

**The Deserving Poor: A Critical Discourse Analysis of the Ontario Disability
Support Program Application Process**

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Abstract

Three policy directives of the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) are examined using a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to help reveal how these directives act as a barrier to the disabled community in Ontario seeking access to social assistance benefits. Arguments are made suggesting that the policy directives help to sustain a system of inefficiency through its adherence to administrative and neoliberal economic discourses rather than one based on social justice. Connections between discourse and the applications process are made using an order of discourse methodology to make links between discourses found in the policy directives and the application process for ODSP. Findings suggest that the policy discourses both procedurally and substantively classify members of the disabled community into those who are deserving of social assistance and those who are not. This classification process has serious implications that relegate those considered undeserving to receive assistance from a much more problematic Ontario Works (OW) program. This paper provides background information on the relationship between OW and ODSP and the implications associated with their overlapping functions. A review of existing literature on the ODSP application process is included and reveals strong connections between the application process and the problems many applicants experience by going through the process ranging from stigmatizing social constructions to having to remain in a low socioeconomic status. Possible reforms are suggested based on reviews of the social welfare system conducted from several sources that advocate a more inclusive and social justice based social welfare program for Ontario. Discussion of how social workers play a role in possible reform efforts is also explored.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction.....	4
Chapter 2: Literature Review and Theoretical Framework	8
Literature Review	8
Theoretical Framework	19
Chapter 3: Research Design	23
Chapter 4: Findings.....	28
Income Support Policy Directive 1.1 - Applications.....	28
Income Support Policy Directive 1.2 - Disability Adjudication Process	31
Employment Supports Policy Directive 2.1 - Program Eligibility	37
Connection to Theory.....	40
Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusions.....	43
Discussion	43
Conclusion	52
References.....	54
Appendix.....	60

Chapter 1: Introduction

The purpose of this research study is to understand and analyze the discourses involved in some of the policy directives that regulate the Income Support and Employment Supports programs through the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP). The research question is designed to explore how the Ontario Ministry of Community and Social Services (OMCSS) policy directives for ODSP Income Support and Employment Supports programs help shape the social process of financial assistance applications through discourse and its power in constructing representative identities for both ODSP staff and applicants.

There is a personal connection to the proposed research topic due to my role as a social worker in the mental health sector. Having experienced the influence of adherence to policy and how this shapes my practice, I find it is important to understand and identify areas of possible tension between discourses and how this affects service delivery to marginalized populations. ODSP Income Support and Employment Supports policy directives form the basis of defining and guiding the eligibility process for Ontarians living with a disability and is relevant to the demographic I have experience working with. Exactly how disability is defined by ODSP is a central point of analysis in this paper as well as how this affects the application process.

Analysis of some of these policies allows for a deeper understanding not only in revealing assumptions of discursive influence within the text. It is also a look at who benefits and who is marginalized in the propagation of the discourses enabled and enacted by the text through social practices which is a foundational premise of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (Wodak & Meyer, 2009). Without this ability to analyze how

policies define and guide the roles for ODSP workers and applicants and identify how these definitions and the processes they guide may run counter to principles of social justice, the ability to connect the text with implications for social work practice and potential change of social processes is diminished since it is in these disparities and inconsistencies that transformative analysis exists (Fairclough, 2005).

ODSP belongs to a 2-part social assistance system in Ontario designed to address the needs of individuals who are living with a disability. The other half is the Ontario Works program that is specific to people in need of temporary financial assistance (Ontario Ministry of Community and Social Services [OMCSS], 2014). The 2-part structure includes heavy overlap between the two programs (Beatty, 1999) which places the functions of ODSP well within the scope of a wide variety of discourses. This is relevant to this paper since it seeks to analyse where tensions exist between discourses and how this can be used as a potential starting point for social justice based reforms in the social welfare system in Ontario.

The disability support program is governed by the OMCSS. It is also connected to the healthcare system of Ontario because of its role in defining disability. As a result, this places ODSP under the influence and governance of the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care (OMHLTC). The OMHLTC has developed a governing body to oversee organizations and associated healthcare programs in Ontario. This body is called Ontario's Local Health Integration Network's (LHIN). This governing body is responsible for determining health service priorities for all regions in Ontario and provide funding to hospitals, community care access centres, community support services, long-term care, mental health and addiction services, and community health centres based

on these priorities (Local Health Integration Network [LHIN], 2014). Understanding the framework is essential in providing context for the social work profession as well as where the discourses come into play in the application process as a whole. This paper will provide some background on this framework and work to expand on the detailed policies that help guide the application process within this overarching framework.

To contextualize the scope for an organizational analysis of ODSP, review of the mandate for the OMHLTC is of relevance. The OMHLTC mission and mandate is to involve themselves in the following:

- Establishing overall strategic direction and provincial priorities for the health system;
- Developing legislation, regulations, standards, policies, and directives to support those strategic directions;
- Monitoring and reporting on the performance of the health system and the health of Ontarians;
- Planning for and establishing funding models and levels of funding for the health care system;
- Ensuring that ministry and system strategic directions and expectations are fulfilled (Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-term Care [OMHLTC], 2013).

The organizational model of the OMHLTC and OMCSS indicates that the discourse of health, which is very much linked with social assistance from ODSP, is also informed by the discourses prevalent in Ontario's Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Government Services, and Ministry of the Attorney General (see Appendix for detailed flow charts). This is very relevant for this paper as it provides support for presenting arguments

regarding the influence that discourses, generally outside the scope of social justice, have over social assistance programs. This can create problems when planning and implementing policy directives that are centred on providing social justice aims to a historically disenfranchised population.

The following chapters will provide a literature review on the topic of the medical model and social model of disability, neoliberal economic discourse, and professionalism in the medical and social work professions. Some connections will be made between the definition of disability within both of these models and the challenges they present for how to improve the social welfare system in Ontario. Analysis of three specific policy directives will be undertaken to help connect big systemic discourses to the practical guidance tools that are used in the application process. These connections will be further explored to reveal the assumptions behind the discourses and how changes can be made, or have already been suggested, to have a more social justice based model of social assistance in Ontario.

Chapter 2: Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Literature Review

Much of the literature on social welfare policy, social justice, and disability crosses over into many academic disciplines. When undertaking the literature review process for this study, emphasis was placed on including sources with a Canadian context but also included sources that discuss and analyze international social welfare and economic policy insofar that they also implicated its relevance to Canadian social policy. Disability policy findings provided a useful parameter and situated the policy analysis literature to focus on a central part of my discourse analysis, which focuses on ODSP. When combined with neoliberal economy discourse papers, the literature was sufficiently broad to assert certain themes and controversies that could be expanded and relied upon the main topics of this paper. I will present the literature review findings for the three main areas to be covered in this paper. These consist of the following:

- the organizational structure of ODSP as defined by its Employment Supports Policy Directive 2.1, and Income Support Policy Directive 1.1 and 1.2;
- how these policy directives interact with and guide the application process and the discourse tensions they create for ODSP applicants and ODSP staff, and;
- possible areas for reform to include a more social justice based framework.

Organizational structure. The social welfare system in Ontario is a product of political, economic and labour market conditions (Aronson & Neysmith, 2001; Klassen & Buchanan, 2006). It is also a result of larger neoliberal discourse formulated to become a competitive member in the ever expanding global market (Maki, 2011). This manifests itself in the form of individualism, productivity, self-sufficiency and the framing of social

problems using a labour market analysis model (Aronson & Neysmith, 2001; Boyer & Faye, 2011; Jeppesen, 2009; Maki, 2011). There are groups that consider this ideological approach to be necessary for increasing viability and sustainability of the social service sector and is in fact a reform that addresses deficiencies in the previous models of social welfare in Canada (Klassen & Buchanan, 2006). Strong advocates of this approach rely on studies that use a comparative analysis of economic systems across the globe to draw conclusions based on their outcomes regarding competitive contract bidding, privatization, and operating cost reductions (Boyer & Faye, 2011). Adherence to these benchmarks is a constant of labour market analyses that are prevalent across multiple sectors in Canada including the social service sector here in Ontario.

