negotiations as they occur within the constraints of the field. The constraints of the field will be elaborated as the controls on action enforced through the activity test and behavioural rules administered by employment services, reflecting the broader intent of the Workfare regime and the tools of welfare conditionality.

It is important to note as did Scheurich (1997) that researchers do not impose a ‘paternalistic’ perspective on their role and view research subjects as passive respondents to the interviewer’s questions. This means the resistances they observe and report, can be situated within observations of their relation to the field as well as the extent to which they are constituted within and by the field. Bourdieu’s ‘double skewed’ theory fulfils this structuralist conceptual function because it provides human actors with the capacity to exercise relative degrees of resistance within the overall tolerance of field conditions and their personal *habitus*. The next chapter describes how the research methodology has been designed to reflect the requirements of Bourdieusian field theory and the associated elements of field analysis.
Chapter 4 – Research methodology

This chapter describes the research methodology and explains why narrative inquiry was used to collect data about incidents involving sanctions. The chapter is structured to firstly describe the epistemological justification for employing narrative inquiry to collect the data. It then outlines the empirical research methods and describes the analytic strategies that followed the data collection. The final section of this chapter describes the limitations of the research methods.

In the process of developing the research methodology, a range of sources were consulted in order to cross-reference the complex epistemological questions for an investigation wishing to combine subjective and objective data. Sources consulted for insight into critical theory and methodology include Morrow and Brown (1994), Crotty (1998) and May (2011). These were cross-referenced with sources like Blaikie (2007, 2009) on questions relating to ontological and epistemological consistency. On research methods themselves, Travers (2001) informed the use of case study analysis, and on narrative inquiry, I was guided by Reissman (2008) and Elliot (2005), and on active interviewing technique, Seidman (2006).

Epistemology

As this study is a form of critical social research, there were epistemological implications to consider. Morrow and Brown said that ‘what is distinctive about critical social research is that the relation between social analysis and critique is built into the framework theory of knowledge interests, not something added on afterward (Morrow & Brown, 1994: 166). This requirement for alignment between the mode of critique and the epistemology was been met by identifying and selecting Bourdieu’s theory of practice as the theoretical orientation, with the modifications identified in the previous chapter. Morrow and Brown described forms of research with similar critical interests as mediation inquiry into resistance and transformation where,

…the most central theme in this kind of research is with the study of manifestations of resistance, a complex and contested term that refers to the ways actors come to terms with and potentially struggle against cultural forms that dominate them (Morrow and Brown, 1994: 292).

The mediation relevant to this inquiry involves the forms of resistance that arise in the context of employment services conditionality. The use of Bourdieu’s theory of practice involves undertaking field analysis. As applied to street-level interactions in employment service, field analysis involves the identification of the actors, who are job seekers and employment services workers. Access to the context was gained through the choice of research strategies involving purposive selection of participants with experiences relevant to the inquiry, and a process to access those experiences intended to draw out issues of theoretical interest. This use of job seeker and worker perspectives to

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understand the forms of resistance reflected the aspiration of a sociological approach to obtain rich qualitative data, which could be analysed using concepts from Bourdieu’s theory of practice.

The approach adopted involved the use of narrative methods that are congruent with the epistemology of social constructionism. Blaikie (2009) described the social constructionist perspective as an approach to drawing the everyday meanings and interpretations of human experiences.

Social constructionism is compatible with the critical realist ontology adopted to rationalise the interpretations generated in this thesis. The critical realist view suggests that an objective world/external reality exists but is apprehended via human sensory mechanisms, and meaning and law like truths are sensed, inferred and deduced from experience rather than being directly observed (Archer, 2010; Bhaskar, 2008; Blaikie, 2007). Critical realism extends the view of knowledge creation to being highly socially and historically constituted. The knowledge that is generated reflects a particular social scientific construction that, over time, may come to be questioned as new perspectives are developed. Critical realism acknowledges the socially situated and constituted knowledge of the researcher, and a method of knowledge generation that can lead to plausible and durable interpretations because it is based in an analytic tradition that furthers human claims to knowledge of the social world.

**Research methods overview**

The research specifically focused on gathering experiences about interactions involving threat of financial sanction and capturing associated experiences with conditionality in employment services. Consequently, the research methods involved narrative reconstruction of incidents involving threat of sanction, which I captured through semi-structured interviews.

There were two separate interview cohorts. The first cohort was job seekers (n=14), and the second cohort was workers (n=5). The ratio of job seekers to workers (14/5 respectively) was weighted to provide greater focus on the experiences of job seekers.

The data was collected over eight months, in the period of 2013–2014. This was midway through the JSA contract, and reflects the impact of the 2006 Welfare to Work reforms, particularly for single parents. The sample of job seekers included six single parents who were affected by changes to eligibility for the parenting payment – firstly in 2006, and then in a second wave in 2013. There were also changes in activation for mature age job seekers and eligibility for the Disability Support Pension, which affected some of the young people who disclosed mental health issues as a barrier to employment.
Job seeker cohort

This section describes the selection, screening and interviewing process for each of these cohorts. The selection was purposive (Patton, 2002) because it involved targeted recruitment of job seekers and workers who had experienced resistance in employment services. The recruitment material was initially explicitly worded to reflect the intention to collect ‘stories about resistance’. However, based on feedback received during the recruitment process, it became apparent that not all of the job seekers identified their behaviour as ‘resistant’.

In order to avoid the connotation that resistance referred to resistant behaviour, the recruitment materials were altered to focus on negative experiences more generally. The job seekers were recruited to ‘tell a story’ about their negative experiences of employment services while they have been looking for work. (See Appendix A, Item E – Job seekers advertisement.) Research participants were then screened for eligibility based on the criteria of having received or having been threatened with a participation failure for not having done what an employment services agency or Centrelink had requested of them.

Information sheets and consent forms were sent to the participants for them to consider before committing to the project. The information sheet and consent form explained the stages of the research and that the participants would be involved in the construction of the narratives about the incidents. Participant involvement in the research was acknowledged by a gift voucher of $40.

Narrative interviews

The narrative interview approach was guided by Reissman’s (2008) methodology and involved three phases: data collection, meaning checking and analytic stages. These stages were adopted in the form of a two-stage interview process; a process of meaning checking, which involved the participants in the construction of a narrative based on the interviews; and case study analysis, which was used in the first stage of the analytic stages of the research discussed later in this chapter.

Incidents involving threat of financial sanction provided the focus for two semi-structured interviews. In the first interview, the interview schedule included questions developed around the context in which resistance or perceived resistance might have been exercised (see Appendix A, Item A – Interview commencement checklist, and Item B – Job seeker interview schedule – First interview). The core questions for the first interview centred on allowing the job seeker or worker to provide an account of incidents in which they had been threatened or had received a participation report involving financial sanction. The interview questions were designed to capture job seekers’ descriptions of incidents where they had been threatened with sanctions. The interview questions were used as prompts to explore how this made job seekers feel. Further prompts were used to explore how job seekers felt they were perceived by the employment services agencies. During these interviews,
active narrative interviewing involved responding to cues naturalistically, allowing the conversation to digress before returning to the schedule (Holstein and Gubrium, 1995; Seidman, 2006).

After the interview, I drafted the narrative story about each job seeker’s experiences of the incidents involving sanction. The creation of the story involved reconstructing the information provided through the interview into a narrative sequence. I wrote the stories immediately after the interview and then cross-referenced against the interview transcript to check if I had left anything out.

It is important to note as did Scheurich (1997) that researchers do not impose a ‘paternalistic’ perspective on their role and view research subjects as passive respondents to the interviewer’s questions. Research subjects resistances help to shape the interview which should be viewed as a space of co-creation and negotiation. Furthermore, some of the research participants regarded their participation in the research as an expression of their own capacity for resistance. The means the space opened during the interviews provided the opportunity for the research participants to actively participate in the construction of the stories that were developed from the transcripts.

Meaning checking was undertaken through two processes. Firstly, before the second interview, I provided the job seekers with the draft of their story for them to edit or comment on. The job seekers were asked to comment on the story as a form of respondent validation (Bryman, 2001: 274). Then secondly, in the second interview, the job seekers were asked about their comment on the story and to further elaborate their own explanations of the incidents that had been discussed in the interview. This feedback was then used to refine the narrative so that it reflected their views. There were some limitations to this approach, which are discussed in the limitations section below.

The interviews were transcribed and, along with the stories, were used to inform case studies. I undertook case study analysis of the interviews in batches, and this helped me to identify emerging themes, which enabled me to recalibrate the interview strategy. An example of this was a change in emphasis on some interviews to focus on the job seekers’ awareness of the ways in which they were being perceived by the workers they interacted with in employment services. This concern then informed the questions relating to workers that were intended to capture issues relating to intersubjective recognition.

**Worker cohort**

As the adaption of the theoretical concepts developed, I realised that the theoretical development would be improved if I was able to interview workers as well. The workers were formerly or currently employed in employment services, and included four female and one male worker. Two employment services workers were recruited by word of mouth. The workers expressed interest in the research based on their experiences as workers at Centrelink and in agencies delivering the JSA contract. One of the workers formerly worked in the Centrelink Compliance team, which is responsible for investigating compliance failures and breaches. Three additional workers were recruited via an
advertisement on the professional social networking site LinkedIn, where information about the research has already involved some workers in discussions.

The workers were recruited to talk about incidents of resistance they had observed in their employment services case work. The interview questions centred around their observations of resistance and how it was handled in their workplace (see Appendix A, Item D – Worker interview schedule). The research questions were designed to provide a perspective on their observations of resistance in employment services interactions, rather than specific details of particular incidents so as to avoid inadvertent disclosure of confidential information. Specifically focused on their observations of resistance in job seekers and how this was treated in their employment services agency.

The findings from the workers reflect their experiences during their adjustment to the new JSA contract, as well as experiences they had as workers during the Job Network period. During the transition to JSA, employment services programs that had primarily support roles, like the Personal Support Program, were disbanded. The interviews with workers were used to extend exploration of the intersubjective aspects of resistance in employment services, and the effects of intersubjectivity in the co-construction of outcomes in street-level interactions.

**Cohort characteristics**

The interview data was collected over eight months in late-2013 and early-2014. The experiences reported in this research reflect the changes in activation and conditionality measures that occurred during the Job Services Australia employment services contract (2009–2015). In this period, there were also changes in benefit eligibility and activation rules for single parents, mature age job seekers and Disability Support Pensioners. The concentration of single parents reflected the impact of recent changes to parenting payment eligibility in which they had been transferred to the significantly lower payment of Newstart and had been activated as job seekers.

The job seeker cohort was demographically mixed and included 3 long-term unemployed men aged 20–40; four women aged 20–40; a mature age man in his early 60s; and six single parents on Newstart payment. The research participants were from different towns, cities and regional areas of Australia. (See Table 1 for cohort breakdown.)

**Detailed cohort profiles**

Table 1 provides a more detailed breakdown of the interview cohorts. In the first column, I identify the research participants by the alias they selected. The second column describes the kind of job seeker in terms of the forms of activation they were subject to.
Table 3: Cohort profile

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Job seeker alias</th>
<th>Activation type</th>
<th>Interview date</th>
<th>Interview type</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kelly</td>
<td>Newstart – Single parent</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>Telephone, email</td>
<td>SE Queensland/Northern NSW</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leanne</td>
<td>Newstart – Single parent</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>Telephone, email</td>
<td>Regional town Victoria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rosie</td>
<td>Newstart – Single parent (Widow)</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>Telephone</td>
<td>Regional town Victoria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Claudia</td>
<td>Newstart – Single parent</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>Email, material provided from complaint letters</td>
<td>Perth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kevin</td>
<td>Young adult male &lt; 30 – long-term unemployed</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>Telephone, email</td>
<td>Sydney</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desmond</td>
<td>Newstart male &gt; 50 – long-term unemployed</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>Face-to-face</td>
<td>Melbourne</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matthew</td>
<td>Newstart male &lt; 30 – long-term unemployed</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>Face-to-face</td>
<td>Melbourne</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jill</td>
<td>Newstart female &lt; 30</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>Face-to-face</td>
<td>Melbourne</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cari</td>
<td>Newstart female &lt; 30</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>Email</td>
<td>Regional NSW</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jane</td>
<td>Newstart female &lt; 30</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>Telephone, email additional material sent</td>
<td>Sydney</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table B: Worker profiles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Worker</th>
<th>Employment Status</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Contact Method</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sally</td>
<td>Newstart – Single parent</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>Telephone, email</td>
<td>Brisbane</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laura</td>
<td>Newstart – Single parent</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>Email, telephone</td>
<td>Regional NSW</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lisa</td>
<td>Newstart female &lt; 30</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>Telephone, email</td>
<td>Perth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geoff</td>
<td>Newstart male &lt; 40</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>Email</td>
<td>Adelaide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>Former employment services and Centrelink worker</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>Face-to-face</td>
<td>VIC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jo</td>
<td>Former employment services worker</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>Face-to-face</td>
<td>VIC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mel</td>
<td>Current female employment services worker</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>Telephone, email</td>
<td>QLD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barbara</td>
<td>Current female employment services worker</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>Telephone, email</td>
<td>NSW</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bill</td>
<td>Current male employment services worker</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>Telephone, email</td>
<td>NSW</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Detailed job seeker profile**

In this section, I provide a short summary of the job seekers’ stories at the time they participated in the research. These summaries provide background to the circumstances that led to the incidents involving sanctions discussed in the interviews.

Rosie is a single parent with three children and was affected by the 2006 Welfare to Work measures. In order to maintain her mortgage payments, Rosie took a number of jobs, which left the care of her children compromised. Rosie had a car accident in which she was seriously injured and while she was recovering lost her house because she could not maintain the mortgage payments. Rosie had been homeless and lived in her car with her 3 sons for a period. Rosie described how she found employment services intrusive and complained about their interference in jobs she had found for
herself. Rosie recently started a new job but was very angry about having had to leave her teenage boys unsupervised while she had to work long hours to make ends meet and meet her participation requirements.

Kelly is a single parent of one child who was also affected by the 2006 Welfare to Work measures. Kelly let go of a three-bedroom rental house and was living in a one-bedroom converted garage. Kelly explained how difficult it had been for her to find part-time work that aligned with her qualifications as a teacher and psychotherapist that fit around school hours. Kelly described being bullied by her employment services agency and found their use of threats of sanction disempowering. When she experienced an irretrievable breakdown with her employment services agency, she moved to a new house again so that she would not have to deal with the hostility she had experienced when she tried to complain about her treatment.

Leanne is single parent with two children who was also affected by the 2006 Welfare to Work measures. Leanne had taken numerous part-time jobs to make ends meet. Leanne described how she had managed to hold onto her house but had to give up a job because of concerns about her son’s welfare after he and his friends from school began to play truant. Leanne reported not having been provided with appropriate support to find a job that matched her qualifications and was threatened with participation failures when she decided she would not take jobs that were not well aligned to her community services qualifications.

Claudia is a widow on Newstart with three children all at university. She was qualified as a teacher and was actively seeking work in this field. Claudia found employment services activity requirements baffling and was not given clear answers about what she was required to do. She felt bullied into signing a job plan that she was not happy with, and when she complained about her treatment, she experienced hostility from her employment services agency.

Laura is a single parent with two children who was also affected by the 2006 Welfare to Work measures. Laura described herself as an articulate and educated divorcee who managed to survive through gift economy. Laura refused to receive Newstart payments because of her experience of reporting and surveillance, which she considered to be intrusive.

Annie is a single parent who was also affected by the 2006 Welfare to Work measures. Annie described how when she had left domestic violence, she and her two children had become homeless and had to return to the family home still occupied by her abusive husband. Annie described employment services unhelpful and suspected their financial motives drove them to hassle people to get jobs they did not want.

Cari is a student with a number of Certificate level qualifications, and was about to begin a Bachelor degree at University. Cari had been threatened with participation failures when she had forgotten to attend a Work for the Dole activity because she was attending a funeral. Cari was forced to take jobs
she did not want and suspected that employment services were more motivated by their outcome fees than the intention to help unemployed people.

Lisa is a student who has been grappling with finding seasonal work to accommodate her participation requirements and student workload, while also managing the demands of the employment services agency for her to take work. Lisa was from a very socio-economically depressed area where a lot of people were on welfare payments. Lisa described how humiliated she felt when she had to beg for money for her rent and borrow money from her family.

Jill is young person experiencing the transition from school to employment, and having difficulty managing the paperwork to apply for Austudy and Newstart, especially because she has reported income from babysitting work, which classifies her as self-employed.

Kevin is a 28-year-old who described himself as having been suffering from depression since his father died when he was 18. Kevin dropped out of a TAFE course due to the depression and became long-term unemployed. He explained that he felt disappointed with himself and that other people think of him as a failure. He did not expect employment services to help ‘people like him’ and felt the stigma of unemployment keenly.

Matthew is a man in his early thirties who was suffering from a mental health condition that had only recently been diagnosed. Matthew described himself as coming from a hardworking family with a strong work ethic, and as a tertiary educated, articulate person with lots of skills. Matthew struggled to have his mental health condition recognised and avoided the hassle of employment services by getting jobs he knew would not work out.

Desmond is mature age artist who had been on unemployment benefits for over 30 years. He had experienced many changes in rules relating to welfare conditionality and witnessed the changes to employment services over contract transitions. Desmond explained that he had never expected employment services to help him get a paid job in the fields in which he was interested. Desmond described having problems having his work as an artist treated as a legitimate occupation.

Geoff was training to become a pilot, and he and his family with two young children were living on a low income to enable him to complete his course of study. Geoff was angry about being breached when he made a trip overseas for a funeral. Geoff described employment services as hassling him to get jobs, when it was clear he was already taking steps to get a job through the intensive and expensive training course he had paid for himself.

*Interview practice and online interviewing*

The recruitment and screening processes were undertaken by telephone and also involved some correspondence via email to determine the best approach to engage in the interviews. Three of the interviews with job seekers and two workers residing in Melbourne were undertaken face-to-face.
Due to constraints on my travel capacity, I undertook the majority of the interviews by telephone. Some participants indicated a preference to be interviewed by email. This involved responding to a thread of email correspondence in which I would provide the initial interview questions, and follow up with questions, or prompts when I felt there was potential to elicit further information.

**Ethics application and ethical mitigation**

Standard ethics processes were followed in accordance with RMIT’s policies for research involving human subjects. Many of the risks and paradoxes identified by Homan (1991) were relevant to this research, including potential disclosure of illegal activities and/or harm of inconvenience to the research subjects. In the ethics application, I outlined how the risks from engagement with this research would be managed through strong attention to transparency and open communication of the research purpose, approach and the outcomes it is likely to generate. The risks for job seekers and workers were addressed in the risk matrix in Appendix B.

I undertook a literature review to identify potential ethical questions arising from the use of online research methods and the research blog on which I published job seeker stories. When reviewing the ethics of a research methodology, scholars in the area of internet ethics reinforced the foundation principles of the prevailing codes of ethics (ESRC, 2010). The literature suggested that ethical practice in online research methods involves the same use of reflection used elsewhere to identify issues of ethical and methodological concern (Nind, Wiles, et al., 2013).

The issues that were relevant to the use of online methods and the blog related to confidentiality, informed consent and data integrity were all relevant, and practical steps to manage these risks were enforced. These issues were addressed by extending and reinforcing ethical practice, such as renegotiation of consent, de-identification and additional measures to protect confidentiality. For example, I imposed security and copyright measures on the use of the blog for my research to protect the content from copying. This was due to the sensitivity of the material expressed in the blog and the potential for it to be used by others without the consent of the research participants.

**Research blog**

I published the stories collected in the narrative interviews on a research blog. After the completion of the two interviews, the job seekers and workers were asked for permission to do this. The blog was intended to provide a channel through which to promote the experiences of job seekers during a period of legislative reform on welfare entitlements. I made it clear that the blog was being used for this purpose, separately to the analysis undertaken for the PhD itself, and that I needed their permission to do this.
The use of the blog was motivated by the belief that the immediate dissemination of the job seekers’ stories would provide an important point of view, especially related to the reforms directed at single parents’ welfare entitlements that were debated in parliament at the end of 2013. A weblink to the blog was sent to other advocacy bodies and politicians with an interest in the research to keep them informed about the project.

The blog provided the benefits associated with online communities. While it was active, the blog provided a forum in which the job seekers could see that others had similar experiences to their own. It was rewarding to receive positive feedback from the job seekers about the blog and the access it provided to the stories of the other research participants:

Reading your blog entries about real people in situations that parallel my own, breaks my heart. There is so much potential in the collective strength of these individuals that goes unrecognised, and yet, despite being a sideswiped stigmatised and essentially unsupported minority, their stories fill me with a sense that a lot of people know that they won’t bend to the systems that governments rely on to maintain their mysterious bottom line and control whatever it is they want to control. Instead they stand up, dust off and keep going. All of them echo parts of my own story. If we occupied a room together, I am sure we could help each other if not just because we all have empathy through experience. In a way, you are that small room, that forum of understanding, so thank you. Thank you for listening to them all (Laura, 2014).

Laura’s comments about the blog suggested that there are potential benefits to online reporting of research results during the period it is conducted. Online reporting helps to overcome the delays in making versions of the findings accessible during the time in which research is conducted. It is particularly important when research is being undertaken at the same time as significant policy interventions like Welfare to Work strategies are being developed and implemented.

**Reflexivity and bias**

Since the research methodology was guided by Bourdieu’s sociological approach outlined as the theory of practice, I have chosen to employ his views on reflexivity to explain how I have addressed bias in this research. Bourdieu’s thinking on reflexivity (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Bourdieu, 1999) informed my reflective stance as a researcher.

Bourdieu contended that social researchers could use reflexivity to locate the bias in their critical perspective. He warned researchers to be mindful of how they set up the ‘rules of the game’ in the interview and to be sensitive to the impact of their point of view on the interpretations they make during the interview:
It is the investigator who starts the game and sets up its rules…and possesses a higher place in the social hierarchy of different types of capital, cultural capital and linguistic capital in particular (Bourdieu, 1999: 609).

He reminded researchers that they inevitably adopt a stance that is an interpretation, and further, those interpretations are interpretations of interpretations, or as Bourdieu puts it, ‘points of view on a point of view’ (Bourdieu, 1999: 4).

Bourdieu’s approach to reflexivity therefore involves drawing attention to the socially constituted position and role of the actors involved in the research. This involves adopting a reflexive stance in which the researcher aims for conscious awareness of the inequities of access to economic, social, educational, and symbolic forms of power, and the ways this affects the research relationship. I use Bourdieu’s ideas on reflexivity to describe my bias in terms of my relation to the field of inquiry. The bias I identify reflects my personal and professional relationship to the field of inquiry.

**Personal bias**

Firstly, at a personal level, my bias is informed by my childhood experiences. As I was a child of the 1970s, a level of social instability shaped my formative experiences. My parents held strong alternative beliefs, and so there were informing anti-materialist and feminist influences in my thinking at an early age. My biographical underpinnings predispose me to a neo-Marxist feminism in which I am interested in contributing to social change based on the ideas of economic redistribution and cultural recognition.

Another bias reflects the fact that I am a single parent. Although there was no intentional bias to interview single parents, I found that they were easier to recruit through social media channels because they were actively seeking redress for the harm they were experiencing arising from the 2006 welfare reforms. Although I identify as a ‘single parent’, I regard this as a label that is often used pejoratively, and is objectionable and disempowering. Like many of the single parents who participated in this study, I am angry at the way in which the construct of the single parent is used to marginalise and oppress women. Due to the strong social capital and trust-based relationships nurtured by single parents in their communities, I believe there is potential for single parents to collectivise to the extent needed to obtain better recognition of unpaid care work and to provide better balance between care and work in social policy. In line with the arguments presented in this thesis, I believe this work has already begun, and involves the need to reappropriate the language associated with single parenting. Further recognition for the contribution of single parents and care work in general is needed.
Professional bias

My employment as a policy worker at Jobs Australia has provided access to up-to-date and intimate knowledge of the employment services context, which has been useful to this research in many ways. It helped me design the research strategies to access the data I was interested in. With this background knowledge, I have been able to understand and identify the features of employment services policy and practice that withstand the inevitable contract and policy changes that occurred while this research was underway. This direct engagement with the constantly changing nature of employment services has enabled me to maintain the currency of my knowledge of the normative conditions in employment services, as well as having an awareness of the kinds of evaluation and outcome-based measures used by Government. This knowledge means that I have been able to adapt my analysis and take a long-term view of employment services despite the contract transitions that occurred over the period of this research.

However, my role as a policy worker caused some tensions that I have identified as potential forms of bias that informed my reflections as a researcher. The first tension relates to the motivation for this research, which I have already described as being a concern about escalating levels of conflict at the street-level. I believe this conflict reflected the narrow and limited perspective of policy makers, such as the bureaucrats and peak bodies I interact with. There were times when I felt uneasy about the critical nature of this research and how my intentions would be regarded by colleagues and the agencies with whom I have professional relationships.

I was frustrated about the lack of qualitative evidence or ethical insight in the policy making processes I observed. I was therefore motivated by a desire to influence employment services policy development by contributing to knowledge based on an alternate perspective than that which is currently dominant and where I could use my research to influence policy. Perceived bias may affect future relationships with employment services agencies, policy advocates and representatives from government departments with whom I interact in my role at Jobs Australia. Although the views expressed in this thesis may affect these relationships, I have not moderated the views presented in this thesis.

During recruitment and screening, some of the workers expressed their concern that the research would portray their work in a negative light. Although they expressed frustration with many aspects of their work in employment services, they told me that not enough attention was paid to their positive achievements. One worker withdrew consent when she checked her permission to use her story because she felt it was too negative. I double-checked the story against the transcript and found the narrative closely reflected what had been spoken. I engaged in a discussion with this worker to explore the reasons for her withdrawal. In this discussion, I emphasised that the intent of the research was to explore ways in which services could be better designed.
The concerns the workers expressed led me to reflect on the fairness of my stance. There was clearly bias in the weighting of the focus of the research — due to the focus on incidents involving threat of sanctions — that does not provide emphasis on the positive achievements of employment services workers. To alleviate the impact of these concerns, I considered ways in which to highlight some of the positive aspects of the workers, particularly in regard to their commitment to helping the unemployed and the frustrations they have experienced. This emphasis on their commitment should be apparent in the worker findings.

**Analytic strategies**

There were distinct stages in analytic strategies. The analytic strategies firstly involved narrative analysis in which the narratives were created following the interview; the narratives were then analysed using field analysis and converted into case studies; then concepts drawn from Bourdieu were applied to provide a theoretical perspective on the case studies; and finally, the third stage involved developing a typology of the forms of resistance, which informed the interest-based perspective. While I described them as analytically distinct, this process was not linear and reflects the idea of abductive strategies in which there was movement backwards and forwards between the data and the explanations developed from them. This process is described by Blaikie as ‘retroduction’ (Blaikie, 2009).

**Analysis of the narratives**

The overall intention of collecting data via narrative methods was to use them as the source from which to undertake field analysis. According to Grenfell, field analysis is a three-stage process involving mapping out relations in the field under observation (Grenfell, 2012: 73). As applied to the employment services field, this kind of mapping involves the identification of the actors, who are job seekers, employment services agencies and their workers, and those who determine the policy rules that define rules acted out in street-level interactions. The concepts from Bourdieu’s theory of practice are employed to understand the conditions of the field, the positions of the actors, and the constraints on their action.

The role of the narratives in this analysis is to provide access to the subjective experiences of job seekers and workers. The interview questions were designed to capture these experiences by asking the job seekers to describe incidents where they had been threatened with sanctions. The analysis was guided by Hoggett’s view of reflective agency, in which human decision making is influenced by the confluence of subjective forces, including emotions, states of psychological health and the contingency of the moment (Hoggett, 2001). The interviewing technique involved prompts to explore how sanctions made job seekers feel and how they felt they were perceived by the employment services agencies. The narratives about incidents involving sanction were a resource for understanding...
how the relations of Workfare made them feel and the relationship between the emotions expressed; how this informed action; and the job seekers’ and workers’ observations of the constraints on action and their field relations. Bourdieu’s theory of practice provided the concepts that could explain the relational nature of interactions.

However, the analysis does not pretend to have fully engaged with the concept of *habitus*. This is because *habitus* is a complex concept that refers to many dimensions of human identity behaviour that are problematic to analyse with any rigour. Habitus is the concept that refers to internalised dispositions, routinised action and generative and creative behaviour that is not readily accessible to social researchers. Such analysis would involve deep investigative analysis of repetitive and taken-for-granted habits of thought and action as, for example, might proceed as a form of discourse analysis of the subjective recursion of social structures.

Because of these reservations about the complexity of the concept of *habitus*, the narratives were used in the field analysis by providing a resource from which to draw understanding of the ways in which activation and sanctions were negotiated. The way in which the job seekers and workers described their interactions was analysed in terms of the relations of Workfare, firstly drawing on the ways in which they described being able to deploy resources and the constraints on their action. Further relevant concepts were identified as the analysis progressed and reflected the intersection of the theory of practice and the sociology of welfare. These additional concepts related to conflict, domination, recognition, interests and misrecognition. Since there was a high concentration of single parents in the sample, additional issues relating to the gendered social relations of Workfare and domestic violence were identified as the analysis progressed. The stages of this analysis are reflected in the presentation of the findings.

The second stage of the analysis was of the forms of resistance that arise in the context of conditionality. This led to the development of a typology of resistance, which is described in relation to three dimensions of power observed as being present in the field. Different forms of power were dominant in these interactions, depending on whether the field conditions were dominated by the effects of instrumental rules and intersubjective recognition, or were a reflection of the individual *habitus* that informed the job seekers’ or worker approaches to negotiating the interactions.

A tertiary level of analysis led to the development of an interest-based perspective. The interest-based perspective was used to provide a critical insight into forms of resistance in employment services that arise due to their role in the administration of welfare conditionality enforced through sanction. It connects the observations of resistance in employment services to the critical concerns of this research, which were to better understand the effects of disciplinary social policy. The consequence of this discipline manifested in the escalating levels of interpersonal conflict reported in street-level interactions in employment services during the Job Services Australia contract.
Limitations

There are four significant limitations to the research methodology. The first is the use of narrative interviews, the second is the sample size, the third is online interview methods, and the fourth is related to the authenticity of the voice of the research participants in the co-constructed narratives of their experiences.

The first limitation reflects concerns I identified after learning that ethnographic research is the most common methodological approach for research into social mediations (Morrow & Brown, 1994). Rather than proceeding as an ethnographic investigation, narrative interviewing was used instead. The decision to use this approach was based on some of the barriers to gaining access to moments of conflict and resistance – identified, for example, in Watkins’s (2006) ethnographic study. The risks reflect broader concerns within ethnography itself of gaining access to naturalistic settings (Hammersely & Atkinson, 2003). These concerns about access reflect the effects of the researcher’s presence in the service, as well as the likelihood that the events of the phenomenon under investigation would occur in the presence of the researcher. I addressed this limitation by undertaking purposive recruitment of job seekers and workers with incidents related to resistance to speak about. This provided very specific access to the incidents of relevance to the research interests from participants who were motivated to speak about these issues.

In relation to concerns about generalisability, there are concerns about the scale of the study. While the scale of the research cohort of 19 is small, it is similar to the size of other qualitative PhD research with similar concerns (Blaxland, 2008; Bodsworth, 2012). The purposive recruitment meant I was able to find job seekers and workers with data that was directly relevant to the research question, and I was satisfied that the cohort provided access to useful rich qualitative data. There was no intention to produce a sample from which generalisability in a positivist sense would be possible, but this does not mean they are not relevant to the experiences of a broader population of unemployed people. Indeed, the experiences described in this research reflect those reported in social media and by the Australian Unemployed Workers Union. The focus on incidents involving sanctions is also intended to draw attention to the impact of disciplinary social policy on social relations in the context of advanced capitalism. The research therefore provides an example of the effects of welfare relations that function through an advanced liberal welfare regime of Workfare, and are not intended to be read as isolated examples of these disciplinary relations.