Maki (2011) shows that these studies and reports have strong implications for policy development projects from its initial stages right through to implementation and subsequent evaluation. They help to create a unified approach to policy development that seeks to nullify variables that are incongruent with the tenets of labour market viability (Herd, Mitchell, & Lightman, 2005). Policies are being shaped and confounded by the aims of an organization previously designed under an interventionist model of economic assistance (i.e. Keynesian economics) (Herd, Mitchell, & Lightman, 2005; Maki, 2011).

Whereby the assumptions held under this interventionist model included the responsibility of redressing systemic failure, the neoliberal shift in the past decades have steadily passed on this responsibility to more localized contexts such as provincial governments, which includes shifting that responsibility to those receiving the economic

assistance (Chouinard & Crooks, 2005). This focus on the individual as the centre of economic instability leads social assistance recipients of Ontario that rely on ODSP as a primary source of income to being placed in a lower socioeconomic status and at greater risk of being underserved by the community mental health system (Durbin, Bondy & Durbin, 2012). The literature has much to say on the difficulties associated with evaluating organizations where competing ideologies of neoliberalism and disability discourses exist (e.g. perception of recipients from society as deserving or undeserving of financial assistance). Jongbloed (2003) and Chouinard and Crooks (2005) assert that a social model of disability discourse relies on a fundamentally different view of disability propagated by neoliberalism, which places the responsibility on families and voluntary agencies. According to a social model, disability is a matter of the social conditions and their inability to appropriately respond to the unique needs of people with disabilities that causes hardship rather than the individual being to blame for their lack of participation in a medicalized diagnosis and program integration (Jongbloed, 2003; Stainton, 2002).

Jongbloed (2003) provides the historical context of disability policy in Canada, and provides a comparison of the socio-political model of disability, which includes the concept of human rights as a foundational premise. Of interest to my study is the analysis undertaken by Jongbloed (2003) of the medical model and the socio-political model and how they each distinctively help shape and inform policies and ideologies prevalent at the time. Stainton (2002) broadens this discussion of defining disability by arguing that a social justice model is appropriate for framing disability policy since it is based on a human rights model and values autonomy that is not central to the medical

or socio-political model. Both analyses concede that a mix of models is essential to providing a viable solution for a more inclusive definition of disability.

Klassen and Buchanan (2006) further complicate the discussion by including the dynamic of political governance with a specific focus on its influence over the structure of Ontario's social assistance programs. An important concept put forward in this discussion is the fight for political control and its effect on developing sustainable social welfare policies. Contextual variables such as gross domestic product (GDP) and unemployment rates at the time of political power help to connect how the economic landscape is constitutive and constituted by interests other than disability reform (Klassen & Buchanen, 2006). Although not a new concept by any means, it does show just how much influence indices of economic viability can be prioritized at the expense of humanitarian concerns such as autonomy and self-regulation (Maki, 2011).

Boyer and Faye (2011) show how global market analysis is a key feature of remaining competitive on an international market and how even an international influence can affect localized contexts such as provincial social welfare. Situating Canada within the much larger globalization effort is important in providing context to how ideologies are not confined only to geographical or political jurisdiction. In their assessment of international economic policy, Boyer and Faye (2011) include a comprehensive and detailed report on how to improve Canada's economic policies in various sectors including health care, telecommunications, and education. This is a great resource to analyze the language used in these reports and how it can also be seen in the policy directives for ODSP. Also, the report is relevant to identifying how

evaluations that are very consistent with neoliberal concerns help normalize the global market framework through unified language and concepts.

In addition to the discrepancies between neoliberal discourse and disability discourse, another theme that emerges from the literature is the connection between federal and provincial social assistance platforms (See for example Maki, 2011; Herd et al., 2005). The analysis of international economic discourse is expanded to include implications for national social policy in Canada and how it extends to provincial jurisdictions. Maki (2011) explains how the 1970's were a period of economic reform at the federal level in response to labour market forces that began the movement towards privatization of public resources. This was seen at the federal level in the 1990's with the dismantling of the Canadian Assistance Plan (CAP) (Herd, Mitchell, & Lightman, 2005). This was replaced by the Canadian Health and Social Transfer "which reorganized government services, decentralizing funding allocation from the federal government to provincial block funding, allowing provinces to determine how to allocate funding to health care, postsecondary education and welfare" (Maki, 2011, p. 50).

The implications of this change at the federal level included the beginning of sweeping social assistance reforms in Ontario. Beginning in the 1990's and illustrated by Mike Harris's Common Sense Revolution, federal economic reforms affected the provincial structures of social assistance organizations to be less federally accountable and become more fiscally and locally dependent (Klassen & Buchanan, 2006; Marquardt, 2007). It can be argued that this was a step forward in the neoliberal reform process that is very relevant to my study as it contextualizes provincial legislation and the policies that interpret them to include analysis of its connection to federal economic

models. In doing so, it provides another layer of analysis to better address possible intervention sites for social justice reform at the federal level in addition to international and provincial jurisdictions. The analysis of these three jurisdictions allows for a more contextualized approach to evaluating what may or may not work in terms of social policy reform (Little & Marks, 2006).

Despite uniformity that is found in the neoliberal approach as seen in the successive flow from international, to federal, and then provincial government in Canada with regard to social assistance funding and priorities, Jongbloed (2003) states that the uniformity that is found in neoliberalism with respect to ideology, is a model that can and should be replicated for the benefit of social justice efforts in the disability reform movement. She states the following about the pluralism that currently exists in defining disability and how to fund this demographic:

There is general acceptance of the idea of providing benefits but much less agreement regarding how much should be shared. What is needed is an acknowledgement of the multidimensional nature of disability and an attempt to address the normative question regarding what society owes people with disability. This requires the development of a normative foundation for analyzing the goals of respect, participation, and accommodation that will result in consistent policy objectives (Jongbloed, 2003, p. 258).

In other words, the success of neoliberalism is founded on its unity and consistency across sectors, jurisdiction, etc. but not confined to be successful for only that ideological application. Jongbloed (2003) criticizes disability reform as being limited because it is not cohesive in its approach to providing consistent policy objectives. This

plurality appears in the literature (Crooks, Chouinard, & Wilton, 2008; Little & Marks, 1999) and is useful in understanding how different theoretical models can be of benefit for the disabled community while others may work against their social reform efforts.

Social stratification. The organizational structure of social assistance in Ontario has a pervasive effect on the social constructions of ODSP applicants. The literature revealed a significant overlap between the neoliberal functions of economic regulation and the individualization of systemic problems. The concept of social exclusion was a recurring theme that was explained in a variety of ways. Interlocking oppression (Bahm & Forchuk, 2009), cumulative consequences (Aronson & Neysmith, 2001), and attribution of poverty (Bullock, 2004; Lofters, Slater, Kirst, Shankardass, & Quiñonez, 2014) were concepts used to reveal the factors contributing to the social constructions and perspectives held towards social workers and social assistance recipients. One clear commonality illustrated by Bullock (2004) and Maki (2011) for example, is the connection between neoliberal economic discourse with the values and beliefs attributed to social assistance recipients. Bullock explains this connection with the following:

Welfare reform discourse in the 1990's was dominated by issues about whether welfare causes poverty and antiwork values among the urban poor. The result is a largely 'psychologized' framework for understanding poverty in which the consequences of structural deprivation are acknowledged but primary responsibility for poverty is assigned to the individual (2004, p. 572).

The concept of deprivation relieves the government of any cutbacks in funding for the marginalized or disabled communities on the premise that they should not really be

eligible since they ought to be working for an income. As a result, the system is devised to include systematic exclusion despite availability of social assistance. When social assistance is accessed, it is viewed as a failure of the individual to have to succumb to such a level that they require assistance. In addition to this psychological attribution, there are factors that generate a state of continued poverty for social assistance recipients (Krupa et al., 2012).

Reliance on ODSP and social assistance in general, is correlated with greater likelihood of being underserved by appropriate community mental health services, decreased social supports, and less likelihood to report negative attitudes towards care (Durbin, Bondy, & Durbin, 2012). This intersection between the personal and political shows how the internalization of systemic ideology (i.e. socio-political) can shape people to become docile, passive, and subsume characteristics derived from neoliberal individualization. Although the scope of this paper is not intended to discuss the psychological perceptions of social assistance recipients, it does illustrate how powerful negative perceptions of the self can be propagated through organizational structures and social processes when they are normalized and uncontested.

The underlying theme of productivity as defined by neoliberal economic contribution is seen in the analysis by Menear et al. (2011). They examine employment supports for people living with mental health diagnoses, with its emphasis on competitive employment. Social constructions of social assistance recipients are complicated due to the fact that it is difficult to determine what is involved in their lack of participation in a system that is there to support them (i.e. ODSP). Though physical disabilities lend themselves to a visual understanding of the physical barriers of

explaining a lack of participation, mental health barriers are more complex in their deconstruction. Krupa, Oyewumi, Archie, Stuart Lawson, Nandlal, and Conrad (2012) go in to detail regarding this common misinterpretation about why people with mental health diagnoses are not accessing services that assist integration into the workforce when supports are available. They point to adverse consequences of the assistance itself. Menear et al. (2011) and Maki (2011) explain how there are many disincentives incorporated into the social assistance system that are overlooked because of the dominant neoliberal perspective that places the blame of needing social assistance on the individual (Chouinard & Crooks, 2005; Krupa et al., 2012). Therefore, the organizational structure is very much connected to the social construction of the applicants seeking assistance from ODSP.

Oversight of this connection justifies negative perceptions from society towards people with disabilities for having to rely on social assistance. These perceptions stigmatize individuals for having a disability, be it physical and/or mental, living in poverty, and being an unproductive member of society based on individual rather than systemic flaws. Interlocking oppression can take place when more marginalized identities are combined. When you add the element of being identified as a recent immigrant and identifying as a woman, for example, the social identity that is created for social assistance recipients with disabilities places them in one of the most precarious positions in a society that adheres to neoliberal economic ideology (Stewart, Neufeld, Harrison, Spitzer, Hughes, & Makwarimba, 2006).

Jongbloed (2003) further complicates the concept of social construction through the distinction between self-identifying as a disabled person and the construction

imposed upon people with a disability through different discourses and the tension this creates on a personal level. If a person with a disability identifies with the commonly accepted social construction reserved for them in the dominant society, they are presented with a challenge of being validated or invalidated, for example, by becoming eligible for services such as ODSP but also possibly being labeled a potential fraud both morally and financially (Crooks, Chouinard, & Wilton, 2008). In other words, they must choose to have an individualized voice that has the potential consequence of making disability resolutions that are not represented by the social welfare system of eligibility, or instead adopt a more collective model that provides them with eligibility but also stigmatizes them for what that eligibility defines them as (Stainton, 2002).

This categorization of either/or of social identity status extends to another binary where there is a classification of deserving and undeserving poor that infers a level of legitimacy to people's claims of disability (Chouinard & Crooks, 2005; Jeppesen, 2009). This paper is not intended to advocate for one approach over the other, but seeks to determine how the binaries are propagated through policy. The implications for this legitimacy diminishes the growth that is achieved through debates on how to define disability and shapes the social re-construction process itself by adhering to neoliberal discourse at a systemic level.

Marks (1999) expands on the construction of disability by using three main ideological divides. These are the social model, the medical model, and narrative approach. The medical model is focused on the disability itself and the associated symptoms, the narrative with the experiences of the individual living with a disability, and lastly, the social model which is described as being the model that:

[...]argues that whatever differences or complexities exist in the way that people experience disability, the most appropriate research topic is not an individual persons account, but rather their external social environment. The aim is not to understand how people feel, but rather to provide fully inclusive physical environments, institutions, policies and practices (Marks, 1999, p. 612).

The literature shows how many discourses are involved in the construction of disability and can serve as the basis for how the social welfare model is structured in Ontario.

Social justice reform. Hudson and Graefe (2011) present a very in depth paper that highlights both the history and challenges associated with social justice based reforms such as the Ontario Poverty Reduction Strategy. They go on to discuss that social reform has already been implemented and provide an analysis of the political and economic implications for developing social policies that reflect the efforts to transition from a neoliberal environment to a more socially progressive framework.

An overlooked finding in the literature was the effect that different definitions of disability would have in the discussion about social policy reform. Jongbloed (2003) explains how this connection between disability and social reform could possibly be the source for examining the text as a measurement of whose voice is represented in the Income Support and Employment Supports policy directives by seeing where shared principles of both reform efforts would be satisfied. Even though there are differences between the two, it is where they overlap that unity can provide concerted efforts towards reform against neoliberalism and the medical model.

How a problem is viewed is very much a factor in what solutions stem from the discussions in addressing it. Lofter et al. (2014) establish the need in understanding how society views problems because it can highlight the need for members of society to commit efforts towards consciousness raising. The underlying theme in social justice reform derived from the literature is that not everyone sees a problem in the same way so much so that it may not be considered a problem at all. As social workers, we have an “inside” look at how disenfranchised populations are affected by policies where the focus of assessments and eligibility are often conducted to improve the economy but fails to capture the quality of life for individuals who make up that economic structure. This economic effect can often take years to be realized which also emphasizes the need to have strategic plans based on empirical data and inclusion of public opinion (Matthews, 2004). What is advocated for is the need for greater transparency and accountability that is placed on systemic functions of inequality as opposed to placing it squarely on the individuals at the receiving end of service delivery (Income Security Advocacy Centre [ISAC], 2003).

Theoretical Framework

The analysis in this paper uses a dialectical-relational variant of CDA rooted in critical realism. Norman Fairclough (2005) provides a thorough yet succinct explanation of this theoretical approach:

Critical realism claims that mediating entities are necessary to account for the relationship between structures and processes/events. These mediating entities are ‘social practices’, more or less durable and stable articulations of diverse social elements, including discourse, which constitute social

selections and orderings of the allowances of social structures as actualizable allowances in particular areas of social life in a certain time and place. Social practices are networked together in distinctive and shifting ways. Social fields, institutions and organizations can be regarded as networks of social practices (p. 922).

Critical realism essentially relies on a perception of the social world being both constitutive and constituted through social processes (Fairclough, 2005; Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002; Wodak & Meyer, 2009). This will frame my analysis to look for ways in which discourses are propagated, what tensions arise between structures and social actors through actions enacted and enabled through text, and what tensions are involved in these social processes that influence how change is created or negated. Critical realism proposes that "organizations, like all objects or 'permanences', are emergent effects of social process, and that change is inherent in social process (Fairclough, 2005, p. 928). Dialectical-relational CDA under this theoretical perspective utilizes a "dual ontology" to provide a distinction within organizational analysis that separates process from structure. This means that although connections exist between structures and processes, they are not necessarily symbiotic. Changes are a result of shifting relationships that can be in concert or in opposition to either the process or a structure across time and space.