The third limitation relates to the use of online interview methods and relates to building rapport and trust as well as lack of authenticity. The main limitation I experienced using these methods was that on one or two cases, the responses were brief, and it was difficult to get the job seekers to expand on their thoughts. This challenge of interviewing is present even in face-to-face interviews and can
reflect the motivation of the participants, which is not always to participate in the research *per se*, as opposed to obtaining the voucher in recognition of their contribution.

Crichton and Kinash (2003) argued that online interviewing can produce high levels of intentionality because both parties to the interview have time to reflect and edit their words before sending them. They suggest that another benefit of this type of interaction derives from the ‘researcher and participant engaging in conversation and meaning making through repeated, revisited and jointly interpreted conversations that support reflection and revision’ (Crichton & Kinash, 2003). The use of narrative interviewing allowed the data to be collected as a conversation between two active participants ‘who co-produce the data in dialogic relationships with greater communicative equality’ (Riessman, 2008: 26). To build rapport in the online and telephone interviews, I sent a photograph of myself, and background information about my interest in the research and personal circumstances that were relevant (such as being a single parent). The job seekers commented that this helped ‘break the ice’.

The fourth limitation related to the authenticity of the voice of the research participants in the stories. While co-construction had been an aspiration of this approach to building the narrative accounts, the participants appeared to lose interest in participating any further in the construction of the stories and approved them with only minor factual changes, and with no intervention in style or intonation. The exception to this was when the participants provided a more or less already constructed and sometimes well-edited narrative of their stories via email. Due to my concern about the authenticity of the voice in the stories, the findings only use direct quotes from the interview transcripts, as these have not been mediated by my interpretation.

**Chapter 4 conclusion**

In this chapter, I outlined how the data collection occurred through narrative inquiry based on an epistemology of social constructionism. This chapter explained the epistemological implications of undertaking this research using Bourdieusian field analysis. I described how these have been captured in a research methodology based on an epistemology of weak constructivism, which tolerates both realism and social constructionism. The chapter then described the specific research methods, the form of researcher reflectiveness applied to the analysis of the data, and the stages of the analytic strategies. Incidents involving sanctions were identified as providing access to rich qualitative data that could be used to examine their effects and how job seekers and workers negotiate the employment services field.

The chapter then explained how the analysis proceeded as the form of mediation level explication described by Morrow and Brown (1994). The mediation is the conflict associated with sanctions in employment services, which has been conceptualised as a subfield of the broader welfare field. The
analytic strategies were described as involving three states in which the narratives were developed, analysed into comparative case studies, and analysed using the concepts from Bourdieu’s field theory. A section described the forms of reflection used to identify the bias I brought to the research. This was followed by a discussion of the practical limitations of this research.
Chapter 5 – Job seeker findings

Introduction to the job seeker findings

In these findings Bourdieusian field analysis is used to situate job seekers in the employment services field. These findings employ concepts from Bourdieu’s theory of practice to describe how job seekers negotiate the rules of conditionality in employment services. When described using concepts from Bourdieu's field theory (Bourdieu, 1990), interactions in employment services are constrained by the objective and subjective conditions of fields.

The findings explore the effects of both the objective and subjective conditions of fields like employment services in which instrumental rules and discursive associations inform worker disposition and treatments of unemployed people. The objective conditions of fields are the instrumental rules that govern behaviour tolerated in the field. The subjective conditions of the field are deposited as a habitus in individual actors. Both the objective and subjective conditions of the field are ‘practiced’ through intersubjective recognition, in which recognition serves to mediate the objective and subjective conditions of the field. This is because intersubjectivity can be used to identify the way in which human actors recognise the legitimacy of other actors.

This chapter is structured in three parts. This first part of the job seeker findings situates job seekers in the employment services field in terms of field relations. Incidents involving sanctions provided the focus of the research and were used to understand how job seekers negotiate sanctions, and their effects on relations in employment services. These findings examine job seekers’ experience of the activity test and its relation to the use of sanctions and then explore the impact of the ‘any job’ imperative of Workfirst on relations.

The second part of the job seeker findings proceeds by explaining interactions in employment services using concepts from Bourdieu’s field theory that are useful for understanding how job seekers negotiate the employment services field. These findings employ Bourdieu’s concepts of capital, intersubjectivity and misrecognition to explore the relational properties of interactions in employment services.

The third part builds on the previous two parts and identifies forms of resistance in a way that adapts Bourdieusian field analysis to the context of employment services. These findings build on the theoretical analysis of the previous findings parts and develops a typology of resistance. This typology elaborates different forms of resistance, the nature of the resources that enable this resistance, and the conditions in which strategies of resistance are escalated beyond personal interactions to change the nature of society more generally. These findings provide the foundation for the interest-based perspective on resistance presented in the discussion in Chapter 7.
Field approach

This field analysis proceeds by firstly explaining employment services in terms of Bourdieu’s concept of a field. As outlined earlier in this thesis, field analysis involves observing and analysing the relational properties of fields informed by the objective, subjective and intersubjective influences and constraints on action. This elaboration of Bourdieu’s field theory does not focus on describing habitus, as this has different methodological implications, such as in-depth interrogation of the extent to which social structures limit subjective reactions.

Action in employment services can be described as a game. Bourdieu used the metaphor of a game of rugby to describe actions in fields (Bourdieu, 1990). When a game is in play, the space in which it is being played is transformed into a field where certain rules apply. The players of the game assume positions on the field, and know the rules of the game. The rules of the game are determined by the objective and subjective conditions of fields. The objective conditions of fields are the instrumental rules that govern behaviour tolerated on the field. The subjective conditions of the field are deposited as a habitus in individual actors. Both the objective and subjective conditions of the field are ‘practiced’ through intersubjective recognition, in which recognition serves to mediate the objective and subjective conditions of the field.

These findings begin with a description of the instrumental conditions of the employment services field as enacted through rules of activation and welfare conditionality. These rules create the conditions that provide objective governance of this field. The objective conditions of the employment services field are the rules of activation and welfare conditionality. The objective conditions of the employment services field are instrumentalised through the employment services contract and the behavioural rules associated with Workfirst labour market policy. The properties of a field are determined in instrumental terms through laws and institutional practices where they become documents of rule. These documents of rule, which provide the instrumental and objective limits of the employment services field, included social security legislation and instruments, as well as employment services contracts and guidelines. These rules manifest in the letters, forms and scripts that employment services and Centrelink workers use to inform job seekers of their entitlements and obligations.

The subjective conditions of the field are informed by the discursive informants of the welfare field - which in the era of JSA reflected the welfare dependency and underclass welfare discourse. Welfare reform is accompanied by a discursive justification, which from a field theory perspective reflects the legitimation of policy achieved in the outcome of classification struggles. Once classifications are normalised, there are shifts in social attitudes, which become internalised in the attitudes of citizens so that these new configurations come to be accepted as the new norms of welfare entitlement. Classifications like that of ‘job seeker’ serve the particular function of normalising welfare constructs for the purpose of legitimising the interests of the dominant. They become embedded as ‘practice’ in
the culture of agencies in the attitudes of workers, and in the expectations of welfare clients (Martin, 2006; Peillon, 1998).

The idea of practice is emphasised because of the extent to which recognition occurs in interactions in social contexts where they come to life as part of the field. Human actors reproduce and validate field conditions through interactions involving intersubjective recognition. Fields are governed by implicit rules that have objective properties only to the extent that they are acknowledged and reproduced through intersubjective relations. The symbolic value of capital exists only to the extent that it is socially legitimated and has value in the eyes of others (Siisiainen, 2003). This emphasis on intersubjective recognition as a variable influencing field conditions means that while there may be some externally imposed constraints on action, fields are in fact the sites of negotiation as agents attempt to improve their field positions by deploying valued forms of capital.

**Job seeker findings – Part 1**

In the employment services field, the actors are job seekers, employment services agencies and their workers. The actors assume roles depending on their positions on the field; in this case, job seekers being those who are subject to the rules of activation and conditionality. This first part of the job seeker findings situates job seekers in the employment services field in terms of field relations. Incidents involving sanctions provided the focus of the research and were used to understand how job seekers negotiate sanctions, and their effects on relations in employment services. The focus on resistance was intended to explore tensions in the construal of human motivation inherent in the discourse of individualisation and marketisation. Further, the interrogation of resistance provided a way to explore the ways in which job seekers exercise agency in contexts that are dominating.

Interactions in the employment services field reflect the extent to which the rules of conditionality provide objective governance of the forms of action job seekers and workers can undertake. The rules of conditionality determine the conditions of the employment services field by prescribing the limits to acceptable conduct, which are designed to reinforce job search behaviours. The particular instrumental measures that were in force during JSA involved shifting single parents to Newstart when their youngest child turned eight, and introducing eligibility criteria for disability benefits that were harder to meet. These measures were intended to activate these two cohorts, as well as to activate employment services agencies to work with them by stipulating the behavioural rules of welfare conditionality in guidelines and contracts.

The activity test and is enforced through the use of a job plan which sets out the form of activity job seekers are required to fulfil their participation requirement and meet the rules relating to welfare conditionality. In this sense, the rules of the employment services game take an objective form as the instrumental rules governing the condition of the employment services field.
Action in employment services can be described as a game. Bourdieu used the metaphor of a game of rugby to describe actions in fields (Bourdieu, 1990). When a game is in play, the space in which it is being played is transformed into a field where certain rules apply. The players of the game assume positions on the field, and know the rules of the game. There are different rules for different games, and different players have different functions within the game, depending on the unique rules of each game. Using poetic licence, the game played in employment services could be described as a kind of dodgeball involving job seekers, in which job seekers avoid being penalised if they behave appropriately. The rules of the game involve active job search and appearing to display the right attitude towards getting a job. When the ball hits them for failing to meet the activity test, they receive financial penalties. Job seekers can score points in this game when they get a job, and this reduces the level of surveillance they experience, especially if the job gets them off welfare or if they find another way to get away from the field where they no longer have to play the same game. It is a peculiar game because the penalty for failures is more of the poverty that the game is supposed to help them quit.

These findings describe how job seekers interacted with the rules of the employment services game particularly the way in which sanctions affected their behaviour and created constraints on their activity. The observations recorded here were particularly focused on the effects of sanctions on relations between job seekers and employment services. The interview questions were designed to capture these experiences by asking the job seekers to describe incidents where they had been threatened with sanctions.

These findings firstly examine job seekers’ experiences of the activity test and its relation to the use of sanctions and then explore the impact of the ‘any job’ imperative of Workfirst on relations. The findings provide examples of the effects of meeting these behavioural requirements on relations by reporting on the ways job seekers described how this made them feel. The findings are structured to report on the feelings that included distrust, disrespect, fear and disempowerment because of the intrusion.

Meeting the activity test

Compliance with the activity test is the underlying condition that sanctions are used to enforce. In other words, sanctions are used to discipline job seekers to ensure they are meeting the conditions of conduct prescribed in the activity test. The activity test itself comprises a series of activities, including job search activity, appointments at employment services agencies, group-based job search activities, attending job interviews and Work for the Dole. The exact formula for individual activity is documented in a ‘job plan’, which is supposed to be a negotiated outcome of discussions between job seekers and workers about how to get ready for work. In reality, the job plan often comprises of strategies determined by the employment services agency, and job seekers can be breached for failing to agree to the job plan (DoE, 2017b).
Once activated as job seekers, it is usually failure to meet the activity documented in the job plan that triggers the decision to sanction. The most common failure is nonattendance at employment services appointments (DoE, 2014). Job seekers are expected to have a reasonable excuse when they are unable to attend appointments with employment services and may be asked to provide evidence of the reason they could not attend, such as a medical certificate. There are strict criteria that must be met to provide evidence of a reasonable excuse and, since new rules came into effect in 2011, to report non-attendance in advance with a valid reason (DoE, 2017). Workers judge whether job seekers had a reasonable excuse and whether that reasonable excuse is sufficient to have prevented them from notifying their absence or failing to attend. The job seeker compliance rules contain limited provision for workers to apply discretion when they make decisions about whether to lodge the participation report, which results in a financial penalty.

The findings of the research support the view that the activity test is counterproductive to self-efficacy. This is because the job seekers had already been busy in ways that they considered to be socially and vocationally beneficial. Job seekers shared the view they were being kept busy for the sake of it, rather than engaging in any useful employment related activity:

I’ve always been upfront with the Job Networks about the type of work I want to do, I am highly educated and a practising artist. It has been for many years, this is my preferred work, and I have never expected them to be able to find a job for me, that’s just not how it works, but I would have taken it if they’d found me one for sure (Desmond, 2013).

Rather than being perceived as being there to help people find jobs, employment services were described as being a policing mechanism of activation. The research participants reported frustration at the constant hassling from phone calls and appointments they felt were a waste of time. The constant checking that the number of hours of activity has been undertaken and the right number of jobs being applied for as described as interfering with the capacity to get on with the work of applying for jobs. Leanne reported:

As if working, looking for work and being financially responsible for your family isn’t enough … the system feels like a big hamster wheel! I’m left with the impression the JSA’s have to justify their funding so keep people constantly jumping hoops even though they don’t appear to have the industry or employer contacts to find employment for you (Leanne, 2013).

Leanne’s complaint about the pointlessness of employment services was a common point of view, with job seekers often using phrases like ‘jumping through hoops’ and ‘hamster wheel’ to describe their experiences. While the job seekers were actively monitored to ensure they had behaved in certain appropriate ways, such as through providing evidence of job search and attending
appointments and job interviews, the employment services agencies themselves were reported as not reciprocating with useful services.

The provider has done nothing to assist me in finding work. Ask them to produce some evidence of it. They did not send me to any job interviews or offer me any services except the appointments I attended. There was some training I had been interested in doing to help me extend my qualifications (which I paid for myself) but there was no offer of supporting me to do this (Claudia, 2013).

Furthermore, the job seekers’ perception of the online reporting and messaging systems was that they were faulty, and if they did not keep checking them, they could be caught unaware and sanctioned for appointments they had not received notification about. Desmond reported having to go online to check what his requirements were, having learnt from experience that appointments were made and he was not advised of them. He reported at length the burden of maintaining up-to-date records and constantly having to keep monitoring for system mistakes to avoid his payment being cut off:

There were all sorts of hassles with Centrelink, even as I was transferred onto the Age pension, because of system muck-ups with reporting dates and so on. It takes hours to sort it all out, it’s the kind of thing you just have to interrupt what you are doing and sort it out. And even when you think you’ve sorted it out, you have to keep checking because of their systems. I’ve learnt from experience to keep checking online to see what the system says you need to do, because I’ve been cut off a number of times without notification, even though I insist on receiving all their notices by post, they don’t even tell you what’s going on or what you have done wrong sometimes. I keep a journal and files on all of this so I can check back when there are mistakes (Desmond, 2013).

The work of being on welfare actually interfered with the job seekers’ capacity to job search, especially when there were administrative mistakes, or disputes over activity requirements, like those experienced by Claudia. Claudia explained how many hours she had spent calling her employment services agency and Centrelink to verify exactly what her participation requirements were after she had been sanctioned for failing to meet the activity test:

On Friday that week I contacted participation again because I did not understand what an employment pathway was, what the requirements are and who decides how many times you have to go and see a provider. Quite honestly, I am so confused about the whole activity test participation thing. Are they the same thing? Is the EPP the participation plan and who has the authority to decide exactly what the person is required to do? This has been my big question. Why do I have to visit a Job Services provider every two weeks? Who decides the frequency of the visits? (Claudia, 2013).
Since she could not get definitive answers from her employment services consultant, Claudia decided to contact Centrelink for clarification.

It was finally explained to me and I was told that I did not have to sign anything. That the process is one of negotiation. There are certain rules you have to meet but there are a number of choices. If you fulfil certain criteria, you do not have to attend fortnightly meetings… None of this I understand as it has never been explained to me…I have wasted so much time dealing with this when I could have been using this time looking for work!!!! (Claudia, 2013).

Because it was challenging for the job seekers to keep up with the administration, they developed strategies to avoid the hassle of administrative review. It was simply easier not to report changes than to risk the reassessment that arose when they did report them. Kevin reported finding it difficult to wait on the Centrelink telephone long enough to update his details and/or claim different forms of allowances when his circumstances changed:

I used to be on Youth Allowance, then Austudy, the paperwork was horrendous. I’ve never been able to complete it all OK, and once I had to pay back some money for their mistakes. I find the paperwork a nightmare, checking all the details; I am not the kind of person who deals with that very well (Kevin, 2013).

He said he preferred to allow agencies like Centrelink and employment services to maintain incorrect records about him, even though he knew he would be penalised for their mistakes. Matthew also explained how he found the bureaucracy off-putting, despite having good knowledge of welfare services:

Even for me, someone who is educated and resilient, I find it challenging. There are so many services to navigate and none of them are connected up. I am trying to get my mental health situation understood, which is a hard thing for me to come to terms with personally, and it’s like they’re asking a man with two broken legs to run a marathon. Except it’s not my legs that are broken, it’s my brain that’s not working properly, yet I am expected to use it for all this navigation and it’s really complex. It’s only my resilience that enables me to do it. I imagine there’s a lot of other people who just wouldn’t cope with it (Matthew, 2013).

The job seekers reflected on the amount of time it took their case workers to respond to reports of change in circumstances, and their frustration at the amount of red-tape or administrative work relating to this. Although failing to update information relating to change of circumstances can result in breaches of compliance and social security rules, there was an unspoken agreement that not reporting minor changes would be better for everyone all round.
The feelings they expressed

The effects of meeting the activity test, the supervision it entailed, and handling the challenging and complex bureaucratic work of being on welfare resulted in the job seekers feeling stressed, frustrated and angry. Furthermore, these feelings were attributable to the surveillance and intrusion involved in meeting the activity test.

I haven’t found any of the employment services I’ve dealt with helpful, they just make you jump through hoops and there’s nothing in it for you. It is so stressful having to handle all the hassle from them, you know with job search requirements and diaries for them and Centrelink and the constant monitoring phone calls and stuff (Claudia, 2013).

The job seekers were angry and frustrated that the levels of hassle they were exposed to were not reciprocated with useful services. The lack of reciprocity reported by job seekers underscored the extent to which they perceived their relationship with employment services as a hassle. The lack of reciprocity and the amount of hassle made the job seekers feel angry and cheated, with no expectation of receiving any useful help:

After stewing over last week’s job interview offers, I attend the employment services provider to query the manager about how these short-term/casual job interviews will assist me in meeting my long-term personal pathway off Newstart. Left with the promise the manager would look over my resume and investigate the sector where I was looking for employment. Wondering if that means they have no options for anything other than casual, low-paid work? Never heard back from her anyway! (Leanne, 2013).

The feeling of being cheated reinforced the extent to which job seekers considered their relationship to be one involving high levels of hassle. This hassle was disproportionate to any help they received, or benefit in being attached to an employment services agency. The job seekers described the extent of the supervision and interference in their daily lives as intrusive and unnecessary. Rosie explained that there were many other complex tasks they were managing concurrently:

You should see me, I apply for jobs all the time, and have all my other stuff to manage, I don’t see why they need to be on our backs, too. It is just stupid, and we’ve got other problems to manage with child support and housing, and you name it (Rosie, 2013).

The job seekers commented on how these treatments were unfair and a wasteful way to spend taxpayers’ money. In this example, Matthew commented from the point of view of his training as a community services worker:

I have been aware that I have taken that on in my own action, which I guess is little bit lack of faith in the system. That these people can’t assist me because I’ve been to Uni. That kind of
sucks a bit because I’ve learnt now, if you give people like myself the right assistance, we will flourish, so it’s like losing the resource (Matthew, 2013).

Matthew’s observations reflected the extent to which the lack of resourcing of employment services to support people when they need help is wasteful. The perception of the unfairness of employment services treatments was related to the job seekers’ belief that employment services agencies were not there to help them, or care about them as individuals:

Another aspect I wanted support with was, when I rang up sick, would be someone to say, ‘I hope you feel better soon’. Like, when you’re sick and overwhelmed, you know, you’re just burdened by your bodies, you’re burdened, you’re overwhelmed by everything. You ring and obviously they don’t care, and sometimes that affects your confidence, you know, when you are dealing with people who are so uncaring (Kelly, 2013).

This perspective of employment services workers being ‘uncaring’ is also reflected in comments about being ‘treated as a number,’ and the view that workers did not really have the interest and capability to help job seekers:

Centrelink just treat you like a number, you know if you are welfare dependent, then you are just a number. When you are in the queue there, you just feel the stigma. There is no personalised service, they do not care about your story, why you have ended up being there, and it is just, ‘next please’. I guess if they had people who were really interested in doing their job there, the service would just be completely different. It wouldn’t be like this if they really took an interest in each case. It would be too hard for them to do their job (Kevin, 2013).

The lack of care Kevin and Kelly observed reflects the resource constraints that mean workers were perceived as not having the capacity to provide customised services to job seekers. This meant the job seekers felt like they were not treated as individuals; rather, they were treated as a group without individualised attention.

They put everyone into the same basket. It’s not saying “well do you need help?: Not grading people in degrees of help they need, or individualising treatment according to what sort of help they need, well not treatment, support. The support I need is a good computer with Office software, so I could do a resume, and if there was someone there who could quickly look over my resume and make suggestions, that would have been ample support. I think in the degrees they are trying to over support us, and it comes across as harassment, because I’m educated I can do this sort of stuff if given the resources and where are these computers where I can sit down and do my resume (Kelly, 2013).

The lack of personalisation led the job seekers to avoid employment services.
When I failed to report for fortnightly and pointless progress reports at the employment providers, my Newstart was suspended. I failed to report because I just got sick of the pointlessness of the exercise. I am no simpleton. The system is not one I want to fit, not for love or money. Even the provider staff agreed that the system was failing (Laura, 2014).

Laura’s decision not to report was based on her view that this requirement was a form of supervision, rather than having any benefits for her in terms of finding a job. Her comments underscore the perception that employment services activity was pointless and not matched by useful services.

Matthew avoided employment services because he did not believe they could actually help him and that he would be forced to take a low-quality job:

My way of coping with employment services requirements has been to just get a job. I know I have three months in between to get my shit together, and then towards the end of the time I just apply for jobs like crazy, and usually end up with something that would be a bit better than what they are likely to get me (Matthew, 2013).

Matthew deployed this strategy and avoided employment services this way even though he knew the job would not last:

I was kind of stressed about and scared of having to deal with employment agencies, and it’s kind of like I have a fear of them, or don’t understand them, or can’t be bothered, or you know what? I don’t want to be forced into some shit job that’s going to deteriorate my mental state trying to keep focused (Matthew, 2013).

These avoidance behaviours illustrated the low levels of trust job seekers held towards employment services.

**Workfirst and any job and lack of choice**

Workfirst is intended to move job seekers into any job quickly. There is pressure on employment services to place job seekers in jobs as quickly as they can to start the clock running towards an outcome payment. The employment services activity management guidelines reflect the Workfirst imperative, and direct employment services agencies to make job seekers apply for jobs even if they are not aligned to job seeker preferences or qualifications (DoE, 2017a). This means that job seekers are unlikely to be given choices about the jobs they apply for, and, if they do not attend interviews for these jobs, they can be breached with an eight-week non-payment penalty. If job seekers are judged as having sabotaged interviews, they can also receive an eight-week non-payment penalty. In this way, there is significant pressure on job seekers to apply for jobs they do not want.

In these findings, Workfirst was identified as making job seekers apply for, take and keep jobs whether they wanted them or not. This caused job seekers to distrust their employment services.
agencies because they connected this to the agencies’ own financial survival rather than being in their own interest. The job seekers knew that employment services agencies’ payments are dependent on job seekers behaving in the right way and cited it as a reason for the hassling they reported. Their awareness that this was an imperative driving employment services was reflected in their observations about the kinds of jobs they were sent for, about which they had no choice.

The job seekers provided examples of being compelled to apply for jobs they did not want. Desmond, an artist, was forced to apply for jobs that were not well aligned to his skills. Although he had expressed no interest, he was referred to a job in a plastics factory. The rules he was subject to left him no choice but to go through the motions of turning up for the job and then being sent away:

I had to go along with it for being threatened with being breached, which was a waste of everyone’s time. The lady at the factory took one look at me and knew I wasn’t right for the job, and sighed like she felt like her time had been wasted, too (Desmond, 2013).

I’ve been made to go for jobs I did not want to take multiple times. Once was at a meat works. Being someone who doesn’t eat meat or cook much as the smell makes me feel sick, I felt vile by the end of the day. Another time was at a fruit pick/pack place – had another job to start (that I got myself and wanted to do) the day after I started at the fruit place. Then another was at a warehouse while I was working part-time (Cari, 2014).

Threat of sanction was used to force the job seekers to stay in the jobs they did not want. The threat of sanction meant they were trapped in jobs they considered unsuitable, until they could find something else:

Once I felt pressured into taking a crap job that I did not really want, in a paper factory. Fortunately, another job came up for me and I was able to exit that one without getting a non-payment penalty, they were really horrible people and had given me a hard time about spending like precisely 2.5 minutes too long in the toilet or something. Even so, I was glad to be earning at the time since it gave me enough money to live on for a change (Lisa, 2014).

Lisa reported how challenging it was to change jobs after being placed by an employment services agency. She knew that she could be sanctioned for eight weeks for leaving the job, even when she did not want it herself.

Not only were job seekers coerced into applying for jobs they did not want, but they were also treated with suspicion if they did not get them. Threat of sanction was used to remind the job seekers that their behaviour was being watched:

When putting me for jobs, my old agency would put me forward for jobs that I wasn’t qualified for and wonder why I never made it past the interview stage, thinking I was purposely sabotaging myself (Lisa, 2014).
It was up to job seekers to find jobs they wanted. However, mismatch between the labour market, qualifications and availability of suitable jobs is a structural problem employment services, activation, conditionality and sanction simply cannot fix:

Now, mainly, my problem is I am a square peg they are trying to fit in a round hole. Most of the jobs around here are blue collar factory jobs and the employers don’t even give me a look in. I am looking for professional jobs in the greater city region, but since I don’t have much professional work experience it’s really hard to get a break. I have heard this is a problem for a lot of new graduates, we are just overqualified for the workforce. As I said, I am not a job snob, although ideally, I would like to work in an area I have qualified for (Lisa, 2014).

How this made them feel

Being forced to take unsuitable or unwanted jobs contributed to the job seekers’ distrust of employment services. The distrust they described related to their observations that employment services prioritised their concern with getting outcome payments over the needs of the job seekers. These perceptions reflect views like those of Grover (2009), who observed the way in which job seekers can be traded as a commodity for the gain of profit-making agencies. For job seekers, this means they distrusted employment services because they prioritised profit over the needs of job seekers:

Like I was just another excuse for them to receive more money from the government to go into their back pocket (Cari, 2014).

Being made to take unsuitable jobs contributed to job seekers feeling that employment services prioritised getting employment outcomes over the needs of job seekers. The treatments job seekers experienced were perceived as being designed for the benefit of employment services agencies, not job seekers.

Furthermore, the job seekers described feeling exploited by employment services agencies. In this example, Rosie describes how an employment services agency lost her a job she had found herself, by contacting the employer without her permission or knowledge:

So this DES [Disability Employment Service] right, they really messed me around. What they did was contacted an employer for a job I’d arranged for myself and told them not to pay me because they were going to organise a wage subsidy so here I find myself in a job I’ve found myself, and not getting paid. I went ballistic and couldn’t stay working there anymore (Rosie, 2013).

Rosie saw the agency’s interest in claiming an outcome for the job she had found for herself as an intrusion, motivated by profit seeking. They prioritised the job outcome claim without care or regard
about the impact this had on her relationship with her employer. Rosie had not wanted the employer to know she had been using Disability Employment Services, as this exposed her as having been on welfare and having a disability. She ‘went ballistic’ because she felt her privacy had been violated and she had been disrespected.

Claudia adopted demeaning language to describe the behaviour of her provider’s bullying.

It is not right that some bully is using standover tactics like some sort of Fat Controller, threatening to stop me receiving money if I don’t do as he says, when I am struggling to exist on $500 fortnight. I want something done about this. I do not want to see that awful man ever again (Claudia, 2013).

Claudia’s language was chosen to amplify her perception that agencies employ authoritarian strategies to control the behaviour of citizens. Her disrespect towards the employment services agency was based on her expectations of the standards citizens should expect from government-funded services.

The job seekers reported their sense that there is a lack of public accountability in employment services, which enables them to engage in unethical surveillance and control of job seeker behaviour. This lack of accountability is a reminder of Wacquant’s view that the role of the agencies that administer Workfare is to administer surveillance and to punish the poor (Wacquant, 2001; Wacquant, 2003). The sense of waste resulted in the indignation expressed by Claudia:

Unemployed people need to be looked after by public servants who are bound by probity, not by private organisations who benefit from people being out of work. As Centrelink have [sic] said, ‘These people are a law unto themselves. They make their own rules’ (Claudia, 2013).

Claudia’s indignation is a reflection of the disparity between her expectations of public services and the behaviour of privatised employment services.

Sanctions and relations

The findings indicate that being threatened with sanction is detrimental to the case management relationship. This research identified the immediate deterioration in relationships between job seekers and workers because of threats relating to participation failures. Cari was breached because she failed to notify the employment services agency that she would not be able to attend Work for the Dole because she was attending the funeral of an aunt:

One that really made me livid is when I had to go to my aunt’s funeral, which was a 15-hour car drive from where I lived in Brisbane. I headed down to where my aunt’s funeral was. Totally forgot that I had Work for the Dole on (obviously the last thing on my mind). So I had forgotten to call them. I got a phone call about two hours before the funeral while I was at my cousin’s house (the children of my aunt who died) from my job agency demanding to know why I did not show up (Cari, 2014).
Forgetting to call the employment services provider in these circumstances seemed reasonable to Cari, but she was breached anyway. It had a dramatic effect on the way she felt towards the employment services agency.

I felt pissed off to say the least. And I felt hatred. Simply because I felt that they had no compassion for the situation. That they didn’t care. The hatred was mainly towards my case manager, but there was some hatred to the whole establishment there. It felt like not wanting to go there (Cari, 2014).

Cari’s reaction illustrated the dramatic effects of sanctions on the worker–client relationship in situations where job seekers believe they have been unfairly treated. The hostility was generalised from the specific worker, to the agency and to the broader employment services.

The threat of sanction eroded trust and transformed the case management relationship into threats to financial security. The problem with financial sanctions for people surviving on very low incomes relates to the very basics of human survival. The threat of financial sanction looms as a behavioural control – but, rather than engendering motivation, it actually engenders fear:

Every time I was threatened with participation failure, either by Centrelink or the job centre, it brought up a very real fear that the decision of one person could change everything in my family. We could be living in a tent surviving on very little and that is not a stable and safe situation for a child to grow up in (Kelly, 2013).

Financial sanctions do not affect job seekers in the same way as other fines, such as parking tickets. Instead, they affect job seekers at the fundamentals of survival because they involve payments being withheld, and this immediately affects financial security. When her financial security was undermined by the employment consultant’s threat of financial sanction, Kelly reported feeling afraid to the extent that she felt sick and was shaking on the phone while she waited to speak to Centrelink about it:

Well I was on the phone for an hour and a half, thinking my payment’s suspended, I’ve got no money to pay rent, or feed my daughter … I was really stressed. I was shaking in my body, for a moment (Kelly, 2013).

When Kelly was asked to explain the nature of the sickness she experienced on the phone to Centrelink, she said it was based on the fear of having her economic security taken away from her and her daughter:

It is taking the basic survival things away, there’s that safety thing. That feeling like, ‘Oh, maybe I am not going to be cared for or looked after,’ and then something like this happens and it’s an extra blow. I really could lose everything (Kelly, 2013).

These are threats to financial security that make job seekers fear employment services and are far more concerning than a tension between help and hassle. This fear reflects urgent concerns about the
basics of survival, for example, being able to pay rent or buy food. Being threatened in such a way reminded job seekers of how little power they had relative to employment services agencies. The job seekers felt that behaviours they considered to be minor misdemeanours, such as failing to attend appointments, seemed to be punished disproportionately.

The threats just make us feel bullied and disempowered and it seems to me like the punishments they use should fit the crime, but there is no subtlety to it (Kelly, 2013).

Furthermore, the single parents provided examples of being sanctioned when employment services activity requirements conflicted with the priorities of caring for their children:

My employment services consultant has submitted participation reports and failures on two occasions. The first was when I did not go to an appointment because I was sick, and so was my daughter. I rang them up the day before because I was not feeling very well, and was recovering at home. The employment consultant put in a contact report about me because I could not afford to attend the doctor to provide them with a medical certificate … I had not mentioned I was actually caring for my daughter who was unwell, too, and that since it was probably just a virus we did not go to a doctor, also because of where I live being isolated, there are not many GPs around and I did not want to waste their time (nor my money) (Kelly, 2013).

The immediacy of family-related preoccupations were quoted by others as having more importance than attending the appointments. Kelly provided another example of the priority given to personal family matters that resulted in her being breached:

I could not attend an interview they only gave me 24 hours’ notice about. I had already arranged to help at my daughter’s school where they were doing NAPLAN testing and the teacher needed help (Kelly, 2013).

The findings suggest that compliance with activity tests is given lower priority in decision making when personal matters are prioritised instead of attendance at appointments. For the single parents, this suggests that the rules of conditionality are not sensitive to the full range of activities that comprise parenting outside of work.

Discretion and distrust

The findings indicate that the distrust job seekers hold towards employment services is reinforced by the extent to which elements of the activity test and sanctions involve the use of worker discretion. Job seekers described worker discretion as a significant cause of distrust in their relations with employment services. The distrust was caused by the discretion workers exercise in determining whether they believe job seekers have reasonable excuses for failing to attend appointments. Workers must interpret whether the job seeker had a reasonable excuse for not notifying the agency that they
could not attend an appointment, and whether that reasonable excuse was sufficient to have prevented them from notifying the agency about their absence, or attending the appointment. To the job seekers, worker discretion was open to exploitation based on subjective factors.

The discretion workers exercise in determining whether they believe job seekers have reasonable excuses was regarded as reflecting the subjective bias of the workers. The job seekers were alarmed when they discovered that discretionary criteria were being applied by employment consultants.

This is all through one decision from this one lady who quite honestly does not like me. How can one person have so much power? (Kelly, 2013).

Kelly felt that her employment consultant’s judgements were mediated by that worker’s attitudes, particularly because the participation failure was based on a discretionary decision about intentional avoidance. If, as was the case in Kelly’s experience, the worker made a decision that did not conform to compliance rules, there was an immediate loss of trust, and a feeling of being unsafe:

Having this happen when I was sick and also had to care for my sick child was draining and it was stressful that they are able to exercise discretion. I wondered why she had told me and tried to enforce a rule that wasn’t actually really a rule, and this made me doubt and mistrust her decision making. I doubted whether what she was trying to get me to do was based on real requirements or just her decisions about me and my case. I felt bullied (Kelly, 2013).

Participation failures are subject to investigations by Centrelink personnel, who follow a script to evaluate whether the job seeker had an excuse for non-participation, which consists of a long list of possible variables relating to the individual’s personal circumstances. During this process, job seekers disclose information to Centrelink staff that they may not have disclosed to their employment services agency, or which they did disclose but found it was dismissed as unsatisfactory.

Centrelink imposes a high rate of overturn of employment services decisions based on the information they collect if a participation failure is subject to any form of review. This overturn rate indicates a disinterested process of investigation that is not weighted so highly on the assumption of work avoidance, but on social security law and entitlement:

I felt here our judgements were always based on thorough analysis of the facts of what was going on, not subjective bias. We had the vulnerability indicators to work as a guide but we worked hard to help people identify and articulate their issues, that didn’t always fit in a neat box, for example, like I mentioned the example of domestic violence, but we were usually able to find a criteria to get people off. From memory I think there was only one case that I knew of where there was an 8-week no payment, I guess it was deserved, out of maybe several hundred I did while there (Jo, 2014).
For Kelly, there was a clear difference between the way in which workers were required to administer system rules by following scripts at Centrelink to the experience with her employment services consultant. The view from the participants can be explained by the shift in control from the safety of a knowable and documented system, to decisions based on worker assessment of the validity of activity or excuses.

**Feeling disrespected**

This distrust of employment services workers’ subjective interpretations was seen to reflect an underlying assumption of work avoidance. The participants gained this view because of the ways in which they observed themselves as being regarded as welfare dependent in the eyes of their workers. This was reflected in Matthew’s observations about the social attitudes he believed informed employment services policy:

> Anti-bludging, yeah I think that tars everyone with the same brush, and there are people like myself who are under- and unemployed with health issues. So not everyone is the same, but they are treating them the same. You can’t have one philosophy for such a complex thing; my feeling is they are just thinking it is too hard, why help the bottom, what is the bottom going to give us? (Matthew, 2013).

He noticed that this manifested in the treatments job seekers received, where there was no investment and support for the issues that led to them being unemployed. Matthew observed the lack of investment in ‘the bottom’ as deriving from negative social attitudes to the poor and unemployed.

> Yeah, that kind of attitude, bootstraps, why have they set it so low? There has to be a principle of why they’ve set it so low: that it’s dead money, it’s not going anywhere so we want to spend as little as we can – or is it connected to that idea that they’re not really working, they’re not being productive, they’re not paying tax so why should we give them anything? I don’t know if it is just a fall out of being punished for being unemployed or underemployed; it is just as hard (Matthew, 2013).

Matthew explained that he saw the low rate of Newstart as a direct reflection of negative social attitudes about unemployment and unworthiness. The sense that job seekers are worth less and are unworthy of welfare was reflected in the job seekers’ observations about how the treatment they received was justified.

The disrespect experienced by the job seekers reflects the low social value attached to being a job seeker, in which they are vulnerable to exploitation and traded as commodities. Rosie noticed employers were taking advantage of job seekers because they knew that they would take jobs below the minimum wage in the grey economy in order to survive on Newstart. Rosie’s observations reflect
the view that job seekers were being exploited not only by employment services agencies, but in
general terms because they were worth less:

Like, I’ve been offered jobs at less than the award rate, like I check with Wageline, and I
know there are heaps of people who take the jobs because they feel like they don’t have any
choice, but the employers are getting away with it and it’s unregulated.

The government should put a stop to that too, you know. It is exploitation, but I know a lot of
women who do it because they haven’t got any choice because they can’t live on Newstart
and it just helps to make them feel like they’re worth less than everyone else (Rosie, 2013).

This reinforced the absolute loss of control job seekers feel they are subject to while employment
services and employers have the power to control their lives and force them into jobs on exploitative
terms.

**Complaints and empowerment**

These findings show that because they felt disempowered, job seekers found it challenging to make
complaints, especially under conditions that the job seekers believed to be weighted towards punitive
treatments. The low level of job seeker empowerment was reflected in their views that they did not
have accessible complaints processes.

The lack of authority job seekers felt to question decisions reflects the power imbalance they
experienced. The job seekers felt disempowered when they were threatened with sanctions and that
they did not feel they have the right to challenge these decisions.

I felt sick. If I wasn’t fighting for my children as well, I don’t know if I would’ve even asked.
To me, it felt like I was a child asking an authoritarian and grumpy parent for permission. Not
nice (Leanne, 2013).

Leanne explained that the only reason she felt it worth questioning the authority of the service
provider was because she had to stand up for the needs of her children. Furthermore, challenging
employment services decisions was reported as being stressful. The decision to escalate a complaint
was weighed against the potential consequences, the resource commitment, and the knowledge that it
would create hostility in the service relationship with their employment consultant. This research
found that the pursuit of complaints requires time and a certain amount of emotional resilience to deal
with the flak, which was described by Kelly as feeling as though she was being talked about behind
her back:

Which is why I’ve sort of like thought, ‘Oh well, I’ll leave’. Because then I can deal with the
complaint. Because then I don’t have to go back in there, and there’s also the anxiety of going
back into it, it becomes a hostile environment (Kelly, 2013).
Kelly moved house so she did not have to go back to an agency where she felt bullied by an unsympathetic caseworker. From the distance of her new location, Kelly felt it was safe to prosecute her complaint because she would not be subject to ridicule or hostility during future service exchanges at the employment service. Kelly’s view was informed by her experience practicing as a psychologist. This experience gave her insight into the attitudes and perspectives she anticipated in her workers. Kelly felt it was pointless to pursue any further negotiation and that the best outcome for herself was to exit the environment she described as being hostile.

Even for job seekers who are prepared to make the effort, the research identified the ways in which access to fair complaints processes were inaccessible. This disempowerment was evident in Claudia’s experiences. Claudia, a widower with three children, claimed Newstart after her husband died. Like Leanne, she was being pressured into taking offers for jobs she was overqualified for, and if she did not, she was threatened with participation failures. Since Newstart was already below her fortnightly living costs, Claudia was forced to comply with activity requirements with which she disagreed. After discussing her options with a Centrelink customer service officer, Claudia summoned the courage to pursue a request to change provider because she believed they were treating her unfairly:

I was extremely upset about having my payment suspended, especially when I have clearly been trying so hard to find work, been continuously given incorrect information and treated so badly in a totally inappropriate manner. I contacted them and had a heated conversation with the manager, during which I told him I was going to change providers. He said I couldn’t do that without his permission and that if I did not behave and change my tone of voice he would make sure my payments were suspended even more and make my life very difficult for me. (this to a widow struggling to support three children – a very nasty person) I hung up on him (Claudia, 2013).

Since the provider refused her change request, this meant that she was forced to return to the same agency and workers who had been disrespectful towards her. Challenging employment services and decisions was reported as being stressful and clearly reflected the power imbalance between job seekers and employment services agencies:

This is absolutely ludicrous that someone would go to such lengths to intimidate a person who is unemployed. I feel completely intimidated by this person. I have lost sleep and I feel harassed. I have done nothing wrong and this creep is manipulating the system to make me look as if I am a troublemaker and non-compliant (Claudia, 2013).

The other job seekers reported similar disparaging treatment when they pursued complaints about the way there were being treated by their employment services agency. When Rosie complained, she was told she should ‘get off welfare’ if she did not like her treatment by the manager to whom she had escalated the complaint.
The findings suggest complaints mechanisms offer job seekers cold comfort. Even when complaints were escalated through independent mechanisms, such as Centrelink reviews, and ultimately the Social Security Tribunal, it took many months to resolve. By the time a judge decided in his favour, Desmond had already faced years of incorrect treatment:

I decided to lodge an appeal, though it was difficult to obtain a clear-cut statement as to what decisions Centrelink had made. In the meantime, I was treated as an ‘average’ jobseeker. After two months, Centrelink’s Review Officer informed me they would not be altering their decision to disallow my volunteer work. I decided to take the matter to the Social Security Appeals Tribunal. It turned out, after all this work and research, that there was no statutory definition of the voluntary activity and that it was up to Centrelink or the employment services agency’s discretion for this particular category of activity, therefore there wasn’t a right or wrong about it. The Tribunal decided in my favour, more or less (Desmond, 2013).

These findings have implications for understanding the accessibility of complaints processes. They indicate that, because there is so little return on the time and emotional effort involved in pursuing complaints, only a very small number of job seekers with grievances pursue them. While complaints mechanisms do exist, they are not an effective means for job seekers to resolve disputes because of these low levels of empowerment. Further, complaints channels do not guarantee any improvement because they take an extraordinary amount of effort to pursue. The effort reflects the time involved and the disempowerment inherent in being exposed to systems and processes that are unfair because they are based on subjective decisions about reasonable excuses.

**Job seeker findings – Part 1 conclusion**

By examining how job seekers interacted with the rules of the employment services field, these findings showed that while unemployed and receiving social security benefits, an unemployed person has little influence over field conditions and occupies a field position with very weak influence. The rules of conditionality function to impose controls on their behaviour in which activity is undertaken that is recognised as contributing to them getting a job.

These findings suggest that sanctions have disciplinary effects intended to enforce the rules of conditionality. This discipline functions through surveillance, intended to ensure that job seeker behaviour is consistent with the requirements of the activity test. Being active provides evidence that job seekers are meeting their Mutual Obligation by undertaking job search and related training, while the policy of Workfirst compels them to get into jobs quickly. Failure to comply with either of these behavioural requirements results in financial sanctions.

In summary, the effect of sanctions on relations between job seekers and employment services left job seekers feeling cheated about the one-sided social contract in which their activity is not reciprocated...
by support that might help them get jobs. The job seekers described being hassled to meet the activity test and levels of intrusive supervision that were not reciprocated by useful services.

The job seekers described being coerced into taking jobs they did not want and could identify that employment services were unethically motivated by outcome payments. Distrust arose because the job seekers believed they were being used by employment services agencies to get payments, rather than focusing on the needs of the job seekers. This distrust of their motives was reinforced by the distrust that grew from the use of sanctions as threats to get job seekers to comply with the activity test.

Furthermore, the job seekers described how financial sanctions were experienced as threats to their everyday survival. The threat of financial sanction looms as behavioural control and engenders fear. These findings reflect the disempowerment experienced by job seekers, and this manifested in the challenges they reported in being able to escalate their concerns about their treatments by employment services agencies into complaints.

The job seekers described this an abuse of the power of the employment services agency that made them feel bullied and disempowered. They felt that these treatments were based on being considered unworthy of welfare, and that this manifested in the general disrespect and low regard with which they were treated. The job seekers felt employment services did not care about them, and that they were not resourced to help them. Due to these treatments, the job seekers reported avoiding employment services.

Having described the role of sanctions in enforcing social relations in which job seekers described being dominated, the following part of the findings will use further concepts from Bourdieu’s theory of practice to explain how job seekers negotiate employment services conditionality. This provides the a foundation to understanding the forms of resistance that were observed in employment services.
Job seeker findings – Part 2

This part of the findings employs concepts from Bourdieu’s theory of practice to describe how job seekers negotiate the rules of conditionality in employment services. The findings illustrate the effects of field conditions in terms of the way in which capital is deployed as a resource in social negotiations. This aspect of Bourdieu’s theory is illustrated by showing how capital is deployed and helps job seekers negotiate the conditions of the employment services field. The findings firstly illustrate the way in which capital functions as an enabling resource. The findings also capture the ways in which job seekers negotiate these conditions using active reflection. This focus on active reflection draws out the relationship between active reflection and field conditions. Then, attention is paid to the ways in which the field conditions dominate job seekers by providing low levels of recognition for other forms of capital and prioritising the acquisition of economic capital.

This part of the findings also provides examples of the way in which intersubjective recognition influences the outcomes of interactions. The examples provided focus specifically on job seeker observations of the way in which intersubjective recognition informs interactions with employment services and manifests in variations in judgements they make about the worthiness of job seekers. A short case study is used to illustrate the extent to which the instrumental limits of the Workfare field inhibit action. This case study also illustrates the impact of intersubjective recognition and the way in which it is informed by changes to instrumental rules.

The following section provides examples of the forms of social suffering caused by the misrecognition associated with the constraints of the Workfare field. This section includes two short case studies that illustrate the ways in which job seekers expressed misrecognition as alienation. There follows a section in which the effects of the misrecognition experienced by single parents affected by the 2006 Welfare to Work measures are discussed.

By elaborating this account of interaction in the employment services field, these findings provide the underpinning for Part 3 of the findings, in which I describe the forms of resistance identified in this research. This step is important because it applies Bourdieusian theory to explain action in terms of the Workfare field.

Enabling properties of capital

The practical constraints and enablers of social action are captured in Bourdieu’s concept of capital (Bourdieu, 1986). Capital is the idea Bourdieu employed to designate the power that agents have to function effectively within different fields. Human agents acquire capital through socialisation, during which they inherit, or have inculcated through education or social connections, certain advantages and disadvantages. Human actors learn the value of capital through their exposure to social contexts in which cultural and behavioural rules are transmitted during socialisation. Roles and positions in the
social field are designated by the forms of capital that agents possess – that is, their symbolic distinctions – and assume varying degrees of power according to what is valued.

There are some variations in the names for the forms of capital used by Bourdieu and scholars who employ these concepts depending on the nature of the field under observation. The primary forms that contribute to the effectiveness of agent action fit within the categories of economic, social and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986). Economic capital is the command of economic resources (money, assets, property). Social capital is the actual and potential resources linked to the possession of a durable network of institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition. Cultural capital is based on a person’s education (knowledge and intellectual skills) that provides advantage in achieving a higher social status (Bourdieu, 1986).

A game of chess provides a useful analogy for understanding how capital function in fields (English & Bolton, 2015). The different capabilities of the chess pieces reflect their mutually assigned and recognised power to move in certain ways. In Bourdieusian terms, they represent certain forms of capital that have the power to influence or change the outcome of the game. Importantly, it is only because the players mutually recognise the moves the pieces can make that they have legitimacy in the game of chess. Capital thus has to be recognised in the field because of the instrumental rules of the field, as well as the extent to which it is recognised by the players of the game.

Some of the decisions made by the job seekers involved making decisions about how to deploy resources to improve the outcomes in the game. Deploying the right moves at the right time involved strategic decision on how to deploy resources like, to use another metaphor, the pieces in a chess game. The different capabilities of the chess pieces reflect their mutually assigned and recognised power to move in that way. In Bourdieusian terms, they represent certain forms of capital that have the power to influence or change the outcome of the game (English & Bolton, 2015).

**Capital in action in employment services**

Capital is therefore employed in negotiations in the employment services field to the extent that is recognised and holds value. This next section describes the ways in which capital is deployed to help job seekers negotiate the conditions of the employment services field. It firstly describes the way capital was deployed as an enabler that provided job seekers with power to negotiate field negotiations. The findings show how job seekers deployed the forms of capital available to them to attempt to negotiate better outcomes for themselves.

The first set of examples will focus on the single parents who deployed combinations of cultural and social capital in their field negotiations. In the interviews with single parents, there was evidence that social capital played a strong role in helping them withstand the impact of the activity test. They relied on social capital, which they employed through social networks and community relationships in ways that supported parenting.
Leanne was well resourced with social capital, and this enabled her to make adjustments to her way of living when she first became subject to participation requirements. This social capital served her well on several occasions when she mentioned being helped out by friends or colleagues – debts she is mindful of repaying when she can in order to protect this asset:

I still wasn’t sure how I would afford to pay for study … until a gorgeous workmate/friend gave me the cash to pay for the course – no obligation to repay. I intend to ‘pay it forward’ as soon as I can. I am still not there yet (Leanne, 2013).

The single parent job seekers actively participated in their communities. The school community was an important source of social support and provided them with a place in which to contribute through voluntary and paid work. Leanne showed great initiative and perseverance in getting her voluntary role at her children’s school recognised by embarking on a traineeship in administration there, and eventually by getting the school’s employment contract to reflect the ongoing nature of the work. Kelly described how she worked with the teacher at her daughter’s school to administer the NAPLAN exam. She hoped the voluntary work she undertook there would provide her with contacts that would help her get a job as a psychologist.

The single parents were able to withstand the impact of conditionality to the extent that the capital they possessed could be deployed in ways that provided support, outside of the welfare field. However the effective exercise of capital outside of the employment services field depended on the existence of social networks and the reciprocity that made them an effective source of social support.

I’ve got a contact through a friend who has a one-bedroom converted garage cabin place (Kelly, 2013).

The parents described examples in which friends had provided them with support when they had been in crisis and how they reciprocated this with support of their own. Laura explained the extent to which the mutual interdependence of her community and the integrity of the social capital are vital to her survival.

Sometimes I swap my services for someone else’s. Sometimes a friend brings a basket of zucchinis and I gift her a basket of greens and jam. The zucchinis get swapped for meat and part voluntary labour on a neighbour’s farm. It builds community. It builds friendships. Centrelink wants to put a value on that but can’t. You can’t count love (Laura, 2013).

Laura’s focus on gifts magnifies the importance of social capital, particularly for women who are engaged in forms of social exchanges that take place beyond the boundaries of the employment services field, which prioritises economic capital. While the social and cultural capital that the single parent job seekers possessed had enabling properties, there was evidence that the prioritisation of economic capital in the Workfare field constrained their ability to benefit from these networks.
Negotiating the employment services field

This section describes the ways in which job seekers negotiate the conditions of the employment services field. It emphasises the role of the active reflection the job seekers used as they negotiated the conditions of the field. As flagged in the theory chapter, the analysis undertaken in this part of the findings is guided by Hoggett’s view of reflective agency, in which human decision making is influenced by the confluence of subjective forces, including emotions, states of psychological health and the contingency of the moment (Hoggett, 2001).

The analysis of the job seekers showed their capacity to negotiate interactions with employment services involved understanding the “rules of the game”, which in the employment services field, reflect the rules of conditionality. The variations in the ways in which different job seekers develop their responses reflects their unique dispositions (habitus) and the skills and resources they have accrued. Where there is “room to manoeuvre” (Hayward 1998), active reflection is used by job seekers to develop strategies that enable them to improve their position on the field.

The capacity for active reflection is critical to the ways in which agents negotiate and seek to improve their field positions as they compete for the stakes of the field. These observations about the “rules of the game”, reflection and field positions are reflected in the strategies employed by the job seekers as they negotiated their employment services requirements.

The research participants often showed strong knowledge of system rules, the capacity and tenacity to research them to find out specific information about their social security rights and entitlements. Some of the strategies they adopted were based on sophisticated knowledge of the social security rules which required the formulation of correspondingly complex responses. Knowledge of the way to avoid the penalties of the game appeared to be a tacit part of the employment services game:

I’ve heard some pretty bad stories from others but most people seem to put up with it or are more proficient at using the system. The general rule of thumb and advice you get is, ‘Don’t tell them what they don’t need to know’ (Laura, 2014).

Job seekers need to know how to play by the rules, otherwise they risk losing their payments. In fact, since the focus of this research was to collect data about incidents involving sanctions, the job seekers were already well informed about the rules that led them to being breached. The job seekers demonstrated strong knowledge of system rules and the capacity and tenacity to research them to find out specific information about their social security rights and entitlements. Some of the strategies they adopted were based on sophisticated knowledge of the social security rules, which required the formulation of correspondingly complex responses. This form of analysis can be described as informing job seekers of their field positions. Understanding their field position enabled the job seekers to gain extensive insight into how the system works and whether they were being treated
fairly or not. This knowledge enables them to develop responses to improve the outcomes of their negotiations in employment services.

Like the other single parents, Leanne’s found she had to meet the activity test after being moved to Newstart. Leanne engaged in a number of activities to accommodate the activity test:

I picked up a second 14-hour-a-week job in administration to try and supplement our income and meet Mutual Obligation requirements. I also started making longer term plans to get out of this trap and tried warning others that they were on the ‘grandfather/sunset’ rule. I was also accepted into a Diploma of Community Welfare course and began by fitting in one subject/unit in Term 3. I also managed to sneak my enrolment in before the Health Care Card concession rate was abolished (Leanne, 2013).

Leanne rationalised strategies in which she adapted her behaviour to suit the rules. Her decisions were based on active reflection on the way in which the rules could be negotiated. She rationalised strategies that provided the most benefit to her, using quite sophisticated knowledge of the rules.

I somehow managed to fit this ‘training’ in around work, volunteering, getting my youngest into After School Hours Care (which I helped set up because I could see the growing need with grandfathering finishing in 2013!) and gave my eldest, in Year 7, a key to the house (Leanne, 2013).

The combination of reflective action and the resources job seekers used to cope with the effects of conditionality were apparent in Kelly’s experiences. As a single parent affected by the Welfare to Work measures, Kelly used her research on system rules to avoid conditions that would have made it harder for her to spend time caring for her eight-year-old daughter. On the eve of being transferred from Parenting Payment, which had allowed her to work a certain number of hours and maintain her benefits, Kelly quit her job so that she would not be forced to work more hours when she became a Newstart recipient:

I would have lost 60 cents in every dollar I earnt over $62. As I was working 24 hours a week I would have lost all entitlement to a pension card and any payments. As I had recently started permanent at my job, if my daughter or I had become sick, I would not be able to pay the rent. So I was affected by the real fear of losing the security that the Parenting Payment offered, even though I would receive less than $50 a week (Kelly, 2013).

Kelly based this decision on the realisation that she would have to work more hours, which would make her unavailable for her child after school. She also based the decision on the risks she felt she would be exposed to when her income reached the cut-off and she would not be eligible for a concession card and related welfare supplements.
As Kelly and Leanne’s experiences indicated, active reflection on rules plays a critical role in determining the extent of negotiability of field conditions. Active reflection enabled the job seekers to assess field conditions, their own position on the field and the prospects of improvement. It also helped them avoid being penalised for failing to play the employment services game.

The capacity for active reflection is critical to the ways in which agents negotiate and seek to improve their field positions. These observations about knowing the ‘rules of the game’, and field positions are reflected in the strategies employed by the job seekers as they negotiated their employment services requirements. The capacity for active reflection on how to play the game involved complex assessments on the options available, and the extent to which each individual job seeker was resourced to cope with the impact of changes to their welfare entitlements.

**Limits on capital**

This section of findings shows that the conditions of the field create limits on behaviour by providing poor recognition of some forms of capital in favour of the development of economic capital. This means that just having capital does not guarantee that it can be deployed as an effective resource because of the way rules of conditionality impose limits on behaviour. The limits imposed by conditionality are designed to prioritise behaviour consistent with the activity test. This section describes the ways in which the rules of conditionality impose constraints on capital for some of the job seekers. These constraints are particularly apparent when they are articulated in the classifications that determine rules of access, entitlement and the validity of forms of capital on fields.

The constraints for parents reflect conflicts between their caring roles, the activity test and the labour market. Laura spoke about the constraints of having dedicated her working years to her parenting and recognised that now, post-divorce, that also disadvantaged her in the labour market:

> Due to being a wife and mother and casual worker, as with so many women, I lost my foothold in the workforce and in the race for ‘success’ while my ex-husband gained all of his qualifications and a work history enabling him to obtain a high management position post-divorce. This continues to disadvantage me in the normal workforce.

> At 46, I am hard-pressed and not courageous enough to take on any more stress or the huge debt of a university education to gain only an outside chance of a ‘real job’ in my 50’s. In weaker moments, it feels as if I have sacrificed something essential for a man who in the end did not care about his family’s welfare or financial security, but I refuse to let that eat at my soul (Laura, 2014).

Laura’s capacity to draw on the forms of capital she had nurtured as a parent were not recognised as valid skills in the Workfare field, or the labour market. There is a clear lack of value attached to the domestic skills she has developed and those that would get her a job in the mainstream labour market:
In the end, it is the diversity of skills that enables me to eke out a living that is far below what most people could function on. I do not regard my living standard as low, despite my financial poverty, because my resourcefulness is my greatest strength along with creativity and imagination. The people who employ me soon see that I am useful to them and I have a reasonable reputation locally for good work. However, that will never be recognised by employers as I put up with constant rejections of my resume with its lack of qualifications and what looks like long-term unemployment (Laura, 2014).

Despite the resourcefulness that enabled her to survive outside of the mainstream economy and off welfare, Laura found it difficult to transfer that capability into work experience that held value to employers. The attributes developed in her parenting role did not receive the recognition she needed in order for her to get a job. These limits on Laura’s ability to participate in the mainstream economy due to the lack of recognition provided to her skills as a parent and active community member reflect the welfare field’s prioritisation of economic capital.

**Intersubjectivity and recognition at the street-level**

Intersubjective recognition is also a factor in the extent to which capital holds value in interactions in employment services. This is because it is effective only insofar as it has value in the ‘eyes of others’ (Siisiainen, 2003). Intersubjective recognition involves symbolic associations in which human agents effectively recognise one another as occupying positions of legitimacy or not.

In employment services, job seekers interact with workers who have the power to recognise them as legitimate depending on the subjective and professional factors that influence decision making. This emphasis on intersubjective recognition as a variable influencing field conditions means that while there may be some externally imposed constraints on action, fields are in fact the sites of negotiation as agents attempt to improve their field positions by deploying valued forms of capital.

The findings show that intersubjective recognition influenced the outcomes of employment services negotiations because it informed workers’ views of job seekers. This observation draws attention to the way intersubjective recognition functions through the discursive associations in which job seekers are identified as being work avoiders or not. The job seekers were often able to identify the way they felt they were being construed in relation to a discursive ideal, most often in terms of the ‘welfare dependence’ stigma associated with being a job seeker.

Lisa identified the discursive categories she detected were being assumed by workers at a branch of Centrelink:

Because of being on a low income I am in a depressed section of the city for the lower rents.

So I get to go to the Centrelink and employment services agencies who are used to working
with people from around here and I can detect in their attitude and behaviour they’re used to working with people who are non-compliant all the time (Lisa, 2014).

The power of discursive informants of the Workfare field informs intersubjective recognition and discrimination towards job seekers considered unworthy or welfare dependent. The research identified a strong element of intersubjective recognition as a mediating factor in treatments by workers. Lisa also noticed these variations in treatments by different workers. These variations seemed to reflect the individual subjective reactions of the workers and not reflect the nature of the rules they were administered.

You never really know what you are in for with each worker either, it’s the luck of the draw if you get a helpful one, or if you get a bad one. This happens both at employment services andCentrelink, it seems to be really random and subjective. Sometimes they will show empathy and others you are just another job seeker (Lisa, 2013).

Similar responses were observed by Matthew, who noticed that treatments were based on how workers saw him. In his case, he noticed there were assumptions of work avoidance that were lifted once the workers had a good look at his circumstances.

The way you get treated at Centrelink and places like that is so often dependent on the way they seem to see you. Like when they see my qualifications and so on, they treat me differently, instead of looking down at me, they look up at me, but in a sort of confused way, they don’t know how to categorise me. Generally, I think they realise I am not a welfare cheat and that there’s been some bad shit going down for me (Matthew, 2013).

Laura also commented on the way some staff acted inconsistently and intervened in decisions made by colleagues when they did not agree with them. Furthermore, workers engaged in these interventions when they felt sympathy towards job seekers and wanted them to know that.

She was able to mysteriously ‘disappear the technicality’ because as she put it there were ‘100’s of us on this side of the desk who understood where you are coming from because we have been there ourselves.’ It was an extraordinary admission and an extraordinary gesture. I was never able to personally thank her since the phone call was anonymous. I hope she didn’t lose face or her job doing that for me (Laura, 2013).

**Short Case study 1: Desmond and cultural capital**

Desmond’s case study illustrates the instrumental and intersubjective constraints he experienced as activation and welfare conditionality policy changed over the 30-year period he had received unemployment payments. This case study also illustrates how intersubjective recognition is influenced by changes in the classifications that accompanied the policy reforms he witnessed as a long-term recipient of unemployment benefits.
Desmond was an artist who had just turned 60 when I met him for the interview. Desmond was recruited via a noticeboard advertisement in an inner-city bookshop. The location of recruitment is significant because it is representative of Desmond’s cultural capital. Desmond had learnt to negotiate welfare conditionality rules while surviving on a low income. He had experienced the transition from the CES, Job Network and to JSA. Desmond’s experiences revealed the unfolding of changes in the rules of welfare conditionality and activation and the way these intersect with the strategies he has sought to obtain legitimisation of his role as an artist within these rules. After the 2006 Welfare to Work reforms, he found it increasingly difficult to have his creative work recognised as legitimate.