It is because what is a constructed reality by organizations (i.e. structures) is not always what is seen in practice. This is what is defined by Fairclough (2005) as a mediating variable or more commonly known as social agency. It is an important variable that Chouliaraki (2002) proposes to be beneficial for combining social

constructionism and critical realism which are regarded to be incompatible by stating that the use of both ontological and epistemological positions allow for a meaning from the text to be constituted by and constitutive of social processes. In other words, the policy directives can be analyzed more comprehensively by not only looking at how they inform the application process and social construction of identity for social workers and applicants, but also how both the process and the social constructions alter the effect of the policy directives.

In general, CDA does not hold a clear cut and regimented design that informs data sources and data gathering (Wodak & Meyer, 2009). Wodak and Meyer differentiate dialectical-relational CDA from other CDA approaches by highlighting that "more deductively oriented theories which also propose a closed theoretical framework are more likely to illustrate their assumptions with a few examples which seem to fit their claims" (2009, p. 19). Dialectical-relational CDA falls under this category of a deductively-oriented theory and as such, a large volume of data is not required to conduct an in-depth and thought provoking analysis. This is seen in this study by having confined the data collection to include three policies directives directly from OMCSS that can present an argument for the proposed areas of analysis. This is a viable approach since the policy directives are free to access in full from the OMCSS website and focus on a specific area of ODSP with adequate insight in to organizational practices relevant to the proposed research study.

My affinity with the theoretical approach of critical realism is that it runs counter to positivism and post-structuralism in some ways. It does this by acknowledgement that it is only one version of reality that can be refuted, and welcomes opposition in the pursuit

of knowledge expansion and debate since some aspects of analysis are bereft of meaning or observable occurrences (Brown, 2007). This positions my study to be not only an interpretation of the policy analyzed but makes reference to both procedural and substantive elements of the policy directives for a comprehensive and realistic analysis.

Chapter 3: Research Design

To conduct this research, I have used a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) method of inquiry. It is situated in critical social theory that emphasizes the need to reflect on the construction of the world we live in via analysis of discourses by questioning the assumptions and theoretical underpinnings that create our reality (Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000; Chouliaraki, 2002; Fairclough, 2005; Goodwin, 1994). It also seeks to address issues of power relations that exist within society as exercised through various social processes. CDA is open to different onto-epistemological approaches for qualitative research designs ranging from analytics that focus on inductive, detailed studies to those of a deductive, general analysis (Wodak & Meyer, 2009). It is also flexible in its methodological inclusion. Fairclough, Graham, Lemke and Wodak (2004) highlight the importance of connecting analysis within the CDA framework to potential for social change:

It is a central concern and responsibility of critical social research to show the contingency of existing social arrangements: to expose to scrutiny claims of inevitability, claims that the way things are is the way they have to be. The critical objective is not only to identify and analyze the roots of social problems, but also to discern feasible ways of alleviating or resolving them (p. 925).

This situates my research design to become more than a production of "technocratic knowledge - a form of knowledge best suited for use by the people in power to dominate or control other people" (Neuman & Kreuger, 2003, p. 88).

In approaching the analysis of the ODSP policies, this paper utilizes the *orders of discourse* methodology outlined by Fairclough (2005) in breaking down the various textual elements within the policies. At its core, this approach is targeted to analyze how text is influenced by a “combination of different discourses, different genres and different styles, which are articulated together in a distinctive way” (Fairclough, 2005, p. 925). In short, *discourses* are the ways in which social groups are represented. *Genres* are how people act socially (e.g. discussions and interviews). *Styles* are how people identify themselves. These three categories are situated within a dualist ontology which Fairclough (2005) argues to be more focused on identifying the tension and differences between organizational process and agency, and organizational structure. A dualist ontology is simply a separation between social agency or processes and social structure to allow a more refined analysis to identify potential for change in an organization. Fairclough (2005) argues that this allows for a critical realist ontology to be fully realized since this ontological position is interested in the tensions and relationships between discourses and is accomplished by identifying two separate elements (e.g. agency and structure) for the purpose of examining these tensions.

The data source used in this study are three policy directives from both the Income Support and Employment Supports Program of ODSP. They are the following:

- Income Support Policy Directive 1.1 - Applications
- Income Support Policy Directive 1.2 - Disability Adjudication Process
- Employment Supports Policy Directive 2.1 - Program Eligibility

These three policies were chosen for their focus on the entry requirements into the ODSP system and the assessment process once applications are submitted. Policy

directive 2.1 was chosen for its ability to be analyzed for the economic discourse that it includes. Although there are very detailed policy directives, these three were chosen since they deal primarily with eligibility, assessment of both programs and are generalizable to the program as a whole that they serve as a broad overview of the application process in both programs that cover all areas sought for analysis.

An important element to establish once data sources were gathered was defining what constitutes discourse. As with methods, this area is particular to specific theorists and not defined by CDA in general. The definition of discourse is a requirement to contextualize the analysis as it provides scope to what constitutes the unit of analysis within the data. Fairclough (2005) defines discourse to be a "particular way of representing certain parts or aspects of the (physical, social, psychological) world" (p. 925). He goes on to include what he refers to as a "stratified ontology" that is situated in critical realism that assumes there is a distinction within a social process that can be broken down into what is *real*, *actual*, and *empirical*. This is succinctly described to mean that "the 'real' is the domain of structures with their associated 'causal powers'; the 'actual' is the domain of events and processes; the 'empirical' is the part of the real and the actual that is experienced by social actors" (Fairclough, 2005, p. 922). He expands on the stratified or "dual" ontology (this paper refers to stratified and dual ontology interchangeably) concepts by adding the element of *genre* and *style*. These are sub-categories derived from the semiotic analysis of discourse. This semiotic analysis in my review of the text includes elements of word choice, meaning attributed to the word in certain contexts (i.e. colloquial meaning), and word placement within the document as well. All of these analyses consisting of stratified or dual ontology, genre

and style forms combined together form the basis of Fairclough's definition of what he calls *order of discourse*. This is meant to be a composite of the many variables that make up a discourse as a whole. A genre is the way in which social interaction is conducted while style is a way of being and the process of identity making (Fairclough, 2005). In other words, genre can be viewed as the overt process or procedure defining the social interaction (i.e. policy directive, mandate, instructional guide, etc.), while style is more of the characteristics of the people involved in the social interaction (i.e. mood, demeanour, attitude, identity, etc.). It is the connection between process and structure that allows analysis of the order of discourse by examining how they are implicated in the construction of social practice and social structures. This is also referred to by Sayer (2000) as an *analytical dualism*. The following outlines the implications of this duality (e.g. process vs. structure) to provide potential for change:

So the order of discourse of a particular organization will include discourses, genres and styles whose distribution is complementary, corresponding to different parts and facets of the organization, but also discourses, genres and styles which are potentially conflicting alternatives, whose relations are defined in terms of dominance, resistance, marginalization, innovation, and so forth (Fairclough, 2005, p. 925).

In essence, this analysis will focus on two discourses found within one common text.

This will be the discourse of the process (i.e. application to ODSP) and the discourse of the structure (ODSP as an organization) producing two ontological perspectives to find tensions and possibility for reform.

I wanted to focus on the text as the only source of my analysis and therefore decided against involving human participants for this study. However, this did not relinquish a review of my own ethical stance throughout the research process. More importantly was the concept of privilege in defining and analysing a problem. Potts and Brown (2005) explain more concerning this ethical dilemma:

We also find ourselves constantly negotiating our position along the continuum of insider/outsider relation. On the insider pole of the continuum is epistemic privilege; that is, the privilege insiders have since they have lived experience of the issue under study. The outsider end of the continuum is a more traditional, positivist researcher role (p. 264).