I have had constant difficulties with them accepting my work as an artist. As far back as I can remember, I have not felt they have understood this as a legitimate career, and it is a career I have struggled to maintain, as most artists do. I’ve never expected them to accept this as a career, you know, as the kind of work they want you to do. But for me it is my vocation and I am passionate about it, even if it’s not reliable as a source of income (Desmond, 2013).

Desmond’s survival outside of the mainstream was enabled by his social and cultural capital. He described himself as not being financially successful as an artist, but said that his work held prestige that was recognised in cultural circles. It was his knowledge of the arts community and networks that enabled him to obtain work he referred to as ‘spin-offs’ from the artistic various projects he was involved with. This provided Desmond with confidence in his identity as an artist and attachment to the creative community.

However, the conditions of the employment services field he experienced were configured to de-legitimise the practical value of these alternative forms of capital as assets to employment participation, except through the mechanism of a paid job. Although Desmond possessed the reflective capability to negotiate the field and develop strategies that aligned with his interests as an artist, these interests were de-legitimised as the rules of welfare conditionality became more difficult for him to comply with.

The precarious nature of the legitimacy of his status as an artist left him exposed to variations in the way in which he was treated. Volunteer work had originally enabled Desmond to function legitimately as an artist within the activity test rules because he was able to comply with the requirement for the activity to be validated on a form signed by a worker from an arts body. However, a ‘welfare crackdown’ on volunteer work, led to the rules changed to require higher levels of evidence about the nature of the volunteer work, Desmond reported the arts worker had grown more reluctant to sign the form. Desmond described how the worker had complained that he had to sign forms for all these ‘bludgers’ now. This appeared to reflect a discursive change that coincided with the welfare crackdown, and that this was reflected in the new higher levels of supervision and scrutiny he was placed under.
Intersubjective recognition played a strong role in Desmond’s experiences. He described how workers interpreted sole trader income reporting requirements differently because of work he picked up as spin-off for a gallery. While some workers took the complexity of the sole trader reporting seriously, he reported that others minimised it, and helped him complete the profit and loss statement for nil income for the quarter, apparently empathising with the daunting nature of the job and his own bewilderment at the requirements. There appeared from this worker empathy for his work as an artist, but also as an older man, for whom the reporting requirements had been overwhelming. Desmond described a worker whose sympathetic approach contrasted with that of others who told him ‘we can make you do anything we like’.

Desmond expressed dismay at his treatment since activity test rules had changed. Desmond explained that he was able to dismiss the prejudicial attitudes he encountered because he did not value the opinions of others who were judging him, unlike the arts administrator who had distressed him. This observation reflects the extent to which Desmond’s identification as an artist and his connection to the creative community gave him the resilience to withstand the rules of conditionality and their discursive manifestation in negative attitudes towards people like him. He said that rather than worrying about their perceptions of him, he focused on developing solutions to the problems with employment services rules he encountered.

Desmond was resilient to the extent that he escalated his complaint to the Social Security Tribunal and then the Ombudsman. The complaint he escalated centred on a matter in which discretion had been used in a decision about his voluntary activity. Desmond’s capacity to escalate his complaint was based on resourcefulness derived from the forms of capital he possessed. Disputing the decision involved the exercise of rationality to research and assess the validity of social security.

This case study illustrated the ways in which the conditions of the field create limits on behaviour by providing poor recognition of some forms of capital in favour of the development of economic capital. I will build on this analysis and describe how job seekers’ experiences with employment services can be described as misrecognition because of the constraints attributable to the rules of conditionality.

Misrecognition

This part of the findings provides examples of misrecognition experienced by the job seekers who were impacted by the heightened activation and conditionality of the 2006 Welfare to Work reforms. Misrecognition, as used by Bourdieu, refers to the appropriation of the field for the benefit of the dominant, rather than specific experiences of cultural and economic domination. Rather than existing solely as a measure of poverty or inequality, misrecognition provides explanatory power in which experiences of social suffering are linked to structured forms of domination experienced by the poor.
This kind of misrecognition is what Bourdieu talks about as arising from the symbolic violence associated with the denial of social standing and legitimacy imposed by the dominant interests informing Workfarist welfare reform. The employment services system functions to enforce the structure of domination in which unemployment is treated by activation services. Misrecognition in employment services arises because the actors in the welfare field ‘belong to a structure of domination, but one which is largely misrecognised’ (Peillon, 1998: 221).

The appropriation of the welfare field functions to legitimate welfare reform that has become punitive to the poor. The legitimisation is achieved through cultural appropriation of the discursive conditions of the field, which in the context of the Australian welfare reforms has been collected around the underclass and welfare dependence discourses as manifest in the bludger construct and policy of Mutual Obligation. The unworthy bludger identity informed the construct of job seeker, who – if failing to job search effectively – is punished for failing to get a job, either through sanctions or the low rate of unemployment benefits.

The forms of social suffering described here build on the experiences identified in Part 1 of the findings, in which job seekers were not given meaningful choices, and felt blamed for their unemployment and punished for being unworthy of welfare. The following section describes examples of the effect of misrecognition in terms that draw explicit attention to the ways these forms of suffering are structured by the domination of the employment services field.

As the welfare state shifted towards Workfare, the moral discourse collected around the bludger construct and Mutual Obligation. The unworthy bludger identity informed the construct of job seeker, who – if failing to job search effectively – is punished for failing to get a job, either through sanctions or the low rate of unemployment benefits. The job seekers were conscious that the classification of job seeker denoted a new citizen–state relation in which there were higher levels of mandated surveillance, activation and an implicit assumption of work avoidance. The effects of this were to cause the forms of social suffering evident in the ways in which the job seekers described being vulnerable and unworthy:

I mean you are vulnerable enough on the dole and at the mercy of one person’s decisions, their sword of Damocles, you feel so powerless, and grateful when they actually help you out, or get your benefits back for you if there’s been a mistake. I experienced this whole kind of power imbalance thing a lot back in my home town when talking to the Centrelink staff, and since my whole family was on welfare, they made us feel very shameful and at their mercy, like we really weren’t worthy of the benefits we were getting. It just made us feel very bad about ourselves, that added to the negative feelings and loss of confidence we already had about being unemployed, it is really awful (Lisa, 2014).
The view that they are regarded by others as unworthy was identified by the job seekers when they used the terms commonly associated with the discourse of welfare dependence including: ‘dole bludger,’ ‘undeserving poor,’ ‘single mother,’ ‘work avoider’ and ‘underclass’. Each of these constructs were identified as language used to denigrate welfare dependency, and legitimise the dominating policies the participants encountered. Lisa felt the labelling associated with welfare dependence keenly:

It is pretty degrading being poor and I have been conscious of stigma about this since I was young. So I felt that stigma with me, even when I moved to a bigger town, that everyone considered me welfare dependent when I was applying for benefits like Austudy, then Youth Allowance, and especially Newstart when I was a bit older (Lisa, 2014).

These forms of misrecognition were present in the many reports that spoke of disempowerment and disengagement. Lisa described the effect of this labelling on her self-esteem:

These feelings are very strong and present for me about how this treatment is so incredibly humiliating, and you go into these service situations feeling like you have to submit. As I said, my confidence has grown as I’ve matured, but it is always a struggle to overcome the anxiety that you are totally at their mercy. It is a feeling like there is a bowling ball in your stomach, dread and panic, about just being cut off and having nothing. I do stand my ground a bit more, but that anxiety is always there (Lisa, 2014).

This is the form misrecognition took when the job seekers had little power to resist the effects of domination. The following short case studies illustrate the way in which experiences of misrecognition was apparent for two job seekers.

Short case study 2: Kevin and misrecognition

This short case study draws on Kevin’s experiences to illustrate the forms of misrecognition experienced by job seekers who felt disempowered. Kevin’s story illustrates the kind of misrecognition associated with Honneth’s observations about the ways in which modern forms of reflexivity results in feelings of acute failure and anxiety for failing to be successful (Honneth, 2004).

Kevin explained that he had been experiencing depression since the death of his father when he was 18. After high school, he dropped out of his film and television course, which was the industry he wanted to work in. He identified with being a creative type of person now destined for low quality work, a destination that he explained made his depression worse.

Like I crashed out of my film and television course, which I really wanted to do, get some work in that industry because I am quite creative, but now I’ve wasted my youth and when I would have the energy. I was really good at school, a great student, until year 12, well that’s when it all went wrong.
He spoke about his feeling of being a disappointment and a failure. He spoke about feeling jealousy towards his peers whose careers he checks on LinkedIn (a career networking site) who he said were doing better than he was. This contemplation of his own failure appeared to be a major preoccupation with Kevin.

I feel really disappointed with myself, and that I am a failure. I think other people must see me that way too. I am still at home. What a failure, hey! At my age! My mum is disappointed in me too … I’ll probably fail at this research, too, because I haven’t really had that bad an experience of employment services but I do feel stigmatised by them and Centrelink because I am a failure.

Because Kevin had been unemployed since he was in his late teens, he felt he had ‘failed’ to live up to social standards. He explains that the stigma was there because people like him have not realised normal social goals. As he had become long-term unemployed, the way Kevin spoke about himself suggested he had internalised the sense of being a failure.

Kevin’s opting out involved responses he described as ‘crashing’ – that is, disengaging mentally – when waiting in Centrelink queues or seeing other service providers. This involuntary opting out involved losing presence because, as Kevin emphasised, he believed the point of the system was not to help the ‘unworthy’ but rather keep them active in order to deserve welfare. He did not expect that the services could, or should, help him because he understood that being on welfare was intended to be unpleasant. This affected his confidence, and he explained that it was difficult for him to cope with employment services. Kevin did not pinpoint any particular incident or treatment he received as the cause of his views, but he was able to locate it as present within the discourse:

This is why I feel like a failure in the eyes of taxpayers, that I can’t do that. It is not so much a feeling I get from individuals who help me but an impression I have that this is a general view, an expectation of that’s what you do when you grow up, get a good job and all the rest of it, and that I am letting society down by not doing that.

Kevin’s reflections seem to be indicative of the ways in which mainstream values are internalised and cause the anxiety associated with misrecognition. He articulated the symbolic lens through which he and people like him are perceived, at times agreeing with it, but at other times being sarcastic about it. There was indignation at the way he felt he was being labelled, while at the same time, strong evidence of his internalisation of being a failure.

**Short Case study 3: Matthew and misrecognition**

This case study describes the misrecognition experienced by Matthew. This misrecognition was associated with a classification struggle for recognition of a mental health condition because Matthew had not qualified for the Disability Support Pension (DSP), due to the incremental changes to
eligibility that had been implemented since the 2006 Welfare to Work reforms. Matthew described how he felt trapped in a destructive cycle because of the lack of recognition that his mental health condition was serious enough to exempt him from activity requirements. Matthew described an ongoing struggle for recognition of his mental health condition, involving unsympathetic treatment by GPs, Centrelink and employment services:

Like all these years I’ve been dealing with Centrelink and I’ve had this mental health problem. Someone there could have had a look at what had been going on with my work record and the symptoms I was reporting like when I was losing it, and go, hang on a minute, this guy is at risk, and needs help. But that has never happened, and it was only when things got really bad a year or so ago that I had to take responsibility for this and start my DSP application, even though, as I said, I wasn’t really feeling up to it.

Matthew’s story shows how difficult and destructive life can be for people in similar situations to his. The unhealthy cycle he was trapped in was made worse by the poverty of Newstart, which exacerbated his mental health condition so that it had become disabling:

Yeah extremely difficult, I am lucky, over last 3 years, this is how I’ve survived, Newstart, bits and pieces of work, basically only spending money on bare necessities. Not buying anything for myself, like clothes and stuff, like a tree stripped of branches and only keeping the trunk going, and borrowing money off my parents, and using my credit card, and living very unhealthy situations, because they were cheap, which exacerbated my mental health … because it makes you have to make life choices that aren’t healthy.

Matthew’s experiences are typical of what happens to people who are not considered ill enough to get off the ‘hamster wheel’ of employment services. Matthew’s experience is of ‘disconnection’ or, as he describes it, an affective state, where he is not in control of what is happening in his life and is going through the motions:

I’d guess you’d describe it as a messy or painful, or an affective mentality, kind of like someone playing the guitar without really playing, just playing random notes, just strumming.

Not being classified as worthy of welfare because of the lack of recognition of his mental health condition, causes him endless frustration, particularly because of his consciousness, as a welfare worker himself, that he needs help that is not readily available.

The humiliation of misrecognition is described by Matthew in his feelings of failure and the compulsion he has experienced to be functional. It had taken a nervous breakdown for him to realise there was something wrong with his mental health that he needed support with. He described that
before he had the breakdown, he had felt there was something wrong, but it was something he had only recently been able to articulate and seek help about.

Matthew expressed a strong work ethic but was worried about how the ‘crap jobs’ he could get through employment services would exacerbate his mental health condition. He knew this because he had tried it and it had not worked out for him:

So even this Stream 4 thing, I feel like I’ll end up doing it again, getting a job before I start getting hassled too much, and probably lose that one too/

He explained how he felt employment services were a waste of resources because he was not accessing the services he really needed, while in a state of limbo:

You can’t do anything. Yeah, that’s the cycle I’ve been in for a quite a while and even though I’ve got that exemption it’s kind of like, Oh well, that’s good enough for the moment, I don’t have to worry about employment services busting my chops.

He considered this treatment to be a waste of the potential of people who, if given the right kind of help, would benefit. Despite the challenges he experienced, Matthew described others who were less empowered than him, who had been compelled to take crap jobs, whereas his education gave him choices.

I am lucky that I’ve been able to realise some of this stuff for myself, but there’s heaps who don’t, or can’t, who are out there. I’ve an education that I can’t put to use because I have this trauma, and at the same time I don’t want to end up in a crap job, but my situation is that my mental health has been up and down for a long time and none of these services are working well for me. Like I said, I have a strong work ethic, but I am also a person with some qualifications and ambition one day to do something.

As a qualified social worker, Matthew had strong views about the way unemployed people were being treated.

Centrelink is like being given rice when you need a meal. I mean it’s nothing, like you’re not starving but you’re malnourished. Australia is a rich country but we are not very generous, we make our poor survive on next to nothing, there is no nurturing.

Matthew’s case study illustrated the forms of misrecognition experienced by job seekers who identify as having mental health issues that do not meet the eligibility criteria. Matthew’s case study illustrated the profound effect of classifications. The shifting classifications of welfare eligibility have made it harder for people who do not fit into the ‘right’ categories to escape the activated classification of job seeker. For Matthew, this meant being classified as a job seeker, and being ineligible for the DSP meant it was challenging for him to deal with employment services rules.
**Single parents and misrecognition**

Bourdieu’s use of the term misrecognition diverges from Fraser and Honneth, because it refers to a ‘structure of domination’. The structure of domination was highly apparent in the findings with single parents, because of the profound impact the 2006 Welfare to Work reforms had on the welfare of their families. In this sense the welfare to work reforms were misrecognised as an intervention designed to help to improve the welfare of single parent families, and employment services were the street-level organisations administering this policy.

The structural domination associated with the welfare to work reforms took effect through activation strategies and associated changes in social security benefit rules. The reforms meant that single parents were subject to the activity test of 15 hours per week as well as being transferred to the lower-paying Newstart allowance. However, it was not only the activity test and less money that impacted the welfare of the single-parent families; the changes to taper rates meant single parents needed to earn less to be exited from benefits and lost the associated concession (Phillips, et al., 2013). These effects of the Welfare to Work reforms are recognised as a poverty trap that has not increased income levels for single parents, despite the increased hours they have had to work (ACOSS, 2015).

These effects were apparent in the experiences of the single parent job seekers. They were faced with the decision between poverty on Newstart, or working longer hours than they had previously when on Parenting Payment. The findings show the Welfare to Work reforms made extreme differences to their daily survival. The single parents spoke of financial hardship and the extraordinary measures they had taken to survive on reduced incomes. Kelly and Rosie reported living in converted garages so that they could avoid paying the high market rents, which they could not afford without working long hours. Kelly spoke with regret of having to let go of a 3-bedroom house and move to another area away from family so that she could avoid working long hours so that she and her daughter could be happier by having more time together.

The adverse effects for the single parents who worked longer hours were more extreme than poverty. The examples provided below illustrate the lengths some of the single parents went to when trying to maintain their income levels by working longer hours and the adverse effects this had.

The last six years have been a nightmare for me. I was placed on Newstart when I left an abusive relationship. My relationship breakdown was traumatic and there had been violence. I had to get out to keep my kids safe. I had been on Parenting Payment Partnered, but for some reason when I was on my own I was affected by the rule which meant I could only get Newstart. But then, when I could only get Newstart, I had to work more hours to keep paying the mortgage on the house that I was still making the payments on (Rosie, 2013).

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8 The Newstart rate is approximately $50 per week lower than the parenting payment and represents 12 per cent reduction in income (Phillips, 2015).
There were limits on the choices they could make about work and childcare and this led to them taking jobs that compromised the care of their children:

My ex has never paid me any child support so I had to take up various jobs that meant I was working long hours and leaving my eldest son who was 12 at the time to supervise his younger brothers and one of them has ADHD. I couldn’t see any other way of keeping the bills paid and I was doing my best to keep us going as a family living in the same place (Rosie, 2013).

Similarly, Leanne took on a second job, which meant her teenage sons were left unsupervised after school:

Then the ‘wheels fell off’. My eldest and his friends had been getting into serious trouble at school. What I noticed about the situation was the similarity in all our family situations. The children were all boys, all parents were low-income earners, half had sole parents who were trying to work/study/volunteer and most of the children were the eldest sibling. I quit the second job after looking at risk and protective factors for psycho-social development in adolescents. The only risk factors I had any control over were – authoritative parenting and parental supervision (Leanne, 2013).

In this case, Leanne had to quit her job to regain control of the welfare of her children. Leanne reported her awareness of the significance of the loss of control, which she was able to regain by quitting the second job she had been forced to take because of the 15-hour rule.

Despite working longer hours, the parents were exposed to other risks that underlined the precarious nature of these arrangements that left them vulnerable to adverse luck. Leanne experienced financial uncertainty when situations she managed to negotiate backfired because of changes over which she had no control:

Not everything went as planned financially, but that’s another story. We were surviving, but by Term 4 my choices for final field placement were being affected by my inability to put petrol in the car. Luckily, I found placement within my neighbourhood and also applied for a small part-time job (also local) which paid well, with flexible hours I could fit around part-time placement. Short-term pain for long-term gain. Phew! Some extra cash just in time for Christmas holidays would be fantastic. This, unfortunately, is where I remembered what it was like to be treated as one of ‘those’ people – ‘The Undeserving’ (Leanne, 2013).

These episodes of uncertainty were spoken about with indignation, as Leanne explained she felt as if she was being punished when she had not done anything wrong. This seemed particularly unfair, since
Leanne had done everything she could to adapt to the new participation requirements of single parents.

These precarious arrangements could lead to catastrophic outcomes. Rosie described the profound impact of the combination of being required to work long hours to ‘get off welfare’ and what happened when it all went wrong.

Then things went from bad to worse. I had a serious car accident four years ago; it was really bad. You know, I was in hospital for a long time, with my boys at home. Luckily, I had my parents who have been able to help me out through the worst parts. But by the time I got out of hospital, I hadn’t been working for so long and all the bills had mounted up and I wasn’t able to work … I lost the house, and we ended up homeless, living in a car. They were very dark days (Rosie, 2013).

Rosie described the humiliation and exclusion experienced by her family because of the poverty they experienced when she was placed on Newstart and she was injured in a car accident. When she was unable to work, she couldn’t maintain the mortgage payments on her house, and it was repossessed. Rosie and her three sons lived in her car and were dependent on food parcels from local charities, until eventually she got back on her feet again with the assistance of the local housing department.

The single parents explained that the 2006 Welfare to Work reforms have left a deep mark on the welfare of their children. The forms of adolescent risk-taking behaviour and social disengagement that Rosie and Leanne’s children were engaged in affect young people for many years following traumatic events. Rosie felt that her kids have missed out on what other kids had, because she had not been there when she did work and because of the poverty they all endured when she was as unable to work:

That wasn’t easy … because I could already see he had started to resent me for not being there, and I am still working on mending that relationship with him. Now that he’s a bit older I think he understands a bit more about why I had to do what I did, but it’s really hard trying to explain that stuff to teenage kids (Rosie, 2013).

The single parents who recovered from economic trauma and homelessness reported the long-term effects on the welfare of their children. Despite the help her family received from welfare agencies that helped her get back on her feet, Rosie described how the experience left emotional scars that would have lifetime effects and lead to the intergenerational reproduction of disadvantage for her children:

They all remember how bad it was. You know, it is terrible putting your kids through that stuff, and I feel like it wasn’t my fault how things went, but no one seems to care about the impact these things have on the kids. I feel like there’s going to be a whole generation of kids
who’ve been through these things, with their parents not around, you know, they’re in poverty and feel bad because of that, and then they get into trouble (Rosie, 2013).

The harm caused to the children in single-parent families where there was domestic violence are particularly concerning. These findings highlight the impact of the activity tests on the welfare of single-parent families when domestic violence is a factor leading to them becoming single-parent families. The choices single parents in these situations can make are severely limited by the lack of support available from welfare services that mean they are forced to return to situations that are unsafe for them and their children.

This vulnerability, and the impact on maintaining the welfare of her family, was also described by Annie. Her vulnerability emerged after being reclassified from Parenting Payment to Newstart:

I am 50 and in 2012 I left a very bad marriage with our two girls, 15 and nine. I had recently before that lost my job of four years due to the pressure of the relationship. I was on benefits; I lost our rental property as I could no longer afford the rent; trying to find something in the private rental market that was sustainable for me was difficult (Annie, 2014).

To keep their children safe, many of the single parents had to give up their family homes and some had become homeless:

Through trying to sustain expensive properties and live I got myself in financial trouble (as I left the marriage with nothing). I got put on the at risk database and was homeless (Annie, 2014).

The domestic violence is prolonged as women seek to recover from trauma and gain the financial independence they need to support their children. This is not always possible, and the welfare of their families continues to be compromised. This is illustrated what happened to Annie after a period of homelessness:

I cried for weeks and was in a deep depression at the thought of trying to give my girls a better life away from their controlling aggressive father. I’ve ended up having to move BACK IN WITH HIM [her caps] (Annie, 2014).

Annie’s despair at not being able to maintain a home for her children away from violence reflected the loss of social support and its immediate impact on her and the welfare of her children. The single parents reported that the key to rebuilding their lives after leaving violent relationships has relied on their ability to repair and leverage their social capital. Friends, family, support networks and charitable support enabled the women to rebuild their economic security and to provide safe homes for their children.
Workfare and the misrecognition of care work

Ultimately the misrecognition experienced by the single parents reflected a broader conflict about welfare to work strategies and caring. This conflict between care and paid work was at the heart of the mothers’ stories of distress. Their conflict was articulated as the strong attachment they held to the social position of mother over worker, and the failure of the system to accommodate both. The single parents expressed the desire to obtain the right kind of work that would enable them to fulfil their parenting roles and vocational preferences. Instead, they were compelled by their economic circumstances or their employment services providers’ enforcement of the 15-hour rule, to take jobs that were below their qualifications and were exploitative.

It has been hard to find jobs I am qualified for which fit with my daughter’s school times and I have had intermittent work. I have been able to find some work, but it is often not what I have been qualified in. I have learnt to make ends meet living on a low income but had to give up the three-bedroom house we had before and get cheaper accommodation (Kelly, 2013).

Kelly explained the structural constraint of a labour market that did not readily provide jobs of the right number of hours that suited her qualifications. This constraint on the availability of part-time work meant she had to radically alter her standard of living and move to a cabin in another town.

The value of parenting was diminished in employment services agencies because of the rules they are required to administer. Rules that, for Leanne, do not even always seem to be well understood by workers:

In hindsight, I think the JSA workers had even less of an idea then about sole parents requirements on Newstart. I was told that my payments could be cut off if I did not attend Job Search training over the school holidays even after I explained that I would be unable to attend with two children at home. I had to persist and offered to continue with the worksheets from home. I stood there while the worker phoned her manager and while she used a tone that suggested I was trying to evade the training. The senior manager must have known the different requirements as she gave me an exemption (Leanne, 2013).

The misrecognition experienced by the single parent participants manifested in their experiences of disempowerment. In some cases, this was experienced as panic and an almost absolute sense of powerlessness. Kelly’s first comments during the interview were that she was shocked that one person could have so much control over the life of others, a point she repeated throughout the interview:

I was shocked that one person could have so much power and use it so readily, when I am a mum, trying to find work to fit in with my family and trying to look after my daughter (Kelly, 2013).
The reflections of the single parents underscored the feeling that they were at risk and dependent on others for their safety and security. The single parents feared that at any moment this security could be withdrawn arbitrarily. Threats of financial sanction reminded Leanne of the abuse and control that preceded becoming a single parent.

Having left a controlling relationship, I really struggle with what feels like Centrelink’s micro-management of my life. I understand enough about psychology to realise why the similarity brings up unhelpful feelings (Leanne, 2013).

Laura’s comments highlight a similarity in the single parents’ experiences when, having left an abusive relationship, they were subject to the surveillance and control of their employment services agency:

The treatment by officials reminds me of the abuse I suffered in my marriage. It is impersonal. It is dehumanising and it is about a government's bottom line and unknown agendas and nothing about people’s circumstances or ability to pay (Laura, 2013).

The feelings of being worthless, are associated with having fewer rights than other citizens (Murphy, et al., 2011). Rosie explained how needing to be on welfare made her feel worthless, even though she had been working long hours:

You know it’s unfair, because I’ve always worked as much as I can. It is not just the time away from the kids, it’s the whole thing of being made to feel socially worthless, that our single-parent families are worth less than other people. That really gets to people, including the kids, and I can understand why some people turn to drugs and that to deal with it because the stigma and the shame just get too much (Rosie, 2013).

Rosie’s observation of the association between self-worth and the self-destructive behaviour she has seen in others reflects the forms of misrecognition that Honneth (2004) describes as arising from the self-scrutiny of modernity. This the kind of misrecognition that single-parent families have experienced since the 2006 Welfare to Work measures and suggests that the policies are causing harm. The harm is the poverty and precarity of life on lower incomes, as well as on the psychological welfare of individuals and communities where lack of flexible paid work conflicts with care work.

The findings illustrate the ways in which the low levels of recognition of single-parent families’ interests appeared to be having adverse effects on the welfare of the parents and their children. The workers and job seekers all reflected on this:

Some of the system settings are wrong, like the Parenting Payment thing. Because it just means people have been transferred to a lower income that makes it impossible for them to survive, and there are not really any jobs that fit in with school hours for them to do, and they
should have the right to be there to care for their kids around school hours, I firmly believe that (Barbara, 2014).

The approach has denied access to the basic services that might have enabled them to find suitable work and provide social and economic continuity for their families.

Yeah, I just think of like they’ve cut our payments back and they’re making us see these people and they’ve got all these offices, and how much money is going into these services is it worth the output, and like, if they’ve got 5 offices in one street and you’re paying rent on all those buildings and employment consultant in there, why can’t they just pay us back the money and just give us back the money and give us one centre to go to, and I know some people need more support than I do, but I’m not one of those and to be forced through this system it’s just like putting a round peg in a square hole, it just doesn’t fit (Kelly, 2013).

These single parents exercised choices they believed were reasonable – for example, not taking low-paid jobs in which they would have to work long hours, and which would also exacerbate the levels of disadvantage they experience, increase their level of poverty, and make them vulnerable and dependent on welfare. As Kelly said:

I know of a lot of women there who don’t have that ability who are being forced into low-paid jobs who are really stressed and worried about what’s happening to their kids while they are not home, and just keeping on top of everything they have to do (Kelly, 2013).

Leanne reported being offered short-term retail work repeatedly, and how she feared receiving a participation failure for refusing it, because she wanted to hold out to find a job that better matched her capabilities. Rosie spoke about work that is offered at below award wages by unscrupulous employers.

The forms of misrecognition noted in the experiences of the single parents were particularly strong because of the assumption that the forms of paid work and activity permitted by the 15-hour rule would be good for them. The activity test is informed by the assumption that job search activity is better for job seekers than unemployment, and if they are not kept busy, this might reflect a wish not to work. But this assumption of resistance did not align to the behaviours that were observed in the job seekers who took part in this research. As Leanne said:

Maybe there are some long-term unemployed who chose this as a ‘life-style’ choice. But even living in a low-income area, I can’t think of one person I know of who would choose to live like this if they had a choice (Leanne, 2013).

These findings about single parents occupy prominence in this research because of the acknowledged impact of the Welfare to Work reforms on them in particular. These findings have described how the
reforms led to a form of misrecognition that was cultural domination, which has had particularly damaging effects for the welfare of single parents and their families. There will be further discussion about the particular form of misrecognition the single parents experienced in relation to understanding the forms of resistance observed in this research in the following chapters.

**Job seeker findings Part 2- conclusion**

This first section of this part of the findings demonstrated how Bourdieu’s theory of practice can be used to describe the way in which job seekers negotiate the employment services field. These findings employed the game metaphor often used by Bourdieu to illustrate the relational properties of the field. The findings firstly explained how capital functions as an enabling resource, and then the ways in which the field conditions of Workfare inhibit forms of action by prioritising the acquisition of economic capital. In this respect, the instrumental rules of conditionality, including eligibility criteria, activity tests and sanctions, inform the field conditions of Workfare. In addition, these findings highlighted the use of reflective action. The job seekers assessed their options in the employment services field. The reflective qualities enabled job seekers to rationalise field negotiations and explain how agents navigate complex social situations bounded by the objective conditions of fields.

Furthermore, Bourdieu’s theory of practice explains action in the welfare field as being constrained by the extent of the recognition available to job seekers in the field. The findings showed that job seekers experience different treatments depending on the extent to which workers recognised them as being legitimately unemployed or welfare dependent.

The findings employed concepts from Bourdieu to understand the ‘structure of domination’ of the welfare field and how this can be identified in the experiences of misrecognition described by the job seekers. This misrecognition was apparent as the socio-economic marginalisation and cultural domination the job seekers experienced in their interactions with the Workfare field. These findings perform an important role in providing the conceptual underpinning to the forms of resistance identified in the next part of the job seeker findings because they have demonstrated the ways in which Bourdieu’s theory of practice can be adapted to understand action and interaction in the employment services field.
Job seeker findings – Part 3

This part of the findings describes the forms of resistance the job seekers exercised in the employment services field. The forms of resistance identified here therefore derive from the analysis of employment services interactions involving sanction, interpreted through Bourdieusian field analysis.

Part 2 of the findings provided an underpinning for the analysis because Bourdieusian concepts were employed to describe the ways employment services rules constrain behaviour through the objective conditions of the field and the effects of intersubjective recognition. The objective conditions of the field are the instrumental rules determining how employment services are resourced and the activity test. The rules governing fields are reproduced in intersubjective interactions, where human agents collectively reproduce field conditions by following rules of interaction. Further, intersubjective recognition involves symbolic associations in which human agents effectively recognise one another as occupying positions of legitimacy or not. These conditions are negotiated through active reflection on field conditions and analysis of ways to deploy resources to negotiate within the conditions to improve the outcomes of employment services interactions.

It is important to reinforce the observations made earlier about resistance and domination. Bourdieu’s ‘double skewed’ theory fulfils this structuralist conceptual function because it provides human actors with the capacity to exercise relative degrees of resistance within the overall tolerance of field conditions and their personal habitus. Drawing on this approach means resistance is the exercise of forms of agency which acts as a form of push-back against the forms of power affecting the interaction under observation. In the Workfare field, conditionality is the technology of governance through which power is deployed to influence or control the behaviours of job seekers and workers to fulfil the objective of getting people off welfare. When job seekers and workers exercise resistance they are pushing-back the specific forms of governance and the rationality informing Workfare.