I am without a doubt an outsider to the effects of going through the ODSP process first hand. As such I must be very aware to position my analysis from the perspective of a professional and as an outsider to the first-hand account of the process.

Chapter 4: Findings

Income Support Policy Directive 1.1 - Applications

This policy covers the application process for verifying eligibility when applying to the Income Support program of ODSP. Generally, eligibility is determined by verification of financial need, followed up by a Disability Determination Package (DDP) which is then sent to the Disability Adjudication Unit (DAU). Exceptions are made for those who are incarcerated or who have appealed to the Social Benefits Tribunal (SBT) to overturn a finding of financial ineligibility. Applying an order of discourse analysis to this policy, it can be identified as having key discourses, genres, and styles all of which reveal their involvement with the three elements of focus for this study.

The policy directive (and all others in this analysis) lists the legislative authority upon which the policy directive rests. These vary in sections based on their respective location in the Ontario Disability Support Program Act (ODSPA). It is very clearly a legal discourse representation that is made explicit and sets up an organizational structure of legal compliance and authority for ODSP staff. The genre is informed by the standards that are in the policy and what types of information are to be verified by ODSP staff. These standards include parameters on how to engage with different types of applicants (e.g. Ontario Works recipients or self-referrals), and accompanying checklists of document verification requirements. It is essentially a guide of how to conduct the application process with very direct instructions. Therefore, how an ODSP staff member acts in the course of an application interview, or the genre of the policy directive, is guided by the procedural elements designed to extract only a subset of characteristics from the applicant rather than an emphasis on the applicant as a whole person. The

“meaning” of the process is already provided to the ODSP staff member by the documents gathered from the applicants and standards in the policy directive which have no mention of the person outside of pre-determined categories to verify eligibility (i.e. financial and medical).

Lastly, the style (e.g. identity or style of management) of this policy directive is connected to the legislative authority that is used to preface its content. It provides ODSP staff with the authority to carry out the preliminary step of eligibility with a great number of checks and balances. To illustrate this point, a summary taken from the policy directive is provided:

This directive outlines the process for taking ODSP applications through ODSP offices (i.e. self-referrals) and Ontario Works offices. The purpose of and when to use the application forms are explained and verification requirements are outlined.

Required documentation must be either:

- Visually verified and noted on the Service Delivery Model Technology (SDMT), or
- Photocopied and placed on the master file. (Ontario Ministry of Community and Social Services [OMCSS], 2013a, p. 1)

ODSP staff are instructed by this policy directive on a binary system of either/or that is dictated by certain criteria or documents presented by applicants. Another part of the policy illustrates this with a more detailed representation of this binary being utilized:

Applicants wanting to apply for ODSP, who are in immediate financial need, can apply for financial assistance through Ontario Works. An applicant for

ODSP applying through an Ontario Works office must first meet financial eligibility requirements for Ontario Works. Once financial eligibility has been established a referral is made to the DAU and the DDP is provided to the applicant/participant (OMCSS, 2013a, p. 3)

This sequence of events outlined in the policy shows the ordered structure of the application process that guides ODSP staff at this stage in the eligibility process. Combined with the discourse and genre of this policy directive, the style creates an order of discourse that positions the applicant to be a source of information and the ODSP staff to be an extractor of that information. It is positioned to be an instance involving a one-way method of communication.

From this order of discourse analysis, an argument can be made that the role of the ODSP staff is backed by authority, designed to obtain certain pieces of information, and to do so in an administrative fashion to ensure verification of documents necessary for the eligibility process to proceed to the next level. It focuses on the procedural but not the substantive elements of the process such as how to engage with applicants or common areas that are overlooked in the application process, which delay the review of their application. The only area that could be argued a departure from the procedural is with regard to accommodating special needs:

Applicants who have special needs (e.g. deaf or hard of hearing, do not speak English or French, etc.) should be given time to arrange for the services of an interpreter or translator. If the applicant is unable to make appropriate arrangements, the ministry must provide the necessary accommodation (OMCSS, 2013a, p.2).

This is a requirement regardless of its inclusion in the policy due to the Ontario Human Rights Code but its inclusion in the policy presents applicants to ODSP staff as individuals who are to be engaged in dialogue to inquire about their needs. Nonetheless, it still refers the accommodation to the responsibility of the ministry and again separates ODSP staff from a connection to the applicant outside of information gathering purposes.

Income Support Policy Directive 1.2 - Disability Adjudication Process

The second stage of the eligibility review process is guided by this policy. At this stage the definition of disability is compared against the legislative definition as set out by the ODSPA. This policy defines disability as the following:

A person with a disability is defined as a person who has a:

- substantial physical or mental impairment that is continuous or recurrent and expected to last one year or more;
- the direct and cumulative effect of the impairment results in a substantial restrictions [*sic*] in one or more of the activities of daily living (i.e., the ability to attend to personal care, function in the community or function in a workplace); and
- the impairment, its likely duration and restrictions have been verified by a prescribed health care professional (Ontario Ministry of Community and Social Services [OMCSS], 2013b, p. 1).

Exploring the discourse of the policy reveals that the definition of disability as interpreted in this policy includes an aspect of a social model of disability in the second bullet point (i.e. impairments that arise from physical or systemic barriers) the issue of the disability being continuous and verifiable by a prescribed health care professional as

illustrated by the first and third bullet point respectively, frame the policy towards a more medical model of defining disability. To further substantiate this finding, a look at who is considered a prescribed health care professional is of relevance. The following lists the professions given authority to provide verification of a disability for the purpose of a DAU review:

Health Status Report (HSR)

- Physician
- Psychologist or Psychological Associate
- Ophthalmologist or Optometrist
- Registered Nurse in the Extended Class

Activities of Daily Living Index (ADLI)

- Physician
- Psychologist or Psychological Associate
- Ophthalmologist or Optometrist
- Registered Nurse in the Extended Class or Registered Nurse
- Occupational Therapist or Physiotherapist
- Audiologist or Speech Language Pathologist
- Chiropractor
- Social Worker (OMCSS, 2013b, p. 4).

The listed professions are all to some extent based on the medical model both in theory and practice. Despite this commonality in praxis, an important distinction among them is the variable of occupational prestige. Shortell (1974) states that “the prestige accorded a particular health occupation acts as a sensitizing influence affecting the

behaviour of present and future role occupants and those with whom they interact” (p. 1). This means that how prestigious a profession is perceived has a tangible influence on how problems are perceived by both professionals and their service recipients. This discourse analysis argues that in the ODSP verification process, applicant’s problems are assessed in accordance with the medical model. This model has an internal professional hierarchy where medical doctors are afforded the highest level of prestige (Shortell, 1974). The influence of occupational prestige can also be seen to be replicated in the text through semiotic analysis (e.g. word composition and structure), of the policy. The physician is placed at the top of both lists. This can be seen as a representation of how the text is influenced by social perceptions of medical doctors as an authority on the diagnosis of disability not only internally within the medical model, but also externally since this policy directive is a social policy document. Bywaters (1986) states the following regarding this hierarchy of professions:

It is argued that medicine has devalued the contributions to health made by other workers such as midwives, nurses or social workers who are seen as ancillary, essentially secondary rather than equal sources of health provision. Alternative sources of knowledge are actively discouraged by medicine even when concerned with health problems to which medicine has only limited answers, such as cystitis, pain control or the treatment of some forms of cancer (p. 668-669).

This hierarchy has seen some changes over the years to include a more interprofessional approach and is reflected in this policy directive by relying on many professionals to be eligible for conducting assessments. Namely, the interprofessional

approach has deconstructed the medical profession to become only one perspective amongst many rather than the only perspective considered to hold value. Bleakley (2013) explains how this deconstruction is primarily a result of other helping professions such as nursing and social work advocating for perspectives outside of the traditional medical model to be considered during interprofessional discussions. Nonetheless, these instances of interprofessionalism advocacy still contend with the hierarchy and prestige that, according to Kathan-Selck and Marjolein (2011), continues to hold firmly in today's medical profession.

Disability is not only a medical concern and as such, directives such as this can help to prioritize certain perspectives that discount a full account of the experiences and perspectives of the disabled community and different helping professions. It can also be noted that the location of social workers, for example, is at the very bottom of eligible assessors in this directive suggesting a discourse of social welfare being less of a primary focus than that of the medical discourse. It is these subtle discourse manifestations that normalize a medicalized approach to understanding and perceiving disability that are propagated through social policy and social processes. Fairclough (2005) calls this an instance of intertextuality which "can only be investigated in terms of relations between processes (and events) and the networks of practices and associated orders of discourse which mediate the relation between process and structure" (p. 920). The process in this scenario is the review of applications and the structure is the medical model. The mediating variable can be said to be the ODSP staff and how they implement the directives listed in the policy. This is an important level of analysis to possibly enact change through training or exposure to other models of defining disability

other than the medical model for ODSP staff. The seemingly inconsequential listing and ordering of professions eligible for verification of disability thereby becomes much more revealing in terms of what discourses are propagated through the DAU assessment.

With regard to an order of discourse analysis, this policy shares many similarities with Policy Directive 1.1. The discourse now established as being medical, the style is very much the same across the two policies (i.e. binary; procedural). The genre is however a bit more comprehensive in this policy. Whereas in Policy Directive 1.1 there was a more direct relationship between ODSP staff, applicants, and the DAU, the DAU (i.e. assessment) policy directive involves several other sources of information and verification that have their own unique order of discourse. For example, Policy Directive 1.2 lists the following sources of information explicitly mentioned in the policy directive that can be relied upon and accessed by the DAU to help verify information provided by the applicant. This can have a negative effect on their application by making the application process very difficult to navigate. Applicants can be refused based on a technicality rendering them ineligible based on many other variables that are not made explicit on the application form while being so in the policy directive:

- Ontario Works
- Social Benefits Tribunal
- Canadian Pension Plan Disability Benefits
- Quebec Pension Plan Disability Benefits
- Old Age Security
- Developmental Services Act
- Provincial Psychiatric Hospital

- Centre for Addiction and Mental Health
- Homewood Health Centre
- Homes for Special Care Act
- Services and Supports to Promote the Social Inclusion of Persons with Developmental Disabilities Act
- Children's Aid Society
- Continued Care and Support for Youth
- Child and Family Services Act
- Correctional facilities
- Divested Psychiatric Hospitals
- Substance abuse recovery home (OMCSS, 2013b).

This exhaustive list includes many different potential discourses, organizations and legislation that have an effect on the DAU process. In essence, the more involvement an applicant has with medical, legal, or social service systems, the more characterized they are by their involvement and the less they are able to identify themselves on their own terms. It is of importance to contrast it against Policy Directive 1.1 where the focus is on the individual and their financial eligibility which enables the possibility of a transfer to the DAU verification process. Therefore, the genre of this policy is again not in any way focused on the individual based on their own narrative despite more variety in the sources of information captured. It is only interested in how the applicant is defined or narrated by other discourses by verifying with organizations that help to create an identity of the applicant for the purposes of the application. To further substantiate this interpretation of the policy primarily viewing the client from an alternate viewpoint other

than the individual applicant's point of view, in the Health Status Report package, a self-report that accompanies the DDP is the only document that is optional. This positions the applicant's narrative or self-identification as an additional or ancillary variable but not central to the evaluation by the DAU. As put forward by Beresford and Croft (2001) and reflected by this policy, this is not a framework that seeks to benefit the applicants and their validation of experiences:

This whole process can be seen as one as much concerned with extraction, that is to say, data gathering from service users, as one of empowerment, that is to say, increasing their personal and political power. While the aim may be to make change, control remains with the service system (p. 296).

Employment Supports Policy Directive 2.1 - Program Eligibility

This policy touches on the connection that ODSP has to the economy of Ontario and provides insight as to how the program is influenced by and propagates a larger neoliberal economic discourse. Under an order of discourse analysis, the focus of the policy places this under economic, or more specifically, labour discourse. The mention of competitive employment and labour market underlines that this policy is framed on the concept of neoliberal economic discourse. Genre and style are once again in conformity with the previous policies. Yet, the inclusion of labour discourse creates a different genre (e.g. social interaction) between ODSP staff and applicants and is represented in the following text:

As a condition of program eligibility, applicants must intend to and be able to prepare for, obtain and maintain competitive employment. Service providers will work with clients in order to identify a competitive employment goal,

disability-related employment barriers, as well as an action plan identifying the supports required in order to achieve the competitive employment goal (Ontario Ministry of Community and Social Services [OMCSS], 2006, p. 6).

This frames the eligibility process for Employment Supports to focus on the applicant being able to fulfill the service agreement between ODSP and the service provider (e.g. employer) rather than on the quality of life of the applicant. The genre in the policy is therefore an interaction based on establishing suitability and contribution to the competitive labour market. In doing so, it is a form of regulation and surveillance as much as it is controlling aspect in the labour market potential of a vulnerable demographic:

The emphasis is on compulsion rather than voluntarism, sanctions rather than incentives, and individualized obligations rather than collective rights. Understood in this way, workfare encapsulates the transnational restructuring of social and labour market policy towards work activation, employability-based programming and market-tested welfare provision (Herd, Mitchell, & Lightman, 2005, p. 75).

The program is also open to individuals who are not currently in receipt of ODSP funding but must also have a disability verified in the same manner as an applicant to ODSP:

A person does not have to be in receipt of ODSP Income Support to be eligible for ODSP Employment Supports. All applicants must provide documentation that he/she:

- has a disability/impairment that results in substantial barriers to employment that is verified by a prescribed professional (excluding people with disabilities receiving ODSP Income Support) (OMCSS, 2006, p. 1).

To its credit, this element changes the style of the policy from the others in that it is inclusive of individuals who have a disability (albeit, under the same definition scheme required in the Income Support program) but affords them the ability to potentially contribute to the social economy. It is an instance of treating the disability demographic as potentially productive members of society and shares many of the same principles that are forced on OW applicants but are voluntary under ODSP (see Maki, 2011 and Herd, Mitchell, and Lightman, 2006). Nonetheless, it then opens them up to a new social construction which is rather similar to the discourses of the OW program. This parallel OW program which is often described as a “workfare” program has a more explicit neoliberal economic focus. ODSP on the other hand, is touted as an assistance plan for the deserving (Beatty, 1999). And so the binary is highlighted to divide between the deserving poor who are incapable of working at the expense of their debilitating disability status on the one hand, or on the other hand, fully functioning members of society that are seeking assistance but must work hard for it in order to deserve it. Vick (2012) believes that this inability to live in-between these classifications, or at least not be recognized as such, runs counter to validating and accepting a large segment of the disabled community:

The way disability is embodied or “lived-in” is not universal and is often antithetical to its construction within social policy. Since the experience of

disability is physically, socially, and contextually variable, no one definition fits across all circumstances or is even desirable and achievable (p. 42).

This policy directive provides evidence of distinguishing between who is eligible to receive access to employment while adhering to a neoliberal economic discourse creating problems and disincentives for those who apply.

Connection to Theory

These three directives share commonalities that reflect the framework of organizational consistency in both genre and style. There are some variations and minute inconsistencies in their discourse representation that make the order of discourse analysis a rich source of information to provide an expansion on these inconsistencies and tensions to developing social policy reform.