Furthermore, the forms of resistance identified as significant to the research concerns are reactions to the domination experienced because of the use of sanctions to enforce the Workfirst activity test, and the discursive associations of welfare dependence.

The findings in this chapter are described as a typology of resistance (see Figure 1 – Typology of resistance). This typology maps these forms of resistance to the domains of interaction identified as the personal, interpersonal and political. These findings include analysis of the particular resources involved in these forms of resistance and the conditions in which strategies of resistance are escalated beyond personal interactions to change the nature of society more generally. Three core components of resistance are reflection, resources and motivation.

This table below illustrates these forms of resistance using the core components. The typology uses the three domains of resistance to distinguish the types of resistance, bearing in mind that more than
one form of resistance may be present, and the process of conversion of the different forms of resistance. Three core components of resistance are identified and include motivation, active reflection and resources, which are here identified as forms of capital.

**Figure 1 – Typology of resistance**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Form of resistance</th>
<th>Motivation</th>
<th>Active reflection</th>
<th>Resources</th>
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<td>Personal</td>
<td>Rules</td>
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<tr>
<td>Personal</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interpersonal</td>
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<td>x</td>
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<tr>
<td>Political</td>
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It is necessary to identify resistance across these different domains of interaction because, as a relational concept, resistance must be observed in relation to the social system and power informing the context under observation (Hollander, 2004; Barbalet, 1995). In the social relations that occur in employment services, the domains of power were identified as informing interactions in the Workfare field. These different aspects of the field can be used to describe different forms of resistance, which are categorised here as the personal, interpersonal and political domains of interaction. The findings therefore describe the nature of this resistance relative to these domains of interaction as well as the particular resources that enabled this resistance.

This chapter will introduce the argument that some forms of resistance are strategies for recognition. They are strategies for recognition because they involve rationalisations designed to enable job seekers to negotiate field conditions in favour of their own interests. Strategies for recognition took two forms. The first form involved deploying cultural capital to influence intersubjective recognition in service interactions. The second involved deploying social and cultural capital to change the conditions of the field itself. These forms of resistance are political because they involve sophisticated awareness of the forms of power governing social relations and the development of strategies intended to mobilise resources for collective action.

**Personal resistance and reflection**

Personal resistance involves reflection on instrumental field conditions and the development of strategies to negotiate better outcomes in interactions. Local tactics of resistance are the forms of resistance observed in the domain of power in which instrumental rules are the primary forms of
governance influencing the outcome of interactions. As with the findings in Part 2, these rationalisations involved active reflection on field conditions and decisions about action based on an assessment of the likelihood of job seekers being able to improve their field position. This active reflection involved making an assessment of the options available, and the extent to which each individual job seeker was resourced to develop strategies of resistance.

These are local tactics of resistance similar to Scott’s ‘weapons of the weak’ (Scott, 1986: 5). These were not intentional or overt stands against the rules of conditionality; rather, they were tactics scaled to make life easier for job seekers, especially when employment services conditions were experienced as dominating. These forms of resistance are significant because they reflect the forms of disengagement that arise from meeting the activity test when it is not reciprocated by help or support.

These local level forms of resistance involving negotiation of field rules are reflected in Leanne’s experiences. Leanne described how she had eventually become weary of the constant roadblocks that impede her obtaining outcomes that satisfy her wish to find forms of employment that accommodate her parenting preferences. This caused a change in attitude in which she no longer accepted what she was told about system rules, especially about how workers used discretion:

Repeated exposure has taught me to be respectful and compliant in order to financially survive but to also look for and use any discrepancies to question decisions. My attitude has gone from originally trying at all times to follow directions and do the right thing … to seeing the situation as a challenge. I listen to what the ‘experts’ inform me, then check and double check the information. So, I no longer believe what I’m told (Leanne, 2013).

Knowing when to keep quiet had become a skill Leanne learnt so as to avoid conflict, even though it might leave her in breach of social security rules regarding change of circumstances. The ability to negotiate field conditions in this way was particularly evident in the behaviours of the single parents. The forms of tactical resistance identified involved finding ways to negotiate field conditions to avoid the effects of conditionality that conflicted with their priorities.

For the single parents, the conflict between the activity test and the commitment to caring for their children provided a strong and clear motive for resistance. They described how they rationalised field conditions to prioritise looking after their children. When Kelly realised that activity test rules left her no option but to spend less time with her daughter, she developed a number of strategies to avoid being forced into jobs she did not want to take:

I did know that you did not need to accept a job if it made you worse off, which in my mind was definitely the case by quite a bit. I quit my job the day before I moved to Newstart just in case they hassled me (Kelly, 2013).
In the following example, Leanne opted in favour of pursuing prioritising her parenting, as opposed to being subject to employment services surveillance, even if it left her without a source of income:

A phone call from the job search agency, offering cleaning jobs over the break, confirmed my decision to be resistant and retain my power and confidence. I went in and cancelled my Newstart payments. I’ve opted out without conforming. This way I can actually enjoy a break while applying for work over January without the stress and hassle of micro-monitoring and (mis)management. Had such a great time discussing why I was cancelling my payment with the lovely lady at Centrelink, who was concerned at how I was going to manage and included an interesting conversation about the punitive effects of the system (Leanne, 2013).

Leanne identified her behaviour as resistant, but rather than being directed against the goal of getting a job, it was intended to enable her to care for her children without the high levels of supervision she experienced while on Newstart. Leanne explained that she chose to do this because a windfall payment meant she could survive financially over the school holidays to look after her children.

**Personal resistance and resources**

Bourdieu used the concept of capital to describe the way in which the resources accrued by individuals have effective power in social fields (Bourdieu, 1986). As explained in part 2 of these findings, the distinguishing elements of capital can be understood in terms of the pieces of a chess game. Each piece has the power to make specific moves as governed by the rules of the game, and these moves are undertaken with the intention of improving the players’ stake in the game. Ultimately, the game played in employment services involves gaining access to the economic resources redistributed through the welfare system, or the economic resources of a paid job. In either case, this is ultimately a game of financial survival.

The extent to which the job seekers were able to resist the domination of the Workfare field depended on the forms of capital they possessed. While Leanne’s example depended on her having the financial capital to exit benefits for the summer, the findings indicated that social capital was the most durable resource used in resistance. The benefit of social capital was particularly apparent in the findings with the single parents. There was evidence that social capital played an important role in helping them withstand the impact of the activity test. They relied on social capital that they employed through social networks and community relationships in ways that supported parenting.

This point is illustrated by focusing on the ways in which Kelly employed various forms of capital to negotiate better outcomes for herself within the constraints of the system rules. When Kelly realised the employment services rules left her no option but to spend less time with her daughter, she adapted her strategies to opt out to the best of her capacity. Kelly made calculated decisions to radically
change her lifestyle. She left a job, moved out of an expensive three-bedroom house and moved to a new location and rented a ‘cabin’ in a regional area from a friend of a friend.

I’ve got a contact through a friend who has a one-bedroom converted garage cabin place. We were living a three-bedroom house, now we are going to live in a little cabin, and that won’t compromise our happiness, and I’d rather do that than have that lifestyle than live in the 3-bedroom house where I was having to you know not see my daughter very much because of that and work long hours (Kelly, 2013).

When asked what enabled her to make these changes, Kelly explained that it was because she had some unique resources. The resources Kelly drew on were her education, the extent to which she was prepared to make sacrifices to her material standard of living, and her personal confidence that she could live ‘back to basics’ where others could not.

I know that I can make ends meet by going back to basics, but not everyone is able to live like that. I guess this makes me fairly unique, that I have learnt how to live back to basics and feel confident that I can do that, whereas a lot of women don’t have the material independence to survive like that and need to take on jobs to keep their living standards at a level like that (Kelly, 2013).

These findings show that the extent to which field conditions are dominating depends on the extent to which human actors can draw on resources to provide them with forms of support that enable them to withstand its effects. In this respect, the forms of social and cultural capital identified as being deployed by the job seekers suggests that the impact of the dominating effects of Workfare-type conditionality are mediated by the ways in which human actors draw on support from other fields, like their local communities. In these examples, the particular resources involved in these personal forms of resistance were effective because they involved the use of social capital.

**Discursive resistance**

Discursive resistance was observed when job seekers articulated and rejected the constructs they felt were providing negative interactions with employment services. This form of resistance involved reflecting on not only the impact of the rules of conditionality, but also the discursive associations implicit in those rules. This capacity for reflection on the discursive informants of field conditions is here called discursive resistance.

There was evidence the job seekers reflected on the discursive informants of the field to identify how they were construed as welfare dependents and the effects this had on their treatment in employment services. The single parents reported shock when they realised they were being treated as job seekers, rather than parents. Kelly described it ‘as if someone had waved a magic wand and the value of parenting had changed overnight’. Leanne mentioned the same external change in perception of her
status when she referred to being perceived as ‘one of them, the “undeserving poor”’, while Kelly’s lament drew on the paternalistic discourse of tough love. These discursive justifications were drawn from the same discourse of unworthiness and the underclass.

Leanne had strong views about the extent to which she felt she was being judged as ‘welfare dependent’. She spoke about the discomfort she felt when being perceived as welfare dependent. Because of her training as a community service worker, she had a nuanced understanding of the forms welfare takes – an understanding she did not see reflected in the perspectives of the general population. She reported how customers seeking medical reimbursement from Medicare seemed confused about being in the Centrelink queue. She commented on how she wanted to tell them that, ‘Yes, Medicare is welfare, too,’ because she was indignant about being judged as welfare dependent.

Leanne was indignant about these assumptions and went to great lengths to explain how proactive she had been about finding a job and participating in activity that supported her community.

So presently I am attending weekly ESP ‘training’ sessions where I am advised on how to look for work as I am considered one of the most employable job seekers. Really!? I am also working approximately one day a week enjoying doing project work for a school in partnership with our local health department and local university. I have also picked up another short-term role for this term facilitating two orientation sessions at our local TAFE provider. I’m spending at least two full days per week writing job applications, addressing key selection criteria. Oh, and you know, I’m also caring for my children! (Leanne, 2013).

Leanne’s indignation extended to her challenging the way in which employment services used classification instruments like the Job Seeker Classification Instrument (JSCI). When she found out that she had been classified as a ‘hard to help’, she reported having spent many hours researching system rules to find out how her Job Seeker Classification score was calculated:

This resulted in the discovery that I have been placed in Stream 3. I query this assumption of my inability to find paid work, but the details on the system appear to be correct. Not happy, Jan! Stream 3 to me means I’ve been assessed as having high needs and will be micro-managed. I return home to do some research (Leanne, 2013).

Being hard to help was a classification she rejected because of her conscious identification of the discursive values that consigned her to a ‘high needs’ job seeker classification. Leanne knew that high needs equated with higher levels of supervision and intrusion, and she sought to have this classification reviewed.

The examples provided here show how reflection on the discursive properties of the employment services informed tactics of resistance at the personal level. In this domain of resistance, the findings...
provided examples of personal tactics of resistance relative to the instrumental and discursive properties of the field. These personal tactics were based on reflection on the conditions of the field, and rationalisations on ways to withstand the impact of the rules of conditionality in ways that reflected the unique situation of each of the job seekers. Some examples of the resources they used to develop these tactics of resistance were provided, and the concept of capital was employed to explain the extent to which these resources were effective relative to the conditions of the Workfare field.

**Interpersonal resistance and discursive reflection**

The forms of resistance observed in the interpersonal domain also drew on the capacity for reflection and assessment of the ways to deploy capital. The difference in the interpersonal domain is that these tactics of resistance were directed towards workers and used to attempt to influence the intersubjective conditions of the field. These forms of resistance are identified as forms of subversion because they were attempts to shift attitudes or impressions. The capacity for subversion involved understanding the intersubjective basis on which field conditions are reproduced in the eyes of others, such as workers in employment services and Centrelink.

Subversion was observed as a strategy the job seekers employed to change the outcomes of service exchanges. It was this knowledge of the discursive properties of the employment services field that enabled job seekers to subvert the outcomes of employment services interaction. The job seekers utilised cultural capital when exercising subversion, because it involved shifting expectations about welfare dependence into forms of cultural recognition.

This argument about subversion and cultural capital is illustrated in this example involving an incident reported by Leanne. Perceiving that she was considered ‘welfare dependent’, she realised the need to correct this interpretation. Leanne provided a striking example of the way she consciously mobilised cultural capital to get better results for herself. She related how she prepared herself to attend the office dressed for a job interview in order to garner the respect she feels she would not have been given if she had not adopted the dress code of the employed.

So … rocked up to the JSA Monday morning, dressed as if for an interview, asked to speak to the worker (who was away) and ended up talking to the manager. I briefly explained why I was there and this is where she ‘implied’ I’d be risking participation failure. I bluntly asked whose decision that was and was told it was up to her discretion (Leanne, 2013).

Leanne articulated the way in which the discursive conditions of the field limited her options, particularly in the service relationship, where she anticipated that intersubjective impressions would be formed from her appearance. Leanne realised that she needed to correct an interpretation of the discursive category of ‘welfare dependent’, and this knowledge enabled her to get better a result from the appointment:
THIS time though … I was prepared, asked for ten minutes of her time, sat down with my job application folder and professionally went through my qualifications, explained (again!) the type of work I was currently doing (even though I am still classed as unemployed) and went through (and showed evidence of) all the jobs I had applied for and intended to apply for. That’s when she made an appointment for me with HER manager and I went through the whole process again (Leanne, 2013).

In order to avoid the discriminatory treatment she expected at her employment services appointment, Leanne knew that she could influence the outcome of the interaction by dressing in a certain way that would overcome this prejudicial treatment. She realised she would be treated better if she dressed as if for a job interview, thus associating herself with the discursive construct of a worker, rather than a job seeker. As it turned out, she was right to anticipate the effects of this decision, which bought her relief from the surveillance and scrutiny she would otherwise be subject to. Furthermore, she was able to shift the perspective of the employment services workers to provide her with greater recognition, that she was not lazy or a work avoider, but rather a capable and qualified single parent.

Identifying and mobilising the discursive properties of the field enabled Leanne to obtain temporary respite from the ongoing surveillance administered by employment services agencies:

I left the second appointment feeling confident, went and bought a take-away coffee, hopped into my car and cried. I think it was stress relief (Leanne, 2013).

Mobilising cultural capital enabled Leanne to negotiate a better outcome for which she rewarded herself by buying a coffee. However, at the same time, the emotional duress she reported reflected the effort it takes to be recognised enough to obtain temporary release from the micro-management associated with being a ‘high needs’ job seeker.

These finding about discursive forms of resistance draw attention to the ways in which intersubjective recognition functions as a mediating factor in the way in which interactions are negotiated. This capacity for interpersonal resistance is derived from the reflection the job seekers used critically reflect on the discursive aspects of field conditions and how these influenced service outcomes. This analysis contributes to understanding why interactions in street-level exchanges are the site for the co-construction of outcomes between job seekers and workers.

**Case study – Laura and discursive resistance**

This case study illustrates how Laura actively reflected on both the instrumental and discursive properties of the field to develop her tactics of resistance. Laura had decided to exit Newstart payments because she was indignant about the surveillance it involved. The resistance she exercised was against the instrumental rules of conditionality as well as the discursive conditions of the field.
Laura demonstrated the capacity to reflect on the instrumental and discursive properties of the Workfare field and develop strategies of resistance that drew on her social and cultural capital to shield her from the effects she described as punitive.

I am a 46-year-old solo mother of two teenagers. I do not receive welfare benefits of any kind including Family Tax Benefit. This is because I was accused of failing to report and fulfil my obligations to Centrelink as well as hiding the names addresses of purported ‘tax dodgers’. Centrelink’s words. I was left with a debt to Centrelink. Family Tax Benefit was cut off when I resigned politely from Newstart. I was transferred onto Newstart from Parenting Payment during a government review of welfare payments.

By exiting the welfare system altogether and reflecting on the release this provided from surveillance, Laura reveals her capacity to reflect on the instrumental rules that constrain action in the employment services field. Although Laura was also a single parent, her decision to exit employment services reflected her personal objection to the surveillance and intrusion. The decision she described reflected her view that the surveillance was dehumanising, for her especially since she was required to repeat the details of a painful divorce:

It is true that in my present circumstances I would do well to be on the dole, but I can’t bear the reality. I do not want to have to sit with disinterested staff doing their talking about the intimate details of my traumatic divorce, be required to prove my medical condition, or my mental state by entering into an arrangement with an approved psychologist/practitioner. I object to being subjected to surveillance like scrutiny of where I have looked for work in a rural low employment and socio-economic region and who I work for – their addresses, phone numbers and names.

Laura attached higher value to maintaining trust-based relationships, which she identified as being fundamental to her ongoing survival. In fact, it was because of the way in which Laura spoke about her communal interdependencies that highlighted the extent to which social capital played such a strong role in the ways in which job seekers were able to negotiate the employment services field and develop tactics of resistance. She directly identified the strength of her social capital, and the interdependencies it involves, as the foremost capability that enabled her to avoid being exposed to the conditions of the employment services field. This social capital was deployed in her gift exchanges.

Try explaining living with less reliance on money to Centrelink! Try explaining that part of your living wage is the gift economy that you operate in that doesn’t attribute value to work done and goods exchanged.

Laura’s focus on gifts emphasised the importance of social capital, particularly for women engaged in forms of social exchanges that take place beyond the boundaries of the employment services field,
which prioritises economic capital. Laura described how she was enabled in this behaviour because she had learnt to trust the value and return she can obtain from her investment in her social relationships. Laura’s determination to be independent extended to her not wanting to take the $40 voucher for participation in the research. When she finally accepted it, she told me she would share it with a neighbour who was in greater need of it than her. In other words, she decided to invest the money in her social relationships, knowing perhaps that these will provide greater return in terms of the goodwill on which she thrives.

These strategies enabled her to survive outside of the mainstream economy and placed her beyond the reach of the welfare conditionality about which she was indignant:

For some people I am sure it helps, and I believe that welfare payments are a critical part of a well-functioning healthy society. I do not make any aspersions about their reliance on welfare support systems, but unless I am injured or unable to find any way of earning a living, I will not need to be on Newstart ever again.

Laura demonstrated capacity for reflection and articulation of the differentials that enabled her to transcend dependency on the mainstream monetary economy. Laura’s articulation of the constraining features of the Workfare field demonstrated her analytic capability. The constraining features were both the instrumental rules, and the discursive informants of the field.

On the day that I ‘resigned’ from Newstart I was concerned about the treatment of Newstart recipients in terms of their common rights as a result of my relatively brief experience with Centrelink arrangements re Newstart. It is a system that purports to give the needy a helping hand, but once you are part of it you are wound up in a sequence of obligation and invasive scrutiny that I suspected far outweighs any benefit of the money received. If you have any consciousness of your absolute natural human right of personal freedom you feel oppressed. The money you receive is a paltry financial band-aid.

Laura’s resistance reflected her capacity to articulate and reject the regime of personal disclosure, and surveillance associated with conditionality, which she found dehumanising.

When I failed to report for fortnightly and pointless progress reports at the employment providers, my Newstart was suspended. I failed to report because I just got sick of the pointlessness of the exercise. I am no simpleton. The system isn’t one I want to fit not for love or money. Even the provider staff agreed that the system was failing.

Further, Laura identified the relationship between employment services and the shift to a Workfare regime. In Laura’s view, this shift had created alienation from the fundamentals of survival that were her immediate concerns.
I have decided to be independent from Centrelink to lead an experientially rich life, in effect removing the distraction of gross consumption that most of us are tied to. To reveal the natural state of being human without necessarily losing sight of my living standards and ability to be happy and content. Centrelink dependency for me is not an option. I will not swap the life I am growing out of ashes for that state of abject and unquestioning abeyance under an authority I have little respect for.

Her awareness of the discursive properties of the field enabled her to identify the features of Workfare against which she developed her own strategies of resistance. These involved recognising the misrecognition inherent in the field, and finding ways to survive outside of the mainstream.

I have everything I need – a home, good health, a good mind, skilled hands, community around me. I don’t need a shiny new car because I have two old bicycles that work very well. I don’t need expensive adventures because I am tired out and thrilled by the ones I have every day that I discover something new about the microcosm of life scaled down to essentials. I don’t need money saved in a bank account because I don’t need that much money because I don’t want the things that money buys.

Laura’s reflections provide access to an example of a job seeker who analysed and rejected the prioritisation of paid work in the paid labour market. Her strategies of resistance involved the ethical and material rejection of the values of capitalism and paternalism:

I don’t define poverty by money alone. I think it is too easy to measure your success by how much money or the things you have instead of how kind you can be, or resourceful with very little. My freedom depends on me being able to explore the huge gaping holes in the societal economic and political fabric that is humanity to find the niches that afford me survival and when you start looking and building relationships with people based on the only things that you have, you find them everywhere.

I am on my own and so I have to find a way to be financially independent and if poverty is the name of the game, then so be it. I will learn to live with less reliance on money and be happy without it. And I find that I am.

Laura rejected the judgements she believes others made about her because she operated from a different value base. Laura’s subsistence on the fringes of capitalism was a deliberate stance outside of the mainstream. It is also a state into which she was marginalised through maintaining her desire for freedom from surveillance and from an abusive relationship, in detriment to her economic self-interest. It shows the lengths that some job seekers are prepared to go to in order to free themselves from the domination they experience when they are exposed to Workfare-type conditionality.
Laura’s resistance to the Workfare field was not only material. She identified the discursive nature of the subjugation that was reflected in the attitudes and treatment of the workers she interacted with. This capacity for reflection on the discursive nature of her subjugation was apparent in comments about how she was treated by a worker:

The most insulting statement made to me by an otherwise polite and efficient male staffer was a response to my asking to be taken off the books. He looked at me as if I had lost the plot, and said along the lines of, ‘You are not managing your life well or your finances, and you are fool not to accept Centrelink payments. It is free money.’ I understand his attitude. It is that of a rationalist.

The example showed how Laura identified and articulated the defining welfare constructs and subjugating relationships imposed on job seekers. This was based on her unique capacity for reflection on the discursive informants of the welfare field. Laura recognised this as a form of subjugation she had chosen to opt out of:

He is seeing a thin, stressed, tired, desperate human being in front of him who from his point of view has lost control of everything and doesn’t have much of a life. He IS trying to help. He thinks $203 a week will solve ALL of my problems, or that it is enough to run a household and support two boys and pay a mortgage etc., when actually what he has on his hands is someone who has survived alone for years without welfare and knows how to manage quite well despite the odds doing all of those things. Most of us are managing whether on welfare or not. That is the most incredible thing about human beings, that no matter what the circumstances, we manage.

Furthermore, Laura demonstrated the capacity to reflect on the intersubjective dimensions of the field. She demonstrated this in her observations about the workers she met:

Some Centrelink staffers are very good at being people persons, as well as abiding by the rules and getting the job done. Some aren’t, or they have had a bad day, or they hate their job. They are inelegantly but beautifully human behind the uniforms and officious language. I respect that. If I am questioned, I like to discuss the matter with equanimity and patience. I learn something that way and they have a few moments off dealing with bad mannered people.

Laura’s observation of the humanity of the workers she interacts with provided the realisation that she has the power to influence the service encounter by adopting the self-conscious strategy of politeness, which she believes provides respite from their usual experiences. Laura assumed their intersubjective stance and reflected on her own behavioural control as a strategy to ease the workers’ pain at being exposed to clients who do not behave as well as she does. Laura explained her understanding that the workers suffered from their own forms of emotional discomfort, which to her are an inevitable
consequence of being trapped in the economic rationalist paradigm of existence, and dependence on the monetary system of value exchange rather than her own preferred ‘gifts’.

**Political resistance and struggles for recognition**

This section describes how forms of resistance involving complex reflection on field conditions are escalated into political resistance and struggles for recognition. These forms of resistance involve reflection on the instrumental and discursive properties of the field and are escalated into collective action intended to change the conditions of the field itself and are fuelled by struggles over interests and misrecognition. These forms of resistance are political because they involve awareness of the forms of power governing social relations, and reflection on ways to subvert the discursive properties of interactions and mobilise resources for collective action.

Leanne’s experience provided a perspective on resistance as a strategy for recognition that proved useful for understanding the other forms of resistance identified in this research. That is because these negotiations reflected the job seekers’ desire for better recognition. These higher levels of recognition could be negotiated in interpersonal interactions when job seekers realised how to shift the attitudes of workers. The forms of resistance involved job seekers in strategies for recognition in which they subverted the misrecognition they anticipated in employment services.

The forms of resistance encountered in this investigation were most pronounced when they were reactions to reclassifications that resulted in misrecognition and domination. This was particularly apparent in the experiences of the single parents who reported feeling shocked at being classified as job seekers, rather than parents. Bourdieu described this as people finding themselves out of step with their new social position (Bourdieu, 2000: 19). The classification struggle the single parents were engaged in was caused by the changes in eligibility rules for Parenting Payment initiated with the 2006 Welfare to Work measures. Through reclassification, single parents experienced change in the socially legitimated value of their parenting, which was devalued ‘overnight’ by policy makers.

Rosie identified the new construction of single parenting and the profound impact it had on her personal circumstances. For Rosie and Leanne, who had initially subordinated their own interests to the extent that it compromised their teenage boys’ safety, the indignation at the way their new status informed the way they were perceived was strong:

> I have been threatened with participation failures a lot of times, and it has added to the feeling of being made to feel incredibly, incredibly worthless, then I get angry. It is just not right the government should treat women like me like this, we do everything we can to get our kids growing up to be healthy and safe, and not a problem later on, we put our kids first, and this is how we get treated (Rosie, 2013).
This way of reflecting on the externally imposed change to their social position shows how job seekers are conscious of the ways in which the discourses of unemployment are used in political ways to denigrate ‘inactive’ social roles. The single parents were able to articulate the discursive conditions they felt were unfairly prejudicing their treatment. They described how they perceived that the value of single parenting had been affected by the discourse of the underclass.

This is the ability to recognise misrecognition, and these findings indicate that it is an important capability in the development of collective resistance. Through the strength of her social networks, Rosie, like the other participants, felt a responsibility to advocate on behalf of others.

I’ve been able to handle a lot of this stuff, but I am aware of the damage it has caused me and my kids, and lots of other people I know. Since I have been campaigning to have stories like mine heard, I’ve attracted a bit of media interest and have people from political parties and government departments wanting to talk to me and I am not scared to speak out about it because I think people need to hear about the distress that’s been going on (Rosie, 2013).

The strategies for recognition I observed require analytic awareness to critically reflect on field conditions in order to develop strategies to influence the field itself. This form of resistance involved strategies to change the actual rules of conditionality themselves and strategies for the reappropriation of the discursive field. The struggle was not only to change instrumental rules to obtain better alignment with their own needs, but also – through collectivisation – the parents sought to change social attitudes so that single parenting was treated with greater legitimacy at political and administrative levels. Kelly criticised the social policy strategies she identified as pushing unemployed people and their families into poverty:

I have been researching some ideas on the tough love approach of the government and employment services. I wonder what the research is on this being an effective method of engaging people in employment? Surely reducing someone’s benefits and pushing them and their family further into poverty is not an effective solution? It seems like the government and employment services are both following the same tough love approach and both are failing (Kelly, 2013).

The findings indicated that there was a nascent conversion of interpersonal conflict to forms of social advocacy and protest. The majority of the participants indicated an interest in advocacy, itself a form of resistance in which agents seek to improve social conditions they find unjust. There was an emotional driver behind this transition to advocacy and collectivisation. This indignation that is apparent throughout their stories indicates the points at which there is transition from a struggle for personal recognition to a drive to engage in advocacy and collectivisation.
You get to the point where you have to stand up for yourself and the right of your child to be supported. It makes me frustrated and angry that I am caught in this system of unjust change and the effect this is having on my ability to feel secure in raising my daughter (Kelly, 2013).

When the participants spoke about their indignation and humiliation, they were angry at the injustice of the arbitrariness they encountered against their sense of entitlement to fairness and recognition of their role as parents. The greatest indignation is reserved for the ways in which the employment services rules diminished the value of caring and were based on an assumption of inactivity and moral decrepitude.

Advocacy and protest were chiefly enabled in situations where the job seekers had strong social capital and networks. The parents in particular converted their frustration into forms of advocacy, as they found no scope for satisfaction within the system rules. Through the strength of her social networks, Rosie – like the other participants – feels a responsibility to advocate on behalf of others and feels that social change will come about when the rest of the community get offended.

They need to get offended about what’s happened and feel what I’ve been feeling all these years because I think once they get offended they’ll start making noise and getting some change happening (Rosie, 2013).

The research coincided with the rise of social media and its impact on new forms of social organisation and social capital. The use of digital capital as an emerging resource enabling the formation of new interest groups that are mobilising for political ends promises to change the ways in which social capital is understood in the future. The findings indicated that advocacy and protest were enabled in situations where the job seekers had strong cultural capital and social networks:

I came across a post of yours regarding Newstart. I thought I was an isolated case but it’s just disgusting what is happening. You said you were interested in hearing of experiences with Newstart. I have attached the complaint I sent to DEEWR about this dreadful job service provider (Claudia, 2014).

The comments about the blog provided an outlet for the experiences of the single parents who were experiencing high levels of distress when they were reclassified as job seekers. Many of the job seekers saw their participation in this research as a form of advocacy, and agreed to have their stories promoted as part of the research blog.

These findings described the forms of resistance observed in the political domain of interactions. They involved reflection on the instrumental and discursive properties of the employment services field. The forms of resistance were directed at achieving social change through advocacy, protest and political representation driven by the indignation experienced by the single parents following the 2006
Welfare to Work reforms. Social capital was identified as an important resource in seeding collective action, and is being harnessed through new digital forms.

**Job seeker findings – Part 3 conclusion**

This part of the findings described three forms of resistance that occur in different domains of interaction – the local, interpersonal and political levels. These findings provided examples of the forms of resistance that occur in these domains of interaction. The differences in the forms of resistance and the forms of capital that are effective in each of these domains reflect the forms of power informing the relations under observation. Like other forms of action, resistance is most effective when job seekers and workers have resources available to influence what happens in the field, and this depends on having access to legitimated and recognised forms of capital.

The forms of resistance identified as significant to the research concerns are reactions to the domination experienced because of the use of sanctions to enforce the Workfirst activity test, and the discursive associations of welfare dependence. The findings provided evidence that job seekers developed strategies for recognition involving the capacity to identify and respond to misrecognition. They are strategies for recognition because they involve rationalisations designed to enable job seekers to negotiate field conditions in favour of their own interests. The strategies for recognition took two forms. The first form involved deploying cultural capital to influence intersubjective recognition in service interactions. The second involved deploying social and cultural capital to change the conditions of the field itself. These forms of resistance are political because they employ sophisticated awareness of the forms of power governing social relations, and involve reflection on ways to subvert the discursive properties of interactions and mobilise resources for collective action.

The typology of resistance presented in these findings informs the discussion in Chapter 7, in which the forms resistance takes are further elaborated in an interest-based perspective.
Chapter 6 – Worker findings

This chapter presents the findings from the interviews with five employment services workers. The findings from the workers provide an important perspective on the forms of resistance that arise in employment services because workers are responsible for the implementation of conditionality at the street-level. The perspective of street-level workers offers insight into how Workfirst has affected them as human actors with their own interests and aspirations in the welfare field, as well as the role they play in enforcing the rules of conditionality.

In this chapter, Bourdiesian field analysis (Bourdieu, 1990) is used to situate workers within both the objective and subjective conditions which structure fields. These constraints can be mapped using field theory, particularly as reflected in practices involving intersubjective recognition. This is because intersubjectivity can be used to identify the way in which human actors recognise the legitimacy of other actors. It therefore reflects the influence of both the objective and subjective conditions of fields like employment services in which instrumental rules and discursive associations inform worker disposition and treatments of unemployed people.