Organizational structure. The directives provide a clear picture of the consistency found across the policies in the discourses used for organizational structure. With the focus placed on economic stability and fiscal responsibility from different Ministries (see Appendix for flow chart), it can be argued that changes to the structure of the government is one of the most difficult places to propose reform. Regardless of whether it is the most socially just system, it is already implemented. It is not so much about changing the system as a whole. It really becomes more about how to rearrange the existing system and show proof that it works to satisfy the economic stability and financial stability that is currently driving the organizational structure of ODSP. Based on the analysis of policy directives, it appears that change in organizational structure is a political matter which relies on legislative changes and sound knowledge of neoliberal economic principles. There is not enough information in this analysis to quantify how

much influence the OMHLTC has over the OMCSS or vice-versa to determine which organizational structure is the best target to implement changes to the ODSP processes. All that is derived from this analysis is that they share similar discourse values. Further analysis on their relationship may find more discourse tensions to serve as the basis for future changes to the ODSP application process and organizational structure.

Social process. The best finding in the directive analysis that identifies possibility for change is the discretion that ODSP staff have over the application process and the tensions found between discourses. These are areas that can change the application process, for example, through staff training at a more pragmatic level and interprofessional discourse education for changes at the more theoretical level. Going back to Fairclough's notion of social process being tied in to social structure, social change will come from developing a multi-layered approach that focuses on each part of an order of discourse that links theory and practice at each step in development and implementation. Ultimately, it seems clear that focusing on social processes is more realistic in terms of enacting change than is seeking structural change if the focus is to empower ODSP applicants on their own terms.

Although there are many discourses, it's evident that some discourses influence the composition of the text in these policy directives and their ability to define concepts such as disability (e.g. medical model and medical professions) more than others. The focus of this discourse analysis is not necessarily about developing and changing a policy or policy directives so that it includes everybody. It is more about moving away from a binary that places a stigma on one group over another. In fact, it is not even the binary that is the problem, but rather the class system it sets up of having deserving and

undeserving groups that possesses the greatest harm to society, specifically to those who are branded as undeserving.

The following discussion of these tensions will show how these inconsistencies can be capitalized on for beneficial improvement, as well as show the interaction between structure and process and what the day to day impact is on those living with disabilities. It is not positioned to be a policy analysis per se (e.g. better goal attainment through policy) but instead provide more discussion on how discourse awareness can facilitate better accommodation and focus on the demographic it is designed to serve.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusions

Discussion

Despite the findings that this paper uncovers, the real progress and benefit for policy development through discourse analysis is how it can ultimately help people. As an advocate of marginalized groups in the mental health sector, there are many problems that can be seen on the front lines. The analysis in this paper shows some new interpretations that help connect policy with the structures and processes that many people with disabilities have to face in order to receive funding. The Income Security Advocacy Centre (ISAC) was one of the starting points for this paper and helped position my analysis. A report they released illustrates the connection of the application process to the findings in this paper's analysis. For example, throughout the application process, there are no built in supports for the completion of the financial eligibility process or the submission of documents for verification by the DAU and DPP (ISAC, 2003). This is seen in the discourse analysis findings since it is highlighted that organizational involvement and responsibility is only initiated when an applicant completes all the submission requirements, but no responsibility is assumed by ODSP staff throughout the process. ISAC explicitly states that "the complexity of the package, the lack of any resources to provide support to applicants or even to reasonably accommodate the very disabilities that underlie the program, make the program least accessible to those who are most vulnerable" (2003, p. 11). One area of partial disagreement towards this statement would be in accommodating disability from a human rights perspective. The findings showed that compliance with the Ontario Human Rights Code did get mentioned and therefore included in the application process via

Policy Directive 1.1. Save for this exception however, the application process is not conducive to a streamlined relationship between applicants and ODSP staff that addresses common elements that delay the process (e.g. incomplete forms or packages). In other words, the policies attempt to promote efficacy but do not facilitate it. This is significant since these delays prevent access to finances. The report by ISAC does address a problematic issue with the application and review process that has real implications on the lived experiences of those living with mental illness. As a result, many applicants are dependent on their families, if they have family support in the first place, causing possible financial and emotional stress on families and challenges the perceived sense of autonomy for the applicant (Krupa et al., 2012).

The definition of disability and employability using the orders of discourse found in the policy directives is problematic. It is primarily based on the medical model as well as administrative discourse that is inherent in the neoliberal economic model. This helps to negate the benefits that could be given to applicants not classified as deserving, or eligible, if a more social model were to be used. The social model need not replace the medical model or the administrative models entirely as they serve a purpose in their own regard by providing a systematic application process, but an organizational system that is comprehensive in representing the people they are designed to assist is a more viable structure that includes a variety of discourses and strategic policies (Matthews, 2004). In fact, it is considered “inappropriate - even incorrect – to equate disability with unemployability” (Caledon Institute, 2003, p. 9) which argues in favour of removing disincentives that categorize so broadly between who is capable or incapable based primarily on a medical diagnosis. This connection between disability and employability

does not take into account episodic disabilities which are deemed ineligible for ODSP funding. These types of disabilities deny the possibility for people to be accepted into the program specifically because they do not conform to the medical model and its definition of disability:

Since persons with episodic disabilities are neither always well nor always sick, as they move between periods of health and illness, they fit in no standardized categories as they attempt to qualify for benefits. They must continually defend the contested credibility of their volatile bodies and situations (Lightman, Vick, Herd, & Mitchell, 2009, para. 3).

This does a disservice to a large majority of the disabled community as they become penalized for possibly having some capabilities to succeed in competitive employment with the caveat of requiring some assistance in times of need. Therefore, the social model would be of benefit in this scenario since they would be accommodated to work while still being categorized as “disabled” and continue to be eligible for benefits without the imposition of being forced to work under the OW structure of eligibility requirements. Although the administrative and surveillance functions that are found in OW are still found in ODSP to some extent, this ability to be accepted into ODSP at least helps to alleviate the social stigma of “deserving” the assistance which lessens some of the hardship that OW recipients face at all stages of engagement with the social welfare system (Beatty, 1999; Maki, 2011).

An important discussion point for this paper is the role that social workers play in social welfare and, more specifically, the application process for ODSP. The social construction of ODSP recipients is very much linked with the social construction of

social workers (Bullock, 2004; Stainton, 2002). The precarious position that is constructed for and experienced by social assistance applicants is also to some extent experienced vicariously by social work professionals (Bullock, 2004). Epstein (1970) provides a social-structural explanation of how organizational structure and professionalization plays into the social justice efforts of social welfare programs and services. The findings of Epstein's study suggest "that constraints against social worker radicalism are more powerfully exerted at the upper reaches of social work organizations" (1970, p. 128). This creates tension between the adherences that a social worker has towards a particular discourse depending on where they rank in the hierarchy of the organization. Since social workers are afforded the ability to fill out a form found in the Activities of Daily Living package for ODSP applicants, social workers have some say in how ODSP applicants are perceived by the DAU. Epstein (1970) posits that the more power social workers have the less radical they appear to become. The effect of power dynamics over the perceived ability to enact change is still relevant in today's modern social work practice. Sakamoto and Pitner (2005) speak about the effect that certain tensions between discourses and theoretical positions can have on the perceived power of the social work profession. For example, given the uncertainties about what constitutes oppression in theoretical frameworks such as anti-oppressive practice (AOP), it is difficult for social workers to know how to balance organizational procedure with that of social justice principles. This can lead to feelings of powerlessness since there is no bridge between theory and practice. Powerlessness can "ultimately lead to apathy on the part of the practitioner" (Sakamoto & Pitner, 2005, p. 438). In other words, social workers find it easier to perform neoliberal functions and

reflect on their actions later, which amounts to personal reflection but no real systemic change. Therefore, the power of social workers is not in their opposition to the system but rather in being able to uphold it. This is also seen in the tension that comes from social service organizations receiving funding from OMCSS that rewards adherence to neoliberal benchmarks and is essentially internalized by social workers in those organizations despite a desire of front line staff to be more responsive to the needs of their clients (Bullock, 2004).