The interviews with workers took place during a period when the contract transition to JSA was recent, and this provided a comparative frame that helped draw out the impact of the changes. It is by drawing on the experiences of comparison that many of the insights provided in these findings become most salient. The contract transition effected cultural shifts in the employment services offices. These findings reflect on the cultural transition in terms of changes in attitudes of staff towards job seekers. The workers who experienced these changes were able to comment on the contrast between the old and new employment services and how this personally affected them. The findings then reflect on how the worker experiences fits with Peillon’s (1998) definition of ‘misrecognised care’ and the implications this has had on the capability of the employment services workforce. Finally this chapter identifies the forms of resistance the workers embarked on in their own quest to reinstate conditions that would enable them to practice case management more effectively.

The employment services field

Field analysis involves the identification of the actors and the conditions of the field. In the case of the employment services field, the actors are job seekers and employment services workers. Action in employment services can be described as a game. Bourdieu used the metaphor of a game of rugby to describe actions in fields (Bourdieu, 1990). When a game is in play, the space in which it is being played is transformed into a field where certain rules apply. The players of the game assume positions on the field, and know the rules of the game.
The rules of the game are determined by the objective and subjective conditions of fields. The objective conditions of fields are the instrumental rules that govern behaviour tolerated on the field. The subjective conditions of the field are deposited as a habitus in individual actors. Both the objective and subjective conditions of the field are ‘practiced’ through intersubjective recognition, in which recognition serves to mediate the objective and subjective conditions of the field.

The objective conditions of the employment services field are instrumentalised through the employment services contract and the behavioural rules associated with Workfirst labour market policy. Employment services worker field positions are defined by the agency and contract rules they are required to follow and are reinforced through monitoring and surveillance. Worker autonomy is constrained by organisational resources and the rules that define how they are used. The primary forms of surveillance to which employment services workers are subject are KPIs and target-based reward systems. Managers of employment services sites routinely monitor worker performance and site-level performance contributes to the overall star rating for the provider.

The subjective conditions of the field are inculcated as a habitus which informs worker attitudes towards job seekers. The subjective conditions of the field are informed by the discursive informants of the welfare field, which in the era of JSA, reflected the welfare dependency and underclass welfare discourse that accompanied the waves of welfare reform since the 1990s. These reforms were accompanied by a discursive justification, which from a field theory perspective reflects the legitimisation of policy achieved through classification struggles (Bourdieu, 2000). Once classifications are normalised, there are shifts in social attitudes, which become internalised in the attitudes of citizens so that these new configurations come to be accepted as the new norms of welfare entitlement. Classifications like that of ‘job seeker’ serve the particular function of normalising welfare constructs for the purpose of legitimising the interests of the dominant. They become embedded as ‘practice’ in the culture of agencies in the attitudes of workers, and in the expectations of welfare clients (Martin, 2006; Peillon, 1998).

**Instrumental and cultural change**

This section describes how the formal shift in program focus to Workfirst affected the practice of workers and led to an eventual change in workplace culture. This section explains worker’s field relations by illustrating the impact of the transition from the Job Network to JSA on worker practices in employment services. The workers commented on the contrast between the old and new employment services and how this personally affected them.

The new contract entailed a shift in the rules of the employment services field so that job seekers were activated, and employment service worker behaviour as motivated by payment by results contracts. In contrast to the previous Job Network, JSA had a stronger emphasis on employment outcomes (Workfirst) which meant that employment services programs that had pre-employment support
objectives, like the Personal Support Program, were disbanded. The job seekers who were in these programs moved into mainstream services, and more single parents and people with disabilities were activated. Once activated as ‘job seekers’ there was a stronger emphasis on behavioural monitoring and welfare conditionality backed by financial sanction. By bringing these job seekers into the active JSA caseload, the competitive drivers of employment services contract were mobilised.

The workers interviewed in this research had all experienced this transition and reflected on the implications of the change in culture and the treatment of job seekers. The contract transition compelled workers to overhaul their practice because of the new job outcome targets of Workfirst. This increased the levels of pressure on workers to get job outcomes, as their own performance was subject to surveillance in the form of performance targets.

When PSP transitioned to JSA, initially there was not much change; however, over the next two years, I noticed some major changes to office culture and eventually I left as my caseload increased from around 40 clients to 110, and I felt I was no longer able to practice case management (Sarah, 2014).

For workers this contract transition involved higher levels of activation, conditionality and sanction, as well as increased caseloads. The workers interviewed in this research had all experienced this transition and reflected on the implications of the change in workplace culture and the treatment of job seekers. The surveillance of compliance was felt keenly by workers as requirements to lift standards and achieve outcomes, and this dominated their interactions with job seekers. The way they practiced as employment consultants was profoundly affected by Workfirst, and a shift from case management to caseload management.

When I started, it was all kind of flowers and sweetness, yeah give people what they need and help them, help them, then within six months it had gone to, ‘We’re not getting the outcomes, we need to start pushing people into job clubs,’ which are the biggest waste of time. That is it basically (Jo, 2014).

The reference to job clubs reflects the extent to which workers were compelled to push job seekers into activity for its own sake. This has a ‘disutility’ effect like Work for the Dole, where it is assumed the job seekers will find jobs because of the high levels of hassle involved in participating in 25 hours per week of activity for no pay. In the research about Work for the Dole, this is called the referral effect (Borland, 2004), and in Departmental language, it is also called a tree-shaking effect.

In the JSA contract, there was increased pressure to get employment outcomes, which meant workers could no longer case manage job seekers with complex pre-employment and non-vocational barriers to employment. For Sarah, the external change in rules created constraints on her practice:
At first, I found my social work skills were useful in JSA, then about six months into the contract there was a lot of pressure to change our practice and get people into jobs. This really changed the culture, and there was an influx of new staff from other Job Networks who were much more employment consultant focused. I did have to learn new skills, like reverse marketing, which I did find useful to the job, but I felt like my capacity to actually really help my job seekers was eroded (Sarah, 2014).

In terms of the objective conditions of the field, the policy of Workfirst legitimated the more disciplinary use of sanctions. The workers reported how the changed employment services rules resulted in change to workplace practices particularly in the use of participation reports. Participation reports are submitted by workers when job seekers do not attend employment services appointments and other activities as documented in their job plans. They are the basis of an assessment of whether the job seeker will be sanctioned. In Jo’s view, the colleagues most likely to use participation reports were workers with no professional background from old Job Network agencies:

JSA staff were different in all aspects of the practice than we were and there was much more focus in them on using participation reports and compliance as tools for engagement (Jo, 2014).

The change in rules created a shift in practices reinforced by employing new and inexperienced staff who lacked the knowledge of the qualified and experienced workers to work with the clients. The ways these new workers used participation reports contrasted with the ways the qualified and experienced workers used them. The workers expressed concern about the extent to which these new colleagues tried to contact job seekers who missed appointments. Jo noticed how they would just let the phone ring twice and hang-up, as if the effort of contacting the job seeker was wasteful, when a participation report would get them in.

The change in practice was reinforced by rules that gave workers less scope to exercise discretion about the use of participation reports. The changed rules meant there were instances when workers did not want to lodge participation reports and reported having no choice but to adhere to the strict guidelines of the employment services contract. Mel said there were times when she wanted to exercise discretion but had been unable to because she had to behave consistently regardless of her own perspective:

[Interviewer] Are there any times when you have had to submit participation reports when you felt it wasn’t the right thing to do?
Yes, that was something I was trying to get across in the participation reports, you can completely understand some of these circumstances, but you can’t put in for this one and not for that one (Mel, 2014).

[Interviewer] You need to be consistent?

Yep, so you put in the participation report. I don’t think they actually read it, to be honest. You put in the participation report … and you put the info onto the system about their circumstances and you’re basically saying, ‘Make sure you don’t apply this one,’ and it comes back with a compliance action and you go, ‘Oh no!’ (Mel, 2014).

The shift to sanction-based culture was frustrating for workers who hoped to be able to genuinely help job seekers. These workers were acutely aware that participation reports were not helping people. Workers were required to use sanctions in ways that conflicted with their view of what was really in the best interests of the job seekers they worked with.

There are times when you have to do participation reports and you know it is not really helping people, it is just part of the process of being on the merry-go-round where the help they need is not there (Jo, 2014).

This was frustrating for the experienced workers because they indicated that much of non-compliance they encountered was not motivated by work avoidance. There were other factors in job seekers’ lives that made complying challenging, such as domestic violence and episodic mental health conditions:

Most of the people I found who weren’t complying had mental health, and other crises, in their lives they were not always aware of, or able to do anything about. For example, there might be women in controlling relationships, basically where there’s violence, who are too scared to say anything and kind of appear to be going along with things, but there’s a whole lot of other stuff going on behind there. JSA did not give us a chance to work with that at all (Sarah, 2014).

Jo explained her view that these job seekers were trapped on a compliance ‘merry-go-round’; their life circumstances were such that they simply could not comply for reasons they were often too ashamed to disclose.

Yes, it was a bizarre merry-go-round, where we’d get the people back, often you’d see the same people had been to the same assessments prior, you’d read the report and go, OK well there’s that same thing, then you’d send them back out just to be penalised again, and often
times they were people who just did not have insight into their own barriers and couldn’t get an appropriate JCA [barriers to employment assessment] performed (Jo, 2014).

Jo based her observations of the wastefulness of the participation reporting processes on her experiences as a Centrelink social worker where she undertook Comprehensive Compliance Reviews when eight-week non-payment penalties loomed: While at the Centrelink Comprehensive Compliance Review job seekers are subjected to a review that is necessary to restore their payments, the process did not help them to address the complex issues that contribute to their unemployment. I asked Jo about how job seekers appeared during the review:

Probably the majority seemed emotionally flat, no sense of panic, no sense of anything, they’d just sit there and go, ‘I don’t want my payment cut’ … just so over the whole thing. Often, because they were used to the process, they were like you know, this is why I don’t have a house to live in, and da da da da da da, is that enough for your report love? And off they’d go (Jo, 2014).

Despite the best efforts of workers like Jo and Sarah, who made extra efforts to assist their clients, the compliance ‘merry-go-round’ continued, while the job seekers were not actually helped with the issues that might have been preventing them from getting work.

We do not have the resources to really help them either, it is part of a wider problem of lack of investment in social problems, so the work we do is not really helping, not in this area (Jo, 2014).

The workers expressed frustration at the constraints the JSA contract had on their ability to engage in effective case management practice. The change in practice was reinforced by rigidity of rules and limits on the availability to access resources needed to effectively help job seekers. The capacity of workers to help stabilise the pre-employment and non-vocational issues of job seekers was limited and this shift to Workfirst practices were embedded in institutional practices.

**Intersubjective recognition**

Intersubjective recognition is important in contexts like employment services because it is influenced by the appropriation of welfare discourse and this directly influences how job seekers are perceived and treated. Intersubjective recognition only functions effectively when field conditions provide tolerance for recognition. This tolerance was found to be both a factor of the impact of instrumental rules, and a function of the intersubjective capabilities of workers.
The findings show that intersubjective recognition influenced the outcomes of employment services negotiations because it informed workers’ treatment of job seekers. Intersubjective capability may be understood as the capacity to provide recognition to clients, informed by the training and experience of workers. Training and experience enabled workers to adopt more objective perspectives on the barriers to employment faced by their unemployed clients.

The job seekers reported they felt some workers were not qualified or experienced enough to help them. When the job seekers considered employment services workers as being inadequately qualified, it affected their confidence about the extent to which the agency could help them get a job:

And I remember thinking, you know, the girl who was trying to help had just started in the job, she was like 19, and I’ve been at work for years in this industry, I thought you can’t help me, I thought kind of arrogant. I guess that, she was OK that girl, she was doing what she has to do. I just felt at the point, it was pitched to me down here and I was up there, and I was getting interviews already (Matthew, 2013).

Matthew observed variations in training levels and deliberately went to offices where he knew he would be treated better:

Yeah it does depend on individual worker, I am big on the office, so I deliberately go to the ones that are nice. It’s just different levels of the staff like you get some staff who are just fantastic, and they know their shit, they know what they’re doing, and I’ve been told something and say I don’t think you’re correct. I’ve been to some where they’ve been more tough and authoritarian (Matthew, 2013).

These findings suggest that training is a critical factor that influences the extent to which workers provide recognition to job seekers. Sarah reflected on the effects of this when workers were brought in without much training or experience.

The person sitting next to me was not from a health or welfare background became an employment consultant, she was very young to deal with clients with complex issues. That was a bit painful at the beginning the way she talks to the clients she was only 25 talking to clients who were nearly 60 with lots of issues, the conversation is not going to be very fruitful because of the way she approached people and inability to respect their life (Sarah, 2014).

Training ensures workers treat job seekers according to the rules and that they exercise interpretation that reflects the complexity of job seeker needs. Sarah and Jo’s professional qualifications – and in Barbara’s case, her 11 years of experience – enabled them to reflect critically on the practices required.
in their workplace, and to resist when there was conflict with their view on how to treat job seekers. There were a range of alternative strategies workers could use instead of a participation report, depending on their discretion:

I avoided them where possible. So I developed my own little diary where I would keep notes about people and who I needed to remind. I sent text messages to some of my young people and things like that, and I’d try to reschedule them, so I’d call half an hour before: ‘Are you on your way? No? OK, I’ll reschedule you’ (Jo, 2014).

The importance of being able to exercise discretion was apparent in the reflections of the workers:

I play it by the rule book in terms of doing participation reports, I have to do them so I do. I know it has consequences sometimes; we get a lot of aggro in our office, especially over Work for the Dole … I try to give everyone the benefit of the doubt the first few times I hear their excuses, until I get a good sense of what’s really going on (Barbara, 2014).

This was a common behaviour the workers reported and relied on when making an interpretation of whether the job seeker deserved to be reported for non-compliance. This required an important capability for reflection that depended on the workers making assessments relating to the integrity or vulnerabilities of job seekers. In some cases, they were able to show sympathy, as in this example from Barbara:

I had the occasional soft spot. It is terrible sometimes that people have participation requirements, you know, pregnant women, people with terminal illnesses like cancer. I’ve known a few really bad cases that really upset me, like this single parent who ended up committing suicide because she’d lost her house after she was transferred to Newstart (Barbara, 2014).

The workers reflected on how the workforce had changed so that there was no longer capability to work effectively with job seekers. Furthermore, Sarah identified a lack of professional development in the sector, which meant that workers did not have the skills to work effectively with job seekers according to their needs:

Professional development is lacking in employment services because a lot of people are not coming from a welfare background, but they are required to work and have partnership with clients, so it’s hard work for them, so they need training. But because of the workload in employment services, they don’t have time to attend training, and managers don’t assist them to attend (Sarah, 2014).
The lack of professional development meant the workforce had become less skilled, and the funding provided to employment services agencies was insufficient for them to resource the kind of training that would contributing to helping job seekers.

**Internalisation of welfare dependence normative attitudes**

The research identified a relationship between the objective conditions and subjective conditions of the field in the way in which, over time, the objective conditions of the field become reified in the attitudes of workers. In the case of the employment services this reification was apparent in the shifts in worker attitudes towards the unemployed that accompanied the welfare to work reforms.

The classification of job seeker contained welfare dependent associations that justified workers adopting the disciplinary strategies that get people into jobs quickly. The label of job seeker enabled workers to distance themselves from clients with whom they did not readily identify, and give preferential treatment to those with whom they did. This was particularly apparent in the way the term job seeker appeared to take on a different meaning for workers without the experience to reflect on its discursive implications and associations. New workers were immersed in rules that justified punitive and selective treatments, where their own bias and discriminatory attitudes were given free reign. Jo described colleagues who seemed to relish the new forms of power they obtained in their jobs, particularly punitive power over people from ‘other’ backgrounds:

> Yeah, you know we will show him, we will teach him, this one’s lazy therefore we will put him in job club so he will have to come twice a week for four hours a week, chuck him in the computer room in front of a computer, get him to flick through newspapers, that will motivate him, that will put the fire up him [sarcastic voice] (Jo, 2014).

Jo noted job clubs were used selectively to punish certain types of job seekers the workers did not identify with:

> [Interviewer] They had ones they liked and ones they did not? What were those differences based on?

> Oh, people they could identify more with.

> [Interviewer] OK, so it was a subjective identification of some people more than others?

> Oh, absolutely, like one of the girls was from [name of town deleted] herself, so anyone who was kind of Anglo, young, same sort of lifestyle, couple of kids, they were her favourites …
So, if there was some old Arab guy on payments for five years, she was very hard-line, and you could, because it’s all under the guidelines (Jo, 2014).

Jo expressed the view that some workers used participation reports discriminately in favour of ‘people like them’ and indiscriminately against ‘others’. She identified the way in which subjective bias entered workers’ judgements, especially those without qualifications, in treatments of job seekers. Further, she noticed how the new workers went on ‘power trips’:

It is a ‘power trip’ for someone who has not had the kind of power before, to go, ‘Well here you go, love, you’re now a professional person,’ and no reflection, no. ‘You have worked in admin, you know the system. Do the training package, off you go.’

[Interviewer] So that power trip was about them having authority to make significant decisions relating to other people’s lives?

Yep (Jo, 2014).

As the culture in the employment services agencies shifted due to the impact of Workfirst policy, the workers identified differences in the ways job seekers were treated. Specific language was used to segment job seekers by type and justified practices with job seekers who were considered a waste of time. Sarah spoke about how the term ‘deadweight’ caseload was used both by workers at the employment services and the Department of Employment to refer to job seekers they considered unlikely to get jobs.

It’s a horrible name, but I have to say, a lot of workers are experiencing a very difficult situation which they didn’t have the skill to deal with, it could be a quite traumatic situation, of course the defence mechanism, so this way of being critical, of looking down at job seekers, is a way to manage their stress I think, I’m not justifying their behaviour but I can see where their horribleness is coming from (Sarah, 2014).

The use of this language reflects an apparent complicity between contracting and contracted agency. Worker inability to help some job seekers was transferred back on to unemployed people as a form of blame. The job seekers who were not worth worrying about because they would not get jobs, were assigned to a category that could be dismissed as a waste of time. Sarah pointed out how the use of this language functioned as a form of protection:

Basically they’re protecting themselves too, from being hurt, being traumatised or affected by, I think they externalise it in a way that they don’t get hurt, they put it down.
[Interviewer] Is that because they feel inadequate to the task?

Yes I think so. They have given up on them, but they don’t say that, they’re not allowed to. They make clients the problem, ‘I am not the one who can’t deal with them, it’s the client’s problems’, so that shift somehow helps them to cope better (Sarah, 2014)

The protection that came from workers creating distance between themselves and job seekers enabled them to focus their attention on job seekers they could get into jobs quickly. There was need to disassociate from job seekers who were a waste of the agency and worker resources, so that they could feel validated about the work they did. Sarah comments draw attention to the way workers need to maintain a positive perspective on the work they do, in order to stay motivated.

Because for workers, I am here to help this client get this job, it’s a kind of hope or kind of desire or motivation, it takes effort, it takes your energy.

[Interviewer] Sounds like you have to be in a positive energy space to do it?

Yes to hold it, but when you’ve lost that power or motivation or ability to carry, then you need to have some sort of justification, which becomes the clients because of their difficulty, not your inability (Sarah, 2014).

Sarah’s observations draw attention to the importance of professional recognition and validation as a critical ingredient in keeping the workforce motivated.

**The JSA contract transition and misrecognition**

The concept of misrecognition can be used to describe the impact of the JSA contract transition on workers. Misrecognition in employment services arises because the actors in the welfare field ‘belong to a structure of domination, but one which is largely misrecognised’ because ‘the relationship between administrative agencies and welfare recipients, which is organised in terms of control, is misrecognised as caring’ (Peillon, 1998: 221). This ‘misrecognised care’ became apparent in the contract transition from the Job Network to JSA because of the redundancy workers experienced. The skills and capability of the existing employment services workforce was misrecognised, and there was an accompanying attrition in the workforce as workers left to work elsewhere.

The research findings provided examples of the way workers experienced conflict between their existing ways of practicing and those they were required to implement in their workplaces. These experiences can be described as misrecognition which resulted in personal dilemmas for workers who did not feel comfortable instituting the changed practices. This discomfort was based on conflict
between their own values about how job seekers should be treated after they became responsible for imposing the new Workfirst rules.

The findings of this research captured the ways change in instrumental rules affected workers in complex ways. It was not simply a matter of one day implementing a certain set of treatments for job seekers. Change required adjustments in worker outlook or attitude, adjustments that did not always sit well with the individual’s personal or professional beliefs. Sarah described experiencing how her capabilities as a psychologist became redundant and how this put her out of alignment with the requirements of her employers and the practices of colleagues:

My employer brought in a rewards system for getting more outcomes to drive up performance as this is required in JSA. I didn’t buy into it either, it just didn’t sit right with me, and I told my supervisor I did not want to be involved. It wasn’t a point of conflict, I just felt that it wasn’t for me. (Sarah, 2014).

It was not an explicit conflict with her employer, but as she spoke on this subject, Sarah became more hesitant and troubled as she described how the professional capabilities she had previously practised came to be less valued and validated. Sarah felt her capabilities were no longer appreciated.

They introduced a reward system for employment consultants, so you get a movie ticket for x number of outcomes, and I did not like it. ‘You got second best outcome’. I refused to take the movie ticket. I said it is not going to work for me, so give it to someone else. It is almost like you are compromising your personal philosophy really, maybe I was bit naive in that sense, maybe I could have got it and just give it to my kids but I just didn’t like it (Sarah, 2014).

The contract transitions had lasting impacts on workers and they became conflicted about their roles at their employment services agency. They wanted to keep their jobs and to comply with the culture and standards of the workplace, but they did not agree that breaching job seekers was the right thing to do. This frustration reflected their immersion in the outcome-focused culture in which getting jobs quickly has driven employment services away from case management to monitoring job search behaviour. The findings showed that workers suffered high levels of personnel distress as a result of the contract shift.

This is the worst it has ever been. I’ve been through the good times and the bad times with the changes in the contract almost since it began. It has never been this tough. We used to get paid well for outcomes. Now we are lucky to get a few hundred dollars, when it used to be in
the thousands, depending on the job seeker. Even on the front-line we feel this difference, there is so much pressure on us to get outcomes it’s impossible to get (Barbara, 2014).

Furthermore, the emphasis on outcomes itself was described as having become increasingly unrealistic, once all the job ready job seekers had been placed in jobs.

We used to have a rewards system, but that went out the window because it was just unrealistic. Hardly anyone was getting the outcomes, so now we don’t even have that to motivate us. The agency just can’t afford it any more (Barbara, 2014).

**Worker resistance**

Workers developed their own strategies of resistance when their professional autonomy was threatened. As with the forms of resistance identified in job seekers, the forms exercised by workers were scaled to the extent that they were able to exercise influence on field conditions. Again similar to job seekers, the forms exercised by workers were tactical attempts to create better alignment between their interests and field conditions, and were particularly evident after the reclassifications associated with new employment services contracts. This kind of resistance may be understood as relative to the domination of misrecognition, as a form of push-back against field conditions.

During the contract transition period the existing workers attempted to influence practice at their local office levels. Sarah a qualified psychologist spoke of her attempts to influence the practice of colleagues she found ill-equipped to handle the complexity of her clients.

I often heard them speaking to clients in ways that I don’t think were appropriate, much less effective. I remember one person, who was only 25, and at least initially she didn’t have any respect for the clients. She did not have the capacity to respect or understand who they were. Over time I put some effort into mentoring her, so that she would have a better understanding of the clients (Sarah, 2014).

Workers such as Bill who used the authority of his management role spoke about how he tried to instil a more sympathetic approach to using participation reports in the office he managed.

When I was a manager in Job Network I felt I was able to influence the culture there for the better, so that we used compliance tools like participation reports, only when it was really necessary (Bill, 2014).

Despite these efforts, these individual workers became overwhelmed by the imperative of the new employment services contract. The research captured the deep personal frustration of workers that has
made employment services work one of the least satisfying in the community sector (Kun, 2011). The findings indicated that workers found it difficult to cope if they do not feel empowered in their roles and have terms in which they can justify their practice. Sarah described how she had become the odd one out in her team, and eventually left the job.

That’s the way I work, I didn’t leave immediately, I stayed for another 6 months, just to make myself feel comfortable (Sarah, 2014).

This disempowerment reflects the structural domination of misrecognition and was expressed in the frustrations the workers described in having to impose rules and practices they are powerless to change. When these qualified workers were aggrieved, they expressed resistance by changing jobs. This misrecognition led to feelings of discomfort that resulted in workers leaving their employment services jobs:

There’s a lot of people leaving the industry, and I’ve been thinking about it, too. I just can’t remember a time that’s been this difficult. They’re just not keeping the staff now either, wages are so low, it’s really depressing (Barbara, 2014).

One of the ways in which they strove to have their perspectives as workers better represented was by participating in this research and offering views that countered negative views of their work, highlighting the need for advocacy to change employment services for all the agents involved, not just job seekers.

Worker findings conclusion

The welfare reform associated with the transition to the JSA contract had profound effects on employment services workers. Employment services workers were required to change their practices and perspectives on unemployed people. These were instrumental and cultural changes, that informed agency and worker perspectives and which provided constraints on the autonomy of workers.

In the case of this study, activation workers' perspectives on their clients were mediated by the extent to which they personally identified with the job seeker, the extent to which they had internalised a welfare dependency or underclass perspective, and the extent to which their workplace culture reinforced both the instrumental and discursive conditions of the field. The findings showed that training and experience enables workers to adopt more objective perspectives on the barriers to employment faced by their unemployed clients.

The findings provide an important perspective on the forms of resistance that arise in employment services because workers are responsible for the administration of conditionality at the street-level.
These findings reflected workers’ observations of effects related to transition to the JSA contract, which introduced Workfirst as the primary goal of employment services practices. This required workers to change their practice and exposed the extent to which employment services case management shifted to caseload management in accordance with the rules of Workfirst.

The worker findings indicated similarities to the experiences of job seekers in the sense that they have also been subject to ‘conditions of conduct’ that affect their own autonomy. These effects were particularly apparent in the experiences of the workers who found that the contract transition from Job Network to JSA negatively affected their autonomy. Workfare-type conditionality created limits on the actions of the workers, and the discretion they were able to exercise as qualified or experienced workers were effective only to the extent that field conditions tolerated this. The findings indicated that workers find it difficult to cope if they do not feel empowered in their roles and have terms in which they can justify their practice. This domination plays out for workers as the symbolic violence of misrecognition, the frustrations they feel at having to impose rules and achieve performance outcomes they were powerless to change. These findings have implications for understanding how welfare reforms affect employment services workers; the contributors to the erosion of workforce capability; and the need for investment in workforce development in the employment services sector.

The implications of these findings are discussed more in the next chapter in which they connected to the overarching concerns of this investigation. The perspectives of the workers will be connected to the welfare reform debate about the use of disciplinary conditionality and how this affects workers as much as job seekers. The practical constraints of the Workfare field on the autonomy of workers will be connected to the reflections on resistance and how it is enabled and constrained through the mechanisms that determine the nature of fields like employment services.
Chapter 7 – Discussion and relevance of the findings

Introduction to the chapter

This chapter presents a discussion about the relevance of the findings to the overall research objective. The objectives were to better understand the forms of resistance that arise in employment services. The research aimed to explore these issues with the primary research question: *How can resistance in employment services be understood?*

The discussion in this chapter is divided into the two parts that reflect the overall objectives of the investigation. The first objective was to gain insight into the effects of sanctions on relations in employment services through the experiences of job seekers and workers. Through exploring the forms of resistance that arise in employment services, the investigation was intended to develop critical understanding of the effects of sanctions on relations in employment services. The focus on resistance was intended to explore tensions in the construal of human motivation inherent in the discourse of individualisation and marketisation.

The second part of this chapter discusses the implications of the findings in terms of the critical theoretical objective of the research. The critical objective was to better understand resistance in the context of advanced liberal strategies of governance like individualisation. An interest-based perspective is developed to explain the forms of resistance that arise in employment services. This interest-based perspective reinforces the view that the interests informing the employment services reflect the market-oriented rationality of neoliberalism rather than the interests of the unemployed.

Sanctions and the contradictions of employment services

The section uses the idea of the contradictions of employment services to structure the discussion. These contradictions relating to choice and motivation are the competing rational actor and bad agency constructs of job seekers. The contradictions identified are those relating to individualisation and marketisation, both of which reflect the fundamental conflict between liberal constructions of individual freedoms and choice, and the extent to which this provides the foundation for autonomy and self-determination. These are the contradictions of commodification which serves to maintain the supply of cheap labour, and decommodification in which it has become apparent that employment services have become complicit in the subordination the unemployed and the penalisation of the poor.

Motivation and choice

The first contradiction is essentially the contradiction of commodification, individualisation and choice. It is fundamentally a contradiction between the liberal construction of individual rights and
choices, and the limits imposed through both instrumental and discursive modes of governance. The findings provided examples of the extent to which Workfirst imperative runs counter to the rational actor construct on which the motivational mechanisms of behavioural economics are based. Furthermore, lack of choice contradicts the public choice theory informing NPM and was further compounded when job seekers were told they could not change providers. The disempowerment experienced by job seekers, was reflected in them finding it difficult to estimate their grievances into complaints.

The findings described the ways in which meeting the activity test left job seekers feeling cheated because their activity was not reciprocated by support that might help them get jobs. The job seekers described being hassled to meet the activity test and levels of intrusive supervision that were not reciprocated by useful services. This lack of reciprocity eroded trust because job seekers felt bullied and disempowered. These treatments resulted in job seekers disengaging from employment services and avoiding appointments because they did not believe they would get the help they needed to find jobs.

Sanctions were described as pervasive and functioning as a disciplinary mechanism used to control job seeker behaviour. The effects of sanctions was to induce false compliance. False compliance is one of the most common forms of resistance and perhaps the form that has the most potential to illustrate the fundamental problem of engagement with employment services. Fear of sanction drove many participants into conforming to participation requirements, whether they agreed with them or not. There were many instances reported where requirements were perceived to be unreasonable or unsuitable. Therefore, many participants went along with what they were required to do, even when they knew it was not going to work out long-term. Examples of this include undertaking training, taking an unsuitable job and doing Work for the Dole.

Furthermore, the findings suggested that sanctions do not provide behavioural incentives. Instead, they affect job seekers at the fundamentals of survival because they involve payments being withheld, and this immediately affected financial security. The job seekers described how financial sanctions were experienced as threats to their everyday survival. These are threats to financial security that make job seekers fear employment services and are far more concerning than a tension between help and hassle. This fear reflects urgent concerns about the basics of survival, for example, being able to pay rent or to buy food. Being threatened in such a way reminded job seekers of how little power they had relative to employment services agencies.

Sanctions reduce self-efficacy associated with choice and autonomy and reinforce the psycho-social scarring associated with long-term unemployment. The findings supported those of other studies: that the disciplinary use of sanctions, justified by paternalism, creates conditions in which job seekers lose
autonomy because they are effectively provided without choices. The use of sanctions contributed to the degradation of the resources and welfare of job seekers by causing misrecognition and perpetuating the suffering of poverty and unemployment. The effect this has on the self-esteem and confidence of job seekers pushes them further away from the labour market and disengages them from services that might have once been able to help them.

Through the analysis of interactions involving sanctions, the notion of the resistant welfare subject has been challenged because job seekers were identified as exercising complex rationalisations in decisions relating to welfare and work. These complex rationalisations add support to the need for welfare subjects to be understood as complex actors whose behaviour and decisions reflect the constraints of their relational contexts.