To better understand how social workers are involved in social assistance, it is of value to look at where social workers are placed with regard to governing bodies responsible for shaping the landscape of social welfare in Ontario. Largely, social workers are afforded low value seen by the low level of political priority and by funding cuts to social programs (Beresford & Croft, 2001). But there are other ways to enact change which are tied to the involvement in policy based initiatives and social program development at the provincial level. One central source of governance in the social service sector is the LHIN. Using the LHIN Board members list (LIHN, 2014) for all areas represented in Ontario, the findings showed only 3 members that identified as social workers from a total of 95 members representing all 14 regional Boards. They were Tina Copenance (North West LHIN), Uzo Anucha (Central LHIN), and Cathy Farrell (North West LHIN). Other areas of professional and academic backgrounds represented by the Boards were psychology, medicine, law, nursing, engineering, business administration and finance, journalism, public administration, education, military, police enforcement, forestry, human resources, and project management. It is readily apparent by the composition of these Boards that social justice principles can be

argued to be overshadowed by financial, medical, and legal discourses. The aim in this analysis is not to detract from the importance of these variables in the management of health sector services, but to show the social positions that social workers take up in a sector that is primarily targeted as a destination for their professional employment and what this means for policy development.

However, even if more social workers were found in these positions, evidence suggests that there may not actually be a push for radical changes since these positions can be classified as very conservative even if the holder of that position may not be (Epstein, 1970). This presents a challenge when attempting to seek social justice reforms in an environment that appears relatively opposed to such changes (i.e. OMCSS funded organizations).

In an effort to assist a marginalized community, social workers are afforded with the ability to interpret the needs of social assistance recipients and navigate the social welfare system as best it can to find viable, albeit, pre-configured solutions.

Drazenovich (2004) shows the importance of this concept by stating the following:

If we are to speak meaningfully to the experience of people with serious mental illness, we must be engaged with them in the community in order to more deeply understand their experience that is not always articulated in ways and forms that are immediately intelligible to us (p. 5).

These communication problems are apparent in the interpretation that is undertaken by ODSP staff (e.g. assessment categories for program eligibility). An interpretation of these needs that fits the prevailing systemic structure is also problematic as it is filtered through what funding bodies see as presumed agents of the state (i.e. social workers)

that are positioned by their organization to help people for whom the system is not intended to assist but rather to control (Maki, 2011; Stainton, 2002). Therefore, social workers are never fully trusted by the system as they are advocates of marginalized social groups, and they are also not fully trusted by marginalized populations because they are also regarded as representatives of the state. Stainton (2002) argues that the balance between program funding and loyalty to social justice principles is a constant dilemma that is at the core of the social work profession. It affects the capacity for change that social workers believe they possess while navigating a system that is perceived to be inflexible and paternalistic in its application (Maki, 2011). Even the way that the profession identifies itself can be a point of contention, such as the definition of competency in the field (Wolpin, 2001), which adds to the level of frustration and lack of cohesion to be able to unite for social justice goals.

There are efforts made by social work discourses (i.e. anti-poverty; anti-oppressive) to provide more inclusion in the representation of social assistance recipients by including their voice with less interpretation by social workers. Yet, this has been re-appropriated by organizational structure like the medical discourse and administrative discourse of ODSP to assist the organization more than it has helped applicants. ODSP staff have been constructed as a valuable connection to establish trust with clients and thus be able to divulge information that is used by ODSP to further justify legitimacy and regulation of programs based on a neoliberal economic model of analysis. Beresford (2001) explains this concept with the following:

The welfare service system has shown a remarkable capacity to resist the demands of its users as expressed through consultation and conventional

schemes for involvement, but there are also broader constraints that limit the say disabled people and other service users have over support services. Central among these is finance. For most service users, political emphasis on value for money, best value and restricting public expenditure means budget-driven rather than needs-led or rights-led services, with chronic problems of underfunding and cuts in services (p. 297).

Although in principle, social workers are mandated to provide services that support social assistance recipients, the overwhelming dependence on government funding by social work agencies restricts and re-appropriates the interaction between social workers and service users. It diminishes their capability to adhere to social justice based practices so and constructs them, first and foremost, to be agents of social control and fiscal responsibility.

The real question stemming from this analysis is how policy changes can be made. Several reports have addressed this issue and have advocated for policies to be more inclusive of the population they interact with. For example, the Caledon Institute of Social Policy (2009) has emphasized the need for collaboration among stakeholders to provide continued evaluation to assess policy implementation using a variety of metrics. The problem in using only a few key discourses comes from being limited by these discourses that devalue many types of possibly enriching perspectives. A report from the Institute underlines a key factor in a collaborative model for policy development:

When innovating within a complex system, it is difficult to understand the ramifications of changes. The dynamics of a complex system have a high degree of connectivity and interdependence. There are diverse elements

whose interactions create unpredictable, emergent results (Caledon Institute, 2009, E5, para. 2).

This paper's analysis is a step towards refining the concepts and definitions embedded in ODSP processes for greater clarity and connection to other discourses and perspectives. This enhances the ability to create awareness of the effect that discourse, policies, and social processes have on different groups in society. While this may not build consensus, it does give a voice to demographics that are often times unheard and overlooked. Joshee (2007) states how the interdependence of social policies is a way to capitalize on the areas that are not explicitly governed by text (e.g. mediating variables). As such, since ODSP staff are often times the mediating variable between policy directives and policy implementation, ODSP staff training is a possible source of intervention to help change the discourses that are propagated. This is an area where social workers could potentially take the lead by collaborating with various stakeholders for program development and training.

Policies are not only reformed at the levels most commonly associated with change (i.e. politics, legislation) but should also be used on the front lines. Another report from the Caledon Institute (Torjman, 1997) emphasizes the need for short, medium, and long term goals to target the multiple areas of associated with policy implementation. This goal setting framework, alongside input from a variety of stakeholders has been a step forward in working towards a more inclusive social welfare system in Ontario (Matthews, 2004).

More research is needed in uncovering the policy development process of government agencies. There appears to be very little literature on the discussions held

at the OMCSS policy division and the content of those discussions. Although there are policies available to be analyzed as was done in this study, there is not enough access to documents that outline the meetings where policy directives are actually developed. Of course there are issues of confidentiality, but there is a strong consensus that more transparency and accountability is required to better address inconsistencies and perceived flaws in the social welfare system in Ontario.

Conclusion

Social welfare is a broad and expansive topic that is contextualized by variables that are constantly changing. These changes however are not random occurrences. They appear to be very calculated and deliberate and have the ability to become naturalized to the point that they are presumed to be a natural order of social structures and processes. What the literature shows, and this analysis reiterates, is that more focus needs to be placed on revealing assumptions that allow social processes that are unjust to continue and be considered acceptable by most of society. Problems need to be identified by more than a select few especially if their construction of a problem has strong implications for the lived experiences of a vulnerable demographic. It is very much an issue of changing policies. However, policies are just as much constituted by as they are constitutive which means that these policies support a system that is considered valuable by some segment of society. There is just as much potential to have other segments of society advocated for through policies and inclusion of experiential knowledge. Although my goal was to write a research paper advocating for a marginalized group, I realized that government policies are a body of work that could take up an entire lifetime to be involved with and includes all members of society.

Hopefully, I would like to take the knowledge acquired in this paper and complement it by working with members of marginalized communities to develop a policy reform platform and use it to enact organizational and political change for the benefit of the community as a whole.

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