**Single parents and Workfare**

Due to the high proportion of single parents in the job seeker cohort (6/14), there are findings that are relevant to scholarship about the effects of Welfare to Work strategies on single parents. The findings reflected the extent to which the single parents experienced the 2006 Welfare to Work reforms as a form of cultural domination that had harmful effects on the welfare of their families. The findings reinforce the negative effects outlined in other research with single parents, which identified that the activation requirements of the 2006 Welfare to Work reforms had negative effects on subjective well-being and quality of life (Cook, et al., 2009) and quality of job (Cook & Noblet, 2012).

The findings presented in this thesis reinforce those of these earlier studies, and add some further evidence of the effects the reforms have had on single parents in terms of the welfare of their families. The negative effects on their welfare included: experiencing poverty and needing to leave their children in compromised care situations to be able to work the additional hours required to meet activity tests or to get out of poverty. These were precarious arrangements that left single parents vulnerable to adverse luck, and the findings provided examples of how this led to homelessness, and trapped them in situations where they were exposed to domestic violence. The poverty experienced by the single parents was exacerbated when they decided to exit welfare so that they could survive without the hassle and better attend to the care of their children, or spend more time investing in their community.

The findings of this study indicated that the policy of Workfirst has been damaging to single parents who have exited relationships where there has been domestic violence. The findings reinforce other studies that found that the 2006 Welfare to Work strategies have been damaging to single parent families recovering from domestic violence (Winter, 2014). The stories from the single parents indicated that the key to rebuilding their lives when they had left violent relationships was dependent
on their ability to leverage their social capital. Friends, family, support networks and charitable support enabled the single mothers to repair their lives and provide continuity for their children.

**Commodification and social capital**

The commodifying imperative of Workfare draws attention to innate tensions between capitalism and communitarianism. These observations relate to the extent to which Workfare contributed to the disintegration of community, particularly in the way in interfered with the social capital of the single parents. The links between social capital, social networks and relational autonomy were identified in several sections of the findings. The findings highlighted the benefits of strong social capital as a resource that enabled job seekers to withstand poverty, and for the single parents it provided forms of informal support that enabled them to participate in paid work. This aspect of the findings drew particularly on the ways in which the single parents described how they negotiated the Workfare field, and the resources they drew on to withstand the effects of the rules of conditionality.

The findings showed the importance of social capital, particularly for the single parents who drew on their social networks for support. The single parents participated in social networks where their capacity to thrive depended on the health and reciprocated value of their social capital. These social economies provide forms of support beyond that of the formal economy. In some cases, the strength of social networks enabled the single parents to transcend economic dependency on the welfare system altogether. It was Laura’s ‘gift’ economy, and the trade of goods and labour that she described as occurring in her village-like community, that amplified the significance of social capital. The mutuality and trust inherent in her gift-like trade suggested the way in which ‘wealth’ inheres in reciprocity of social capital.

The findings identified some ways in which the rules of conditionality interfered with the social capital and autonomy of job seekers. The excessive conditionality the job seekers experienced created dysfunction because of the ways in which participation in social networks were stymied, and the value of the capital integral to these social systems was weakened or threatened. This is a harmful disintegrative effect that contradicts both communitarian and liberal theory in which social capital is integral to healthy economic growth. This suggests a fundamental paradox about Workfare and the economic capital it prioritises, since economic capital is really the form of capital into which the recognised value of human reciprocity has been commodified. This was a view that Bourdieu described in identifying the ways in which forms of capital are converted (Grenfell, 2012: 155). These are disintegrative effects of Workfare in which the commercialisation of labour for capital undermines community and social cohesion especially when single parents are forced to prioritise paid work over other forms of care and community support.
**Workforce capability**

The second contradiction relates to the notional function of employment services as agencies that help job seekers leave the poverty of unemployment. The normative purpose of employment services is to help alleviate the poverty of unemployment by assisting unemployed people to get jobs. This contradiction is apparent in analysis of the extent to which employment services workers are able to engage in effective case management of job seekers. The findings drew attention to the extent to which the use of disciplinary conditionality interferes with the autonomy workers need to effectively work with and engage with job seekers. The potential for them to provide useful services is constrained by employment services rules that compel them to prioritise any job and threaten job seekers with financial punishment if they do not comply with system rules.

The lack of autonomy has resulted in the attrition of the capability of the workforce to case manage unemployment, except through discipline. The effect of this attrition is to have created a workforce that is more vulnerable to subjectivity and bias because the residual workforce does not have the qualifications and experience to critically reflect on the needs of job seekers. The findings identified how the inexperience of the incoming employment services workforce contributed to the conditions in which job seekers received low levels of recognition.

This research reinforced the significant role of the qualifications and experience of staff and the extent to which it informs the objectivity of decision making and acts to curtail the impact of bias. The attrition of the capability of the employment services workforce was reflected in Sarah’s observations about the need for more professional development so that workers can develop strong working alliances.

> There is a massive problem with lack of professional development in the sector. Staff need to learn how to develop partnerships with clients, most of them don’t understand what this is any more. They need time and support for their training from employers otherwise it’s not going to happen (Sarah, 2014).

The findings suggested that workers need to be able to exercise discretion outside of the use of sanctions, which constrain employment services practice. Empowering the practice of workers should be a consideration in any future redesign of employment services. Sarah described this as being able to offer support focused around a strengths-based approach to case management. The conditions in which this transfer can occur necessitate workers possessing sufficient autonomy unhampered by excessive external constraints to engage with job seekers of all types without prejudice.
The findings provided examples of the extent to which distrust and disrespect arise as the consequence of the heavy reliance on sanctions to enforce the activity test. The findings reinforced other research that identified that the use of sanctions is detrimental to trust-based relationships needed for effective case management, particularly in relation to arguments about the trust-based foundations of a working alliance (Giuliani, 2015).

Together, all these effects of sanctions highlight a relationship between neoliberal social policy and the loss of capability of the employment services workforce. The capability loss at the street-level is reflected at the agency level, in which the employment services sector itself has failed to gain the political capital required to resist the disciplinary imperatives of marketisation and individualisation. The findings have implications for understanding the interaction between marketisation and the implementation of disciplinary strategies.

**Contradictions of employment services**

The findings have implications for understanding how the effects of disciplinary conditionality are damaging to relations between job seekers and employment services. The findings also challenge the need for disciplinary sanctions, given that job seekers are already experiencing poverty and associated forms of harm because of their unemployment.

The contradictions of employment services are apparent in the high levels of conflict that have been noted in street-level interactions. The conflict occurring at the street-level is concentrated around this disciplinary function, which commodifies job seekers into becoming workers but in so doing provides low levels of recognition to them. The findings suggest that the low levels of recognition provided to job seekers in the Workfare field creates a ‘space of conflict’. The space of conflict in employment services reflects the impact of high levels of conditionality and sanction, which reinforce the low recognition of job seekers who cannot get work or suitable work. When exposed to the Workfare field, job seekers received low recognition for any kind of care or work other than that done to meet the activity test or rules of Workfirst.

The experiences of job seekers in these conditions was of misrecognition, but also of conflict in their interactions with employment services agencies. In the employment services field, the space of conflict manifests in interpersonal conflicts in street-level interactions. Job seekers and workers can be in conflict with field rule conditions as experienced impersonally in relation to the instruments of rule, as well as through interaction with other actors whose ‘rule’ interpretation reflect their own values. This means fields such as employment services become the sites in which conflicts about the distribution of resources manifest in street-level interactions.
The level of conflict in these negotiations reflects the lack of recognition provided to unemployed people in the context of Workfare. This links the observations made about the effects of sanctions in employment services to the critical concern of this study, which is to examine conflict and resistance in employment services from a critical perspective. The following discussion moves to this critical examination by introducing an interest-based perspective on resistance in employment services.

**Interest-based perspective**

This part of this discussion chapter responds to the critical objective of this investigation which was to better understand resistance in the context of advanced liberal strategies of governance like individualisation. In the section an interest-based perspective is developed to explain the forms of resistance that arise in employment services. The interest-based perspective on resistance in employment services is an adaption of both Bourdieu and Peillon’s critical orientations already employed in the findings. It is an adaption of Bourdieu’s theory of practice because it emphasises ‘interests’ as a significant aspect of field theory. It is also an adaption of Peillon’s sociology of welfare because it applies the conceptualisation of the welfare field to the context of employment services, which directly serve a commodifying role in the welfare infrastructure.

This discussion in this section progresses by firstly explaining how the interest-based perspective on resistance in employment services was developed from the findings. It summarises the elements of the interest-based perspective and explains how it can be used to understand resistance in employment services. This first section proceeds by providing a brief description of the interest-based perspective and then explains how the concept of interests relates to Bourdieu’s theory of practice. This is followed by an explanation of the way in which the interest-based perspective was generated from analysis of the findings. The chapter then explains the way in which interests inform the design of the Workfare field. This description of the Workfare field is used as the basis of insight into the way in which policy making is informed by interests. Finally, this chapter explains the insights gained from providing an interest-based perspective on resistance in employment services.

**Interests and the interest-based perspective**

The interest-based perspective was generated from reflection on some of the limitations encountered when using Bourdieu’s theory of practice to understand the motivators of job seeker action and therefore the forms of resistance they exercised in contexts like employment services. To explain resistance, there was a need to build on the theory of practice by emphasising a theory of action involving active reflection. There was also a need to explain why job seekers and workers are driven to behave in the way they do, and the source and nature of the conflicts they were experiencing in these interactions. Consequently following section explains how the interest-based perspective was
developed from the findings. It firstly reviews the findings about active reflection on field conditions, then the findings on resistance and recognition, before explaining how inserting emphasis on the concept of interests helps to explain the forms of resistance present in employment services.

The findings used a Bourdieusian perspective to describe action and resistance in the employment services field. In that analysis, active reflection was emphasised to explain the way job seekers negotiate field conditions as a way of addressing the determinism Bourdieu’s critics identify in the concept of *habitus*. The job seekers and workers were described as having the capabilities to actively reflect on field conditions, and rationalise their behaviours rather than simply respond without reflection. The emphasis on reflective action was explained in the findings chapters in which job seeker decision making was identified as being based on reflective action, which can be influenced by predisposition, but is also reactive, as Hoggett (2001) suggested.

The capacity for active reflection and rationalisation was demonstrated in the findings that illustrated the ways in which the job seekers and workers actively negotiated field conditions. This reflection involved making judgements about the likely benefit of the tactics and strategies of resistance they developed, and this informed their decisions about whether to pursue them or not. The capacity for reflective action is the basic form of reasoning human actors use to make decisions based on their assessment of the options available to them. The assumption of this reflective capability is essential for human actors to act in ways that promote their interests.

Resistance was described as being comprised of this active reflection and the use of resources. Like other forms of action, resistance is most effective when job seekers and workers have resources available to influence what happens in the field. The three core components of resistance included reflection, resources and motivation. Furthermore, the forms of resistance identified as significant to the research concerns were reactions to the domination experienced because of the use sanction-backed conditionality to enforce the Workfirst activity test, and the discursive associations of welfare dependence. From this perspective, the capacity for resistance was relative to the recognised value of the capital available to job seekers and their observations of the extent to which there is utility in exercising effort towards improving their stake in the field.

The concept of interests is used to identify the motivator of resistance. If the idea of interests is emphasised in an account of interaction, it can be used to draw attention to the motivation for action across the three domains associated with fields: the subjective domain (*habitus*), the intersubjective domain and the political domain. The point in highlighting the role of interests is to locate the motives of action at subjective levels as well as in actual instrumental and institutional arrangements of power that are formally mobilised to enforce constraints on behaviour.
Interests and Bourdieu’s field theory

A theory of interests complements the theory of practice because it can be used to represent the motives of different actors in the welfare field. Interests reflect the competing field positions occupied by actors and identify motivators of behaviour. The idea of interests-based action has explanatory power that enhances Bourdieu’s concepts from the theory of practice to provide proxy for human motivation, especially in terms of the decision making that informs deliberate action.

Although the concept of interests was not an element of Bourdieu’s theory of practice, it was elaborated in his later thinking (Grenfell, 1990: 15). Bourdieu’s theory on interests is documented in a chapter of his Practical Reason: On the Theory of Action (Bourdieu, 1998). There Bourdieu expanded the concept of interests:

In fact, the word interest initially meant very precisely what I include under the notion of illusio, that is, the fact of attributing importance to a social game, the fact that what happens matters to those who are engaged in it, who are in the game. Interest is to ‘be there,’ to participate, to admit that the game is worth playing and that the stakes created in and through the fact of playing are worth pursuing; it is to recognise the game and to recognise its stakes (Bourdieu, 1998: 77).

The quote above from Bourdieu is significant because it refers to the motivation of the actors in the social game. It says that what matters to those who are engaged in the game, is reflected in their interest in the game. It therefore suggests that interests are what matter to actors in the game, at least those who are actively involved in playing the game. While Bourdieu employs other concepts like illusio, doxa and libido to describe field positions of actors, these concepts describe action located at the local level of human action, rather than as an external relation. Bourdieu’s use of the concept reflects the way in which interests motivate actors to participate in fields, stating that, ‘only those actors who get drawn into the game and want to be part of it will display an interest in it’ (Swedberg, 2005: 80).

In explaining Bourdieu’s theory on interests, Swedberg (2005) identified his usage as reflecting middle-range sociological concepts, such as ‘class’ and ‘associative relationships’. In this way, it can be used as a shorthand to indicate a significant informant of social behaviour. Furthermore, Bourdieu did not equate interests with rational choice theory or economic rationality (Grenfell, 2012). Rather, and speaking philosophically, Bourdieu argued that it was not possible for actors to engage in ‘disinterested’ behaviour, and that even acts of altruism suggest that actors have an interest in pursuing the goals of this action in terms of there being an attachment to the stake of the game.
Interests and the welfare field

The concept of interests is used in the interest-based perspective to refer to the attachment actors have in the ‘stake of the game’ in the welfare field. The stake of this game is access to economic resources. In one sense, the game played in interactions at the street-level reflects the rules of conditionality and involves job seekers and workers in maintaining the criteria for welfare payment eligibility. In another sense, the rules of the game, and the positions of the actors reflect inequality in which there is differential access to economic resources. In this sense, the employment services field is defined by a common stake in getting access to jobs that remediate the effects of poverty and unemployment.

If the welfare field is described as a game involving access to economic resources, the interests of the actors are reflected in their relation to the field. The actors involved in the employment services game therefore occupy unique positions within this field depending on their relation to this stake. The field positions were elaborated in the earlier finding sections. However, apart from referencing the ways in which the job seekers and workers negotiate the employment services field to improve their stake, the benefit of associating their motivation with the concept of interests is that it helps to identify why they behaved the way they did. This means, the stake they have in the field can be described in terms of the interest they have in the field.

Attachments to interest-based positions can be identified as driving the conversion of interest-based behaviour from the subjective to the political domain. At the subjective level, interests reflect agents’ attachments to relative positions within fields of social contexts. The subjective attachment reflects their internalised disposition (habitus), and can be expressed in the idea that agents occupy field positions depending on their interests. This informs the idea that the action in fields is undertaken from an interest-based position. Attachment to interests also informs intersubjective interactions because the interest-based positions of actors are reflected in the extent to which they recognise and value the conditions of the field, and the positions and roles of other actors in the field.

Beyond the level of individual action and interaction, interests can be explained as the attachments around which social conflicts collect. In this conflict theory perspective on interests, the interests of individual actors coalesce around interest-based positions and, through processes of collectivisation, are converted into political struggles. This links the concept of interests as the subjective driver of action to a broader conflict theory of interests in which the history of society is based on struggles for the power to control resources (Gorski, 2013).

A conflict theory perspective promotes interests as the key determinant of field conditions. This aligns to Peillon’s reading of Bourdieu’s ideas relating to the mechanisms governing the conversion of capital into political capital (Peillon, 1998). In this sense, the concept of interests reflects the ways
field conditions are formally legitimated, ultimately within the frameworks that sustain political installations and the reproduction of social conditions that support the interests of the dominant. The intentionality and reproduction of social conditions that favour dominant interests means that interests function as a causal factor in social conflicts and cultural reproduction. In this conflict theory, field conditions reflect the interests of the dominant and are manifest in instruments of rule and in the discursive constructs used to inform entitlements in employment services.

**Resistance, recognition and protest**

The findings suggested that there was a strong link between resistance and the need for job seekers to feel recognised in the Workfare field in which they were misrecognised. The findings provided examples of the forms of misrecognition that arose in employment services. Misrecognition in employment services contexts means that job seekers are economically and culturally dominated in a welfare regime of Workfare. Peillon argued that resistance arises in interactions in welfare agencies because of this misrecognition. This ‘implies that a system of control is immediately transformed into a site of struggle: such a struggle develops at the interface of the interaction between welfare agencies and welfare recipients’ (Peillon, 1998: 222).

These observations provided the foundation for understanding forms of resistance that arise in the context of employment services, because it demonstrated that some forms of resistance are a reaction to the experience of domination. The findings noted that some forms of resistance could be described as strategies for recognition because of the ways in which the job seekers reacted to misrecognition. The findings provided examples of the way they used cultural capital to respond to misrecognition, as Leanne did by dressing as if for a job interview when she attended an employment services appointment. She reflected that she would be treated better if she adopted the office style dress of a worker, and avoid being treated like a job seeker.

The observation of a relationship between interests and recognition connects the interest-based perspective to resistance in terms of protest and social movement theory. Social movement theory suggests that there are core components that motivate individuals to participate in protest. The component conditions are grievances, efficacy, identity, emotions and social embeddedness (Van Stekelenburg and Klandermans, 2013: 897). This social movement theory describes a process of conversion in which social actors form groups to advance their shared interests. This conversion to collective actions occurs when groups with similar interests identify others who share the experience of having their interests threatened.

The findings described the ways in which personal forms of resistance convert into more complex forms when job seekers can identify the instrumental and discursive properties of the field with which
they are in conflict. When personal struggles converted to political struggles, there was a coalescence of action that collected around the ways in which field conditions provide low recognition for the interests of job seekers. In these instances, these personal strategies for recognition were converted into strategies for collective recognition, such as the examples of the single parents who pursued forms of advocacy and mobilised for political representation. This conversion was triggered by the single parents who were shocked and angry at having been reclassified as job seekers, rather than parents. This reclassification caused them to experience misrecognition, which they responded to with strategies for recognition. Their resistance to the new classifications of ‘job seeker’ and ‘welfare dependent’ sparked the conversion of strategies of resistance into social advocacy and collective action. Being exposed to reforms caused the single parents to pursue strategies to restore the legitimacy of the role of parenting.

Indeed, the forms of resistance observed in this investigation were most pronounced when they arose from the grievance the single parent job seekers experienced in the reclassifications that accompanied the 2006 Welfare to Work reforms. They described feeling shocked at being classified as job seekers, rather than parents. Bourdieu described this as people finding themselves out of step with their new social position (Bourdieu, 2000: 19). Through reclassification, single parents experienced change in the socially legitimated value of their parenting, which was devalued overnight by policy makers. In this way, the single parent job seekers experienced a loss of status, and this underpinned the anger they expressed. Their reaction is consistent with social movement theory in which emotions like anger are identified as the emotional component of resistance. The greatest sense of injustice was felt when field conditions diminished the value of caring. The injustice they reported reflected their experience of previous conditions in which they were not exposed to the punitive forms of conditionality, received a liveable parenting payment, and felt more valued.

**Social capital and protest**

The findings further reflected the argument of Van Stekelenburg and Klandermans (2013) about the importance of social embeddedness as an enabler of protest and collectivisation. They argued that social embeddedness should be regarded as a key factor in the development of social movements. Social embeddedness is a concept they described as being like the concept of social capital, and is linked to protest because of the extent to which social relationships provide structural, relational and cognitive components that enable people to belong and leverage the collective power of groups bonded by trust (Van Stekelenburg & Klandermans, 2013). There are strong empirical and theoretical ties between the concept of trust and social capital. This was explained by Bagnasco, who said that ‘since actors have interests in events that are under the control of others, they engage in exchanges
and unilateral transfers of control that lead to the formation of permanent social relations (Bagnasco, 2004: 231).

It is the trust that forms the bonds of social capital that enable individual actors to form the groups that lead to collective protest and social movements. Groups such as the single parents, with a commitment to caring and their shared experience of the reclassifications associated with welfare reform, had shared interests around which to collectivise. Their struggle was to change instrumental rules to obtain better alignment with their own interests and, through collectivisation, to change social attitudes so that single parenting is treated with greater legitimacy at political and administrative levels. Their struggle was directed at changing social attitudes they identified as determining their social and economic domination.

It was this shared attachment to interests that motivated the job seekers to engage through social networks and begin to the process of organising a social movement. Because of the strength of her social capital, Rosie, like the other participants, felt a responsibility to advocate on behalf of others.

I’ve been able to handle a lot of this stuff, but I am aware of the damage it has caused me and my kids, and lots of other people I know. Since I have been campaigning to have stories like mine heard, I’ve attracted a bit of media interest and have people from political parties and government departments wanting to talk to me and I am not scared to speak out about it because I think people need to hear about the distress that’s been going on (Rosie, 2013).

Social media was the platform the single parents used to get organised. The single parents were active in online communities where they sought to contribute to advocacy anonymously while increasing the strength of their social capital in communities with shared interests. A Facebook group, the Single Parents Action Group, was joined by the some of the research participants and published articles relating to proposed changes to welfare entitlements in 2012. Members of this group announced their registration as candidates for the Federal election of September 2013. The core interest of this action group was to advocate for better recognition of the interests of single parents. This suggests that social media is enabling collectivisation and seeding new social movements.

The way in which new social media is being used for collective action offers potential to revisit theories of protest such as Klandermans’s (1984) resource mobilisation theory. Klandermans argued that a key barrier to the collectivisation of the unemployed is that unemployment is a state most people want to quit, and that they therefore lack the necessary interest around which to collect to form a movement (Klandermans in Reiss and Perry, 2011). The low level of social capital of the unemployed was highlighted as a barrier that prevented them from participating in political organisation and protest. This is a barrier to collectivisation that is further compounded by the new
work formations of ‘neoliberalism,’ such as precarious workers, the unemployed, those in the informal sector, and landless labourers. Bourdieu himself was surprised by the mass protests involving the unemployed in Paris in the early 1990s because of his view that the unemployed and poor lack access to the forms of capital that facilitate social organisation (Bourdieu & Nice, 1998).

Social media is being used to overcome conventional barriers to protest and collectivisation. This became evident because during the period in which this research was undertaken, the Australian Unemployed Workers Union (AUWU) re-formed after having been disbanded in the 1990s. This group is providing an online platform for unemployed people to become active about unemployment and welfare reform. The concerns of the AUWU reflect many of the concerns raised in this research regarding the low levels of recognition experienced by job seekers in the current configuration of employment services conditionality. Social media is providing a resource for these, and other movements, to overcome the challenges of low social capital identified as barriers to the collectivisation of the unemployed. These are interesting locations for social researchers interested in observing the formation of social movements.

The ways in which the unemployed are currently collectivising highlights questions about why employment services workers and agencies are not. This lack of collectivisation reflects the domination and misrecognition the workers experienced and brings to the fore Peillon’s observations about the misrecognition of care work (Peillon, 1998, 221). This misrecognition was explained in the worker findings, particularly as it was reflected in the contract transition from the Job Network to JSA. The skills and capability of the existing employment services workforce was misrecognised, and there was an accompanying attrition in the workforce as workers left to work elsewhere.

This suggests that, unlike the unemployed, the employment services workforce lacks the resources, motivation and the social networks needed to collectivise. The lack of representation of worker views reflects the fact that employment services workers lack the political capital that would be associated with a professional association or unionisation. The lack of professional recognition afforded employment services workers, as neither social workers or vocational guides or coaches, means their perspectives are absent from debates about the terms on which employment services are contracted. The lack of professionalisation and representation affects their capacity to participate in the debates and struggles for political capital that shape the employment services field. These are important observations about the opportunities for advocacy with the employment services workforce to increase the visibility of their views.
Interest-based perspective and policy making as practice

The interest-based perspective can be used to describe the influence of interests in policy making in terms of the instrumental and discursive conditions of the employment services field. In terms of the instrumental conditions of the field, policy makers and the institutions they represent can be described as participants in a struggle for legitimacy of point of view. The second way interests inform policy making as practice is through the legitimisation achieved through the appropriation of the cultural capital of the field, which – in the case of welfare services – is a struggle over cultural attitudes towards unemployment and its construal as welfare dependency. Both informants of field conditions combine to inform practice at the street-level, where policy is implemented and where intersubjective recognition influences policy implementation.

In terms of the instrumental conditions of the field, the interest-based perspective provides insight into the role of policy makers in determining the enabling and constraining conditions of social fields like employment services. This is because it draws attention to the ways in which interests drive the legitimation of social practices, and policy making itself is one of the key mechanisms through which interests gain legitimacy in the social field. In terms of interests and policy making, it is insightful to consider policy making as a struggle for the political capital that determines the conditions of the welfare field. The welfare field involves social struggles that collect around the resource discriminations administered by and through welfare institutions themselves. In terms of instrumental design, policy making is informed by the interests of the dominant.

An interest-based perspective suggests that policy making is a struggle for the control of the policy field, in which the interests of the dominant are imposed. In this respect, interests inform struggles for dominance in the fields in which they compete for legitimacy. These fields are academic disciplines like social and public policy and the advocacy positions of civil society organisations. The agencies and bureaucracies compete for control of the political capital of the field, in battles for the prestige of their agencies, as well as legitimacy of point of view. The positions they adopt are a manifestation of their collective political identity, which gains validity only to the extent that it is recognised and legitimised within their respective fields of interaction. The interaction of the agencies and their access to influence over welfare field conditions reflects their internal dispositions, the turf battles and identity conflicts that take place within organisational contexts.

The interests of these agencies significantly inform field conditions because these are the struggles that govern the production of legitimate knowledge, its dissemination and the way in which it is culturally appropriated to influence social attitudes. This reflects the contributions of agencies whose political capital has coalesced to form effective social advocacy or influence. The capacity of these agencies to consciously reflect and articulate the impact of their field positions to intentionally further
their own interests is therefore a powerful determinant of conditions like those that determine the use of conditionality and sanction in the employment services field.

The second way in which interests are present in policy making, is reflected in the way in which instrumental classifications inform the discursive associations workers make about job seeker worthiness. These reflect struggles for the cultural capital of the field and are reflected in the discourse used about unemployment and welfare dependence. The discursive informants of the Workfare field inform intersubjective recognition and discrimination towards job seekers considered unworthy or welfare dependent. This functions as a form of reification of the perspectives that favour the interests of the dominant.

In the period in which this research was undertaken, this reification was achieved through the shifts in classifications that affected the job seekers and workers who experienced the 2006 Welfare to Work reforms. The discursive shift that justified these measures was based on a discourse of Mutual Obligation, and informed the workers’ views of the worthiness of job seekers. The findings captured examples of how these associations informed the attitudes of workers towards job seekers, particularly those with whom they did not identify. The negative discursive associations became absorbed into the cultures of these agencies and were present in attitudes and language like ‘deadweight caseload’. Through this appropriation of the symbolic capital of the field, new attitudes to jobs seekers were mainstreamed.

The interest-based perspective provides insight that is useful for understanding the interest-based nature of action by drawing attention to the intersubjective dimensions of interactions. The findings provided examples of the ways in which intersubjective recognition functions as a mediating factor in the way in which interactions are negotiated. These interactions are affected by the interest-based positions of the actors, particularly in the ways in which intersubjective recognition was mediated by both the interest-based perspectives of workers and the instrumental properties of fields.

The impact of intersubjective recognition, and the way in which it is influenced by interests draws attention to the relationship between the instrumental and intersubjective properties of policy implementation and how these inform the co-construction of policy outcomes (Barnes & Prior, 2009). The findings provided examples of policy outcomes that were practically manufactured in interactions because of the role of intersubjective recognition. Focusing on these interactions draws attention to the way policy implementation outcomes are co-constructed at the point of service delivery by subjective interpretation and discretion, as well as through intersubjective recognition.
**What’s useful about the interest-based perspective?**

An interest-based perspective can be used to provide a response to the overarching research question: *How can resistance in employment services be understood?*

An interest-based perspective explains resistance in employment services in two respects. The first is that it explains resistance as a reaction to domination, in which the interests of job seekers are subordinated to the interests informing the Workfare field. The second is that it identifies the way in which interests inform negotiations in employment services, on one hand at a subjective level by individual agents, and on the other in the interest-based practices of policy makers that manifest as instrumental rules. These subjective and objective forms of interest are mediated through intersubjective recognition, in which the interests of the actors involved in interactions inform and co-construct policy implementation outcomes.

The interest-based perspective can be used to identify conflict in employment services as a location in which there is low recognition of the interests of job seekers. This creates spaces of conflict in which job seekers experience low levels of recognition due to the way in which fields are configured to prioritise the interests of the dominant. The resistance observed in this study was identified as a reaction to conditions that are experienced as dominating. When interests are not recognised on the field, it results in forms of social harm such as misrecognition and, significantly for this study, the conflict that is prevalent in street-level exchanges.

By taking an interest-based approach, it is possible to see that interests motivate human behaviour at the level of individuals and the processes via which local struggles convert into political struggles. The identification of a relationship between interests and recognition also connects the interest-based perspective to social movement theory. This is the kind of resistance described as occurring in the political domain, where strategies are escalated and mobilised through the collectivisation of resources.

Through analysis of the way interests drive the legitimation of social practices, the interest-based perspective leads to questions about employment services policy and whose interests it reflects. The findings of this research reflected the extent to which the interests of job seekers are dominated in Workfare. Employment services agencies have become administrators of this domination, which functions through the activation strategies of Workfirst and Mutual Obligation reinforced by welfare sanctions. Employment services agencies are driven by their survival concerns, and policy makers are driven by accountability and efficiency concerns.
The interest-based perspective suggests that if the interests of job seekers are not well served, there must be conflict between their interests and those whose interests the Workfare field serves to maintain. Employment services conditions reflect the prioritisation of neoliberal interests, which seek to maximise job seeker exposure to the labour market. These interests are reflected in the informants of welfare reform and how these have intersected with neoliberal economic strategy and neoconservative contractualism to generate Australia’s Workfare regime.

Furthermore, neoliberal economic management informed the marketisation of employment services, in which payment-by-result contracts function to drive employment services providers to prioritise their survival concerns over the needs of job seekers. These survival concerns inform their representation to government over the shape and design of future employment services contracts, in which they advocate for policy conditions that favour their survival over those of job seekers. In this way, the interests these agencies might once have held, and the NPM promise of social entrepreneurship, have been compromised by the mechanism of marketisation.

The interest-based perspective has provided insight into the role of policy makers in determining the conditions of fields like employment services. Policy makers have control of the tools that determine benefit eligibility criteria and treatments of job seekers in respect of classifications and their discursive associations. Because of the extent to which recognition and legitimacy are bestowed through instrumental and intersubjective recognition, these two aspects of the field are both important to understanding the interest-based nature of interaction. By highlighting the impact of these two elements of policy implementation, the interest-based perspective offers insight into the role of policy makers in determining the enabling and constraining features of the employment services social fields.

**Interest-based conclusion**

This chapter has argued that the concept of interests is an important, yet underused, concept in social theory⁹. When combined with Bourdieu’s thinking tools drawn from his theory of practice, the concept of interests offers potential to view resistance as having interest-based properties. As an elaboration of Bourdieu’s theory, the interest-based perspective emphasises the idea that interests are the primary influencers of agents’ behaviour. The concept of interests in an explanatory account of resistance helps to understand the motivators of the actors involved in conflicts that reflect broader struggles over the distribution of economic resources. The conflict and resistance observed in employment services therefore reflects the struggles over access to economic resources, and the recognition of the needs of those who cannot access or participate in mainstream employment.

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⁹ Incidentally, this is a view promoted by Peillon (1990) in his book on Interests – unrelated to his use of Bourdieu in his sociology of welfare.
The interest-based perspective identified policy making itself as a struggle for the political capital that determines government policy. In Chapter 8, I will elaborate on the insights I have gained from observing the ways active reflection can be used to resist and re-determine field conditions. This elaboration will build on the arguments about the interest-based nature of policy making described in this part of the chapter.
Chapter 8 – Thesis conclusion

This chapter concludes my investigation into resistance in employment services. The broad objective was to obtain critical insight into ‘resistance’ that arises in employment services particularly where sanctions are used to control the behaviour of job seekers. The study was motivated by reports of conflict at the street-level of employment services during the Job Services Australia contract, and which has continued concern me during the writing up stages of this thesis. This research was informed by the perspective that job seekers have been constructed as resistant and this provides the justification for the use of disciplinary mechanisms such as welfare sanction. The existing street-level scholarship suggested that examination of resistance in the context welfare sanctions offered a location to explore scholarly issues relating to the construction of job seeker motivation in social and public policy, and its interaction with forms of governance effected through strategies such as individualisation.

The investigation was guided by the question: How can resistance in employment services be understood?

The research question was intended to allow for the examination of resistance in terms that are relevant to critical scholarship about street level relations in employment services.

There are two distinct perspectives on resistance that informed the research aims and objectives. The first is the objective to develop understandings of the effects of sanctions on relations in employment services. The research focused on moments involving the use of sanctions to examine these effects of sanctions in respect of the assumptions of job seeker choice and motivation that inform the strategies of individualisation and marketisation.

The second objective was to better understand resistance in the context of advanced liberal strategies of governance like individualisation. The examination of resistance provided opportunity to explore interactions between human actors and dominating structures like disciplinary social policy social policy which had generated conflict in street-level interactions. This can be described the critical theoretical objective of this research. Together these objectives reflected critical scholarly concerns about the direction of welfare systems in a context of advanced capitalism.

This final chapter revisits how this thesis progressed and the core arguments put forward in each of the chapters. This chapter summarises the significance of findings as relevant to the research objectives, and then the overall contribution of this thesis to the relevant fields of scholarship. The limitations of this study are discussed, and this leads to the identification of areas where further empirical and theoretical research would contribute to strengthening knowledge about conditionality and sanctions in employment services.
Overview

Chapter 2 contextualised employment services in critical social policy scholarship in which marketisation and individualisation were described as manifestations of neoliberal economic and social policy. Employment services were identified as the administrators of welfare conditionality in an advanced liberal welfare regime of Workfare. The rules of welfare conditionality were argued as being premised on a notionally resistant welfare subject who needs activating and is threatened with punishment when they do not meet the behavioural criteria associated with job search. When job seekers fail to meet behavioural criteria, employment services use welfare sanctions to discipline them.

The use of sanctions was argued to be premised on the idea that job seekers are resistant to the policy goal of finding jobs because of the influence of a paternalist construal of bad agency. The bad agency construal reflects the tendency towards instrumental policy based on constructs of a behaviourally and morally deficient welfare subjects as justified by the discourse of paternalism. The high level of conditionality in employment services has been designed to prevent resistance because there is concern job seekers will not exercise the right kind of decision making about welfare and work. Resistance in employment services reflects the interaction between these determining constructs of job seeker motivation and the reactions they caused in welfare contexts.

Through engaging in discussion of these issues, the literature review located a gap in understanding the forms of resistance that arise in employment services, particularly in the context of the Australian welfare and activation regime of Workfare. These existing accounts left room to undertake this research, which intended to learn more about the forms this resistance takes, and how it could be understood in terms broader than an adverse behaviour that policy makers needed to control.

A critical theoretical orientation on resistance was developed to reflect the context in which employment services administer the disciplinary features of an advanced liberal welfare regime of Workfare. This necessitated situating employment services within a critical analytic framework in which the strategies of marketisation and individualisation are understood as strategies of advanced capitalism and advanced liberal welfare regimes.

The critical orientation was described in Chapter 3 and explained the ways in which Bourdieu’s theory of practice (Bourdieu, 1977; 1990) transfers to employment services as indicated by Peillon’s sociology of welfare (Peillon, 1998). The use of a Bourdieusian perspective contrasts with other critical examinations of the relations of Workfare, and was employed specifically to develop a complex account of the forms of resistance generated in employment services contexts. This critical approach involved the use of ‘field analysis’. The field analysis involved observing and analysing the relational properties of fields drawing on Bourdieu’s theory of practice.
Chapter 4 described how the research methodology reflected the requirements of Bourdieusian field analysis. The epistemological justification for using narrative methods and its congruence with the critical orientation of Bourdieusian field analysis was explained. Interactions involving sanctions were identified as moments that could provide access to data that was relevant to the research problem. I described how this field analysis was adapted to employment services to explain how interactions involving sanctions were negotiated.

The narratives were analysed using Bourdieusian field analysis. Bourdieu’s theory of practice provided the concepts that could explain the relational nature of interactions. The way in which the job seekers and workers described their interactions was analysed firstly by drawing on the ways in which they described being able to deploy resources and the constraints on their action. Further relevant concepts were identified as the analysis progressed and reflected the intersection of the theory of practice and the sociology of welfare. These additional concepts related to conflict, domination, recognition, interests and misrecognition. Since there was a high concentration of single parents in the sample, additional issues relating to the gendered social relations of Workfare and domestic violence were identified as the analysis progressed. This narrative approach to field analysis was useful as a resource from which to draw out understanding of the ways in which activation and sanctions were negotiated.

Chapter 5 and Chapter 6 presented the findings from the job seekers and workers. The job seeker findings were presented in a structure that allowed for elaboration against the objectives of the research, which were to understand how job seekers negotiate and to explore the effects of sanctions in employment services. The narratives about incidents involving sanctions were a resource for understanding how the relations of Workfare made them feel and the relationship between the emotions expressed; how this informed action; and the job seekers’ and workers’ observations of the constraints on action and their field relations.

The worker findings provided an important perspective on the forms of resistance that arise in employment services because workers are responsible for the implementation of the rules of conditionality at the street-level. The perspective of the street-level workers offers insight into how Workfare-type conditionality affects them as human actors with their own interests and aspirations in the welfare field, as well as the role they play in enforcing the rules of conditionality.

The interviews with workers occurred following the contract transition from the Job Network model of employment services to JSA, and this provided a comparative base that helped draw out the impact of the changes. It was by drawing on the experiences of comparison that many of the insights provided in these findings became most salient. The contract transition effected cultural shifts in the employment services offices. These findings reflect the cultural transition in terms of changes in attitudes of staff towards job seekers. The workers who experienced these changes were able to
comment on the contrast between the old and new employment services and how this personally affected them.

In Chapter 7 these findings were used as the basis of the discussion which elaborated the significance of the findings in terms of the objectives of the investigation, and the relationship of the findings to existing knowledge in this field. This chapter contains extensive discussion of the findings against the research objectives, including a detailed summary of the key points drawn from the findings chapters. It This discussion informs the comments that follow here regarding the contribution of this study to existing scholarship and the overall implications of this study to knowledge about employment services.

The key findings and contribution of this study

Objective 1 – social public policy and welfare sanctions

The first is the objective of this investigation was to develop critical understandings of the effects of sanctions on relations in employment services. The research focused on moments involving the use of sanctions to examine these effects of sanctions in respect of the assumptions of choice and motivation that inform the strategies of governance effected through individualisation and marketisation.

This findings contributes to social and public policy scholarship in three ways. The first by contributing to knowledge about the effects of welfare conditionality and its relationship to public policy strategies based on assumptions about job seeker choice and motivation. Through the analysis of interactions involving sanctions, the notion of a resistant welfare subject has been challenged because job seekers have been identified as exercising complex rationalisations in decisions relating to welfare and work. These complex rationalisations add support to the need for welfare subjects to be understood as complex actors whose behaviour and decisions reflect the constraints of their relational contexts (Wright, 2012, 2016; Martin, 2007).

The research findings are also relevant to policy implementation studies. The findings highlighted concerns about the way in which sanctions are damaging to relationships between job seekers and employment services agencies. This makes it difficult for workers to develop trust-based relationships needed to effectively case manage job seekers needing support to help them find jobs. Furthermore, the findings drew attention to intersubjective recognition as a mediating factor in discretion and bias in worker attitudes and treatment of job seekers. In this respect, the capacity for workers to exercise discretion had been eroded because of the Workfirst mandate and associated use of sanctions. The findings with workers indicated the extent to which their case management autonomy has been constrained by the strict rules of employment services conditionality, and that there are ongoing issues relating to the attrition of the capability of the employment services workforce.
This thesis also contributes to social and public policy scholarship about the role of third sector organisations as agencies contracted to enforce disciplinary social policy like that associated with Workfare. This thesis draws attention to the role of these agencies in the administration of disciplinary social policy. The use of sanctions to discipline job seekers draws attention to contradictions about the purpose of employment services in a context in which welfare agencies are increasingly used to administer the form of social control associated with advanced liberal governance. These observations echo critical observations that welfare agencies in advanced liberal democracies serve the role of social surveillance, which involves employment services policing behavioural compliance, while themselves being subject to surveillance through the administration of their contracts (Dean, 2009; Wacquant, 2001). Employment services agencies and their employees are constrained by the nature of the contracts they deliver. They have become the agencies associated with disciplinary strategies removed from their missions of alleviating poverty and unemployment.

These observations relate to concerns that the social justice objectives of these agencies have been compromised by their employment services contracts, in which they are required to police job seeker behaviour and in which payment-by-results contracts provide incentive for them to use sanctions to discipline job seekers. These observations reinforce concerns identified in public policy scholarship that employment services agencies have undergone what ‘mission-drift’ (Gallet, 2016), and what Smyth (2014) identified as social services agencies having the lost ‘voice’ to effectively resist government policy with which they disagree.

**Objective 2 critical social policy**

The second objective was to better understand resistance in the context of advanced liberal strategies of governance like individualisation and its relationship to human agency. The examination of resistance provided opportunity to explore interactions between human actors and dominating structures like disciplinary social policy which had generated conflict in street-level interactions.

An interest-based perspective was used to provide a critical account of resistance which reflects the interest-based positions of human actors in social fields. In the interest-based perspective, the conditions experienced in employment services are identified as the manifestation of broader social struggles about the legitimacy of the needs of unemployed people. An interest-based perspective provides insight into the nature and causes of resistance in contexts like employment services, where the high activity levels and low levels of support in a welfare regime of Workfare creates conflict between the interests of job seekers and workers. This manifests in interpersonal conflicts that generate resistance in which people attempt to negotiate with the resources they can deploy so that their interests receive greater recognition. This causes the forms of resistance identified in the findings as strategies for recognition.
This thesis employed an interest-based perspective to highlight the role of interests in the reproduction of policy conditions that favour capital-based interests. Through analysis of the way interests drive the legitimation of social practices, the interest-based perspective leads to questions about how policy is made and whose interests it reflects. The interests represented in a welfare regime of Workfare are not those of the unemployed. Rather Workfirst policy imposes controls on job seekers, and the primary function of employment services has become to administer civil compliance. An interest-based perspective suggests that if the interests of job seekers are not well served, there must be conflict between their interests and those whose interests the Workfare field serves to maintain. Employment services conditions therefore reflect the prioritisation of neoliberal interests which seek to maximise job seeker exposure to the labour market to reduce welfare expenditure. This perspective reinforces the penalisation thesis about the means through which Workfare functions to penalise the unemployed, and in so doing, reinforce the legitimacy of capital-based interests (Wacquant, 2001).

**Implications of this study**

In terms of critical social policy, this research contributes to debate about the direction welfare systems are taking in the context of advanced capitalism. For scholarship about social policy, there are questions about the role and extent of welfare system in advanced capitalism, particularly in relation to the role employment services might play in helping people to leave the poverty of unemployment. This research has contributed to the view that the market-oriented approach of neoliberalism has been failing unemployed people for some time. Neither the market of providers or citizens are actually free to exercise choice. Workfirst and Mutual Obligation are used to control citizens and employment services agencies in support of the interests of economic rationalism justified within a paternalist discourse. These are the effects of conditions Wacquant has identified as the punitive strategies of neoliberalism in which the poor are punished for their poverty and unemployment (Wacquant 2001, 2003).

As with Offe’s observations of the role of the social scientist, that undertaken in this study can only ‘seek to promote an awareness among social groups of the need for more adequate and desirable decision-making processes’ (Keane in Offe, 1984: 12) and draw attention to crisis tendencies. If the interests of the ‘New Right’, as represented in the strategies of neoliberalism, is the direction in which Australia’s welfare system remains anchored, then the crisis implications of this need to be understood. This crisis manifests in the conflicts at the street-level in which sanctions act as threats to basic financial security that make job seekers fear employment services. This conflict occurs because of the distrust and disrespect that arise, and is more concerning than a tension between help and hassle because these conflicts erode the trust needed to build social capital and cohesion (Dean & Taylor-Gooby, 1998). Furthermore, a welfare system that does not fulfil community expectations relating to a
sense of fairness or adequacy has been identified as one that is more likely to be abused (Dean & Melrose, 1998).

The conflict in employment services has escalated in jobactive services, and security guards are now commonplace in their offices. It seems excessive that employment services agencies need to protect themselves like this, when they purportedly exist to help unemployed people find jobs. This study indicated that this conflict has arisen because of the frustration of the job seekers treated as resistant, yet for whom the jobs – or the kind of jobs – they were forced to get, conflicted with their own choices and motivation. For the increasing numbers of long-term job seekers, this means the punitive conditionality to which they are exposed becomes not only pointless, but cruel. These shifts underscore the future risks faced by Workfare states like Australia, in which long-term unemployment has become an entrenched problem for policy makers.

The findings noted how these ordinary forms of suffering are not suffered in silence; they are met with resistance, which is leading to collective action and protest. But as the conflict at the street-level of employment services shows, it is more often experienced in interpersonal conflicts in which job seekers and workers are both exposed to the duress caused by a struggle that is ultimately about the rights of citizens to welfare. They are forms of harm that social scientists can bring to the attention of those who listen and care. These perspectives are increasingly important because of the extent to which disciplinary conditionality is administered by marketised social services agencies in more aspects of welfare in Australia and across the OECD.

In developing this account of resistance in employment services, I have aimed to highlight the ways in which all those involved in creating policy are implicated in the street-level conflict that is endemic in employment services. The interest-based perspective promoted in this thesis suggests reflection on the interest-based nature of policy making itself is needed to shift the reification of neoliberal social and economic policy. This is because it draws attention to the ways in which interests drive the legitimisation of social practices, and policy making itself is one of the key mechanisms through which interests gain legitimacy in the social field. There is a need to reflect on the role of bureaucrats and policy advocates in the reproduction of dominating social conditions and how the positions they adopt reflect and reproduce neoliberal interests.

There are at least two key ways in which critical reflection on the practice of policy making can help change the policy field. The first involves understanding the stakes of the organisations involved in the battles for dominance in policy making and how these organisations and their actors are themselves subject to the disintegrative effects of neoliberalism as it functions through marketisation. The interaction of these agencies and their access to influence over the welfare field conditions reflects their internal dispositions, the turf battles and identity conflicts that take place within organisational contexts. The agendas of these agencies significantly inform employment services
conditions through their roles in influencing the forms of knowledge available within the field, and its use within employment services agencies themselves. These reflections also apply to the agencies whose political capital has coalesced to form effective social advocacy or influence, such as Jobs Australia where I have been employed while engaged in this research.

An interest-based perspective also draws attention to the relationship between critical scholarship and the policy making of governments. It suggest the need for more widespread adoption of qualitative and participatory evaluation in which qualitative forms of evidence are valued and legitimated. These strategies are those of the interpretive branch of public policy development suggested by Fischer (2003). They entail complex engagement between policy scientists and the agents for whom they make policy, suggested by Fischer as a form of participatory engagement (Fischer, 2003: 136). Furthermore, this is the approach suggested by policy scholars interested in learning about the ways in which policy is implemented at the street-level, where the views of citizen-agents are regarded as important because they have the capacity to make or break policy outcomes (Barnes and Prior, 2009; Bevir, 2007).

These observations highlight the need for stronger linkages between research advocates and policy makers so that new formulas for the investment of public resources can be trialled in conditions which satisfy the requirements of the bureaucratic environment. For their part, researchers need to become public advocates to inform knowledge about both the discursive and instrumental layers of policy development. For policy designers, this means genuine engagement with employment services providers and job seekers to develop models for services that more effectively support job search and skills acquisition. For job seekers, this means investing in approaches to prevent and overcome the scarring of long-term unemployment and to provide them with the recent work experience they need to get jobs in emerging labour markets.

**Limitations**

As this research was undertaken on a modest scale, there are limitations relating to generalisability. However, as a sociological study, the findings are not intended to be generalised but rather to draw attention to the ‘kinds of ordinary suffering’ or ‘la petite misere’ Bourdieu described as ‘unexpressed and often inexpressible malaises’ (Bourdieu, 1999: 627). However, the point of the study does not stop there, it was intended to ‘expose the forms of injustice and bring them to the attention of the broader community’ (Lovell, 2007:74). As a sociological study, the intention was to have generated sufficient data to provide rich material through which to explore the phenomenon, and to progress the theoretical abstraction necessary to develop explanatory material relevant to the research objectives.

There is a second limitation of this research because of its purposive nature, specifically due to the focus on incidents involving threat of sanction. This means the views described in this thesis are weighted towards that part of relations between job seekers and employment services agencies, rather
than experiences of employment services in more general terms. The specific focus of the interviews on incidents involving sanctions narrowed the evaluative focus and did not leave open the possibility of exploring the potential positive effects of welfare conditionality. This may be interpreted as an unsympathetic and biased portrayal of employment services. While this is certainly the case, where possible I have attempted to counter this bias by highlighting the commitment and intelligence of employment services and workers towards the work they perform. As creative agents in their own right, I believe workers and managers of employment services offer a rich and untapped reserve of ideas on how to improve conditions in employment services for all actors involved in street-level interactions.

Both of these limitations establish grounds for further empirical research and theoretical examination of the effects of welfare sanctions in contexts like employment services.

Welfare conditionality and human agency

The findings of this research suggest more qualitative research is required to assess the impact of welfare conditionality on disadvantaged unemployed people. The implications of conditionality and sanctions as strategies for helping disadvantaged people need to be better understood in order to inform social and public policy knowledge about the costs and benefits of these strategies. Qualitative research is needed to better understand the interaction of welfare sanctions on the welfare of unemployed people, and the extent to which they contribute to subjective improvements in quality of life.

The questions raised by this research about the construction of resistance job seekers draws attention to limitation of public and social policy constructions of agency. These questions about the construct of welfare subjects are relevant debate about human agency in sociology and social theory more generally. The inadequacy of the constructions of human agency in social and public policy is an area where more sustained scholarly policy advocacy can be used to influence policy like welfare conditionality.

Intersubjective recognition and service outcomes

Intersubjective recognition was identified as playing a significant role in the outcomes of interactions in employment services. This is an area where more observation of interactional encounters in employment services exchanges would help to identify the extent to which intersubjective mediation and discretion is a factor in policy implementation. More observational fieldwork would help to inform knowledge about the extent to which intersubjectivity influences the treatment job seekers receive. Knowledge developed in this area might be used to identify the ways in which policy can be designed to alleviate the impacts of the bias created in the use of policy language and rules such as those associated with the discourses of welfare dependence.
Worker perspectives

While this research was being conducted, workers were able to offer valuable insights into how to develop strong working alliances. There are many opportunities for future research that could draw on the knowledge and experiences of workers about employment services. When they participated in this research, the workers offered sophisticated perspectives, frustration and bewilderment at the direction employment services have recently taken. The views of workers are also an important resource through which the role of intersubjective recognition in bias and discrimination affects service outcomes. Further qualitative interviews with workers about activation and conditionality would also provide a body of knowledge about the impact of the rules of conditionality on worker autonomy and capability.

Work for the Dole

Work for the Dole is associated with further contradictions and paradoxes related to the function of employment services in advanced capitalism. It highlights ethical questions about job seekers and the rights of paid workers to a minimum wage and the protections of working conditions (Gough, 2000; Paz-Fuchs and Eleveld, 2016). It also highlights paradoxical treatments of the unemployed and the relationship of unpaid work and what Hartly Dean identified as the prize of paid work (Dean, 2010). Some of these issues were identified in early research on Mutual Obligation (as Work for the Dole), yet there is little current qualitative research into the effects it has on job seeker welfare or well-being. Recent policy changes have prioritised Work for the Dole as the primary form of employment services activity for long-term unemployed people, bringing urgency to the need for more scholarship in this area.

Thesis conclusion

This thesis was an account of social research that used the idea of resistance to explore conflict at the street-level of employment services. The research used incidents involving sanctions to understand the ways in which job seekers respond to the threat of sanction and how this affects relations in employment services. This thesis sought to explore the forms of resistance that arise in employment services when job seekers are threatened with sanctions. It drew on the experiences of job seekers and workers about the effects of sanctions to draw out understanding of the ways in which interactions are negotiated. Through this examination of resistance in the context of sanctions, an explanatory account of resistance has been advanced as an interest-based perspective.

An interest-based perspective was developed by applying a Bourdieusian perspective to the site of conflict in employment services, where the conflict reflects a broader social conflict about the distribution and access to economic resources. Or in other words, to what Morrow and Brown (1998) referred to as a social mediation. Bourdieusian field analysis was used to analyse interactions to better
understand the forms of resistance that arise in employment services, what enables it and what this means in terms of the broader social relations of Workfare.

The field analysis described in this thesis provided an example of the way in which Bourdieu’s theory of practice can be applied to the analysis of social mediations, such as those acted out in street-level interactions where welfare is used as form of control. By using Peillon’s sociology of welfare as an analytic strategy that builds on Bourdieu’s theory of practice, locations like employment services can be used to explore the social conflicts arising from new forms of governance, like welfare conditionality. These conflicts are not only about economic distributions; they are present in symbolic and material struggles over access to the forms of power that create and enforce legitimacy of needs and interests. As locations for scholarly examination, social researchers may extrapolate from local level conflicts to social conflicts more broadly.

There were two primary motivations for developing this account of resistance in employment services. The first was to explore how social research could contribute to explaining the conflict reported in street-level interactions, by using the idea of resistance to access a social and cultural mediation. This motivation was met by developing this thesis, in which I set out both a normative and a critical account of the implications of the resistance that arises in the context of the welfare conditionality administered by employment services.

The second was to draw attention to the ways in which all those involved in creating policy are implicated in reproducing ways of thinking and seeing that shape policy responses. On this front, the research has drawn attention to the need for stronger linkages between research advocates and policy makers so that critical perspectives are included as legitimate forms of knowledge about the effects of social policy strategies. For their part, researchers can engage with policy making processes and practices, in order to insert their points of view into broader debate about the reproduction of inequality and provide ‘resources for rethinking and renewing democratic struggles’ (Wacquant, 2005: 4). Laura expressed a similar sentiment, whose final word is honoured in this very spirit.

We (the people) need to be a fair bit more proactive about getting our voices heard. …We don’t need rulers. We need social consciousness that effects egalitarian and progressive humanism instead of totalitarian rationalism which is destroying the planet. The catalysts for positive social change are already there. Just like a bushfire can restore native ecosystems to full health so could a total collapse of the convoluted and over regulated system that exists now do with some serious socially beneficial waking up (Laura, 2014).
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Appendix A Recruitment Material and Interview schedules

Item A – Interview commencement checklist

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item to check</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Check ok with recording of interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Check receipt of signed consent form</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explain illegal activity disclosure strategy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semi structured interview - list of questions act as a guide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explain process after interview and next steps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preference for type of voucher (eg different food store)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Demographic information and confidentiality

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benefit type</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Previous benefit history and experience of Centrelink &amp; Employment Services</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Item B - Job Seeker Interview schedule First Interview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Can you talk to me about the incident you wanted to tell me about?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>When and where did it happen?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who was the Employment Services agency?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who was the person you dealt with?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What was the activity you were meant to be doing?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What happened next?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What kind of penalty did you get?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How long was the payment suspended for?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How did this make you feel?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What did that mean for your day to day survival?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you think it it right for the government to do this (i.e. withhold payments)?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why/why not?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did you do anything about it?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did you complain to anyone?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has this happened to you before?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How often has this happened to you?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has this happened to anyone else you know?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Item C - Interview Schedule Second Interview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What happened?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you think they would like to participate in this research?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can you pass on this flyer to them?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have read the transcript of our last meeting, and I’ve written up the incident as a story</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is there anything I have not got right?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is there anything you would like to add or have thought of that happened since last time we talked about it?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I noticed you seemed sad or angry here, can you remember what made you feel like that?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you think it is right for the government to do this (i.e. withhold payments)? Why/why not?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Item D – Interview schedule Workers**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What roles have you held as an employment services or Centrelink worker?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can you describe your experience working in employment services generally?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Without providing actual names or dates, can you please describe some incidents where you have observed people not doing what they’ve been asked by (Employment Services or Centrelink)?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you think there are different types of noncompliers?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are there categories of noncompliers?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Describe situations where you’ve discussed an excuse or reasons they’ve provided for noncompliance?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can you talk about the factors that have contributed to whether you believe them or not (official and nonofficial factors)?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Describe some exceptions and why you’ve made them?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What factors contributed to any discretion you have shown?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In your observations of others workers, what are the factors that contributed to their decisions re noncompliance?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Was there an office view on types of non-compliers?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How would you describe it?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did you share the office view?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you worked for multiple providers?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where there any differences in the way they responded to their clients?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Item E – Job seekers Advertisement**

**The other side of the story**

Keeping up with what Centrelink and Employment Services ask you to do is like having a job in itself. Sometimes the things they make you do don’t even seem to make a lot of sense. If you’ve had bad experience like this, you might like to get involved in some research being conducted at RMIT.

I’m undertaking a study to find out about people’s negative experiences of Centrelink or employment services while they’ve been looking for work.

I am also trying to find out more about the experiences and stories of those people who might have had payment withheld and what it has meant for them. We also want to know how this affects your attitudes and feelings towards Centrelink, employment services and the government.

I am going to use the stories we collect to show another side of the system – the one experienced by people who use employment services who don’t often get a chance to tell their side of the story.

Please contact Simone Casey to find out about how you might participate in this project:

email S9502268@student.rmit.edu.au
Appendix B – Risks to participants and ethical issues

(as provided to RMIT Human Ethics Committee application 49/12)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethical issue/identified risk</th>
<th>Measures taken</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>De-identification</strong></td>
<td>The researcher will ensure that all identifying characteristics of the case studies are removed to maintain anonymity. The research also intends to develop stories which are typical, and not necessarily based on a single incident and therefore drawn both from actual experience and anecdotal knowledge. The exact details of the incidents are less important than the set of circumstances they typify and it not the intention to provide particular examples, rather to provide examples which are typical which will reduce the possibility of the identities of the participants being revealed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Participant vulnerabilities:</strong></td>
<td>Access supports The researcher is very familiar with the social welfare sector, and will suggest referrals to appropriate support agencies where personal circumstances or problems coping are revealed. The information sheet will clearly indicate the researcher will not be able to contribute to the resolution of a grievance, and the modest extent to which the final research will influence social policy development. The researcher will be able to provide information about official grievance processes with employment services agencies and Centrelink. Interviews will be conducted in safe places such as the office at the employment services agency where there are other people in attendance (but in a private room) to minimize risks to the researcher.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Inadvertent disclosure of illegal activity:</strong></td>
<td>The information sheet will explain the risk of disclosure of cash in hand work, benefit fraud, crime or drug misuse and emphasise that it is not the main purpose of the research to explore this, and that if it arises the researcher will check it is relevant to the research and change the subject if it is not. Regarding reportable crimes, the information sheet will explain they should not disclose any information relating to other illegal activity that is reportable under the Crimes Act such as child abuse. The researcher will enforce this by using cues to check that the participant does not accidentally reveal information about illegal activity that is not relevant to the research, and which is reportable under the Crime Act. Participants will also be told they will be non-identifiable in both the narratives and the case studies, and because of</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

De-identification
The detailed narratives and case study analysis will be non-identifying however there is a slight risk that government officials or staff of employment services agencies may recognise the incidents.

Participant vulnerabilities:
Although this research will not specifically target long term unemployed people there is a chance that some may elect to participate in the study which would be highly valued because of the duration of their experience of the employment services system.

Some of these people may have endured many years of poverty, misrecognition and other hardships of unemployment exacerbated over time such as mental illness, drug and alcohol use, unstable accommodation, multiple service use and related vulnerabilities.

They make experience strong emotions and hold expectations the research will contribute to the resolution of a personal grievance.

Inadvertent disclosure of illegal activity:
Some participants may currently (or have previously) worked in cash in hand jobs, have been involved with benefit fraud, drug use and this may inform the reasons why and ways in which participants have resisted employment service. They are not however the primary focus for this research, and are not reportable under the Crimes Act. The research will only explore these issues when they have direct relevance to the reasons for resistance, and will take measures to avoid exploring other crime(s).
the selection of the case studies as typical examples, it is unlikely that either employment service agencies of government bureaucrats will be able to identify the participants. The case studies will reviewed for these risks before being made public.

An Illegal Activity Disclosure Strategy. A copy of the strategy was provided with the PICF to participants at the start of each interview and referred to throughout the interview to prevent inadvertent disclosure.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Worker disclosure</th>
<th>The research questions were designed to provide a perspective on their observations of welfare interactions, rather than specific details of particular incidents so as to avoid inadvertent disclosure of confidential information. The illegal activity disclosure form was provided to workers to help prevent inadvertent disclosure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Workers might inadvertently disclose identifying details of job seekers of agencies.</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Appendix C – RMIT Ethics Approval

Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC)
Research and Innovation Office

Notice of Approval

Date: 19 December 2012
Project number: 49/12
Project title: Perspectives on why people resist employment services: an exploration of misrecognition and social policy
Risk classification: More than low risk
Investigator: A/Prof Martyn Jones
Approved: From 17 December 2012 To 31 December 2015

Terms of approval:
1. Responsibilities of investigator
   It is the responsibility of the above investigator to ensure that all other investigators and staff on a project are aware of the terms of approval and to ensure that the project is conducted as approved by HREC. Approval is only valid while investigator holds a position at RMIT University.

2. Amendments
   Approval must be sought from HREC to amend any aspect of a project including approved documents. To apply for an amendment use the request for amendment form, which is available on the HREC website and submitted to the HREC secretary. Amendments must not be implemented without first gaining approval from HREC.

3. Adverse events
   You should notify HREC immediately of any serious or unexpected adverse effects on participants or unforeseen events affecting the ethical acceptability of the project.

4. Plain Language Statement (PLS)
   The PLS and any other material used to recruit and inform participants of the project must include the RMIT university logo. The PLS must contain a complaints clause including the above project number.

5. Annual reports
   Continued approval of this project is dependent on the submission of an annual report. See below(5).

6. Final report
   A final report must be provided at the conclusion of the project. HREC must be notified if the project is discontinued before the expected date of completion.

7. Monitoring
   Projects may be subject to an audit or any other form of monitoring by HREC at any time.

8. Retention and storage of data
   The investigator is responsible for the storage and retention of original data pertaining to a project for a minimum period of five years.

9. Special conditions of approval
   The project is approved subject on the condition that six monthly reports are submitted to the Human Research Ethics Committee.

In any future correspondence please quote the project number and project title above.

[Signature]
A/Prof Barbara Polus
Chairperson
RMIT HREC

cc: Dr Peter Burke (Ethics Officer/HREC secretary), Ms Simone Casey (student researcher).

K://Governance/RMIT Ethics/HREC\Publications\2012\12\12-12 Ethics approval notice.doc