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Social citizenship and social psychology.

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Abstract

This paper outlines the concept of social citizenship, which was first theorised in the late 1940s alongside the creation of the UK welfare state, and concerns citizens' rights to a basic income and standard of living. It suggests that social citizenship – particularly welfare provision – is a useful and important topic for social psychological research, albeit one that has been largely overlooked. We provide an overview of key developments in social citizenship, and consider the impact of 30-plus years of neoliberal governance in Western democracies, which has resulted in ongoing changes to how welfare rights and responsibilities are configured, such as policies that make social citizenship rights contingent on conduct. We outline social scientific work that examines these shifting ideas of citizenship, personhood, welfare and conditionality, and make the case for a critical discursive psychological approach, which we illustrate with a brief empirical example. We suggest that critical discursive social psychology is particularly well placed to examine how psychological assumptions are built into both policy and lay discourse, and how these can legitimate interventions designed to work on the conduct of the unemployed, such as therapeutic and behaviour change initiatives. Finally, we argue that psychology is faced with a choice: while there are opportunities for the discipline to contribute to the design and implementation of such initiatives, to do so requires accepting the basic values of the underpinning neoliberal agenda. Instead, it is vital to place these assumptions under the critical microscope and explore how they work to obscure structural disadvantage.

Keywords: Citizenship, Discursive psychology, Neoliberalism, Social citizenship, Welfare

In the past 20 years, social psychology has increasingly engaged with citizenship as a topic, contributing useful insights into how people both understand and perform citizenship in various contexts. However, such approaches have largely concentrated on political and civil citizenship, overlooking the social dimension (Gibson, Crossland & Hamilton, 2018). This paper makes the case for social citizenship as a useful and important topic for social psychological research, and outlines work done in this area to date from outside the discipline. Given the increasing moves towards the psychologization of welfare and social citizenship, we argue that a social psychological approach based on critical discursive psychology has a particularly important contribution to make. The increasing prominence of welfare policies that emphasise individual behaviour, and which make social citizenship rights contingent on ‘normative’ conduct, offers opportunities for social psychologists who are willing to embrace agendas such as behaviour change, and the broader set of neoliberal values which underpin these (Cromby & Willis, 2013; Thomas, 2016). By contrast, we will suggest that a critical discursive social psychology should place these agendas and values under the critical microscope, and highlight the contingent way in which psychological assumptions are built into both policy and lay discourse.

To begin with we will provide an overview of key developments in social citizenship, before moving on to outline the potential of an approach influenced by critical discursive psychology, which we will illustrate by way of a brief empirical example. Our discussion focuses on the UK context, but the general issues raised around psychologization can, in principle, be explored in relation to other cultural contexts, particularly given the extent to which similar trends in the development of social citizenship can be identified elsewhere (Handler, 2004; Humpage, 2014; 2015; Peck & Tickell, 2002).

What is social citizenship?

Citizenship in general, and social citizenship more particularly, is a contested idea and an agreed definition is elusive if not impossible (Condor, 2011; Dwyer, 2000). At its most basic, citizenship is concerned with the relationship between individuals and the communities they live in, particularly the state.

Conceptualisations of social citizenship are widely recognised as being based on principles developed from T.H. Marshall's (1950/1992) seminal 1949 lecture 'Citizenship and Social Class', where he first outlined three interrelated dimensions of citizenship: civil, political and social. The civil dimension of citizenship concerns rights to individual freedom (e.g. freedom of speech), the political dimension involves rights to political participation (e.g. voting), and the social dimension involves rights to a basic standard of living (e.g. a basic income). Marshall proposed that these forms of citizenship emerged in Western nation-states in the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries respectively, alongside major changes in social institutions and the material conditions of people's lives (Dwyer, 2000; Humpage, 2014). For example, the US 'welfare state' was instigated in the 1930s in response to the miseries of the Great Depression, which was caused by stock market gambling and an unfettered free market economy (Yergin & Stanislaw, 2002). Similarly, Marshall's ideas took shape at the beginning of what we now know as the 'welfare state' in the UK, the creation of which was instigated by the Beveridge report of 1942. Between 1944 and 1948 laws were passed to raise the school leaving age to 15, create the National Health Service, and to expand national insurance. These reforms were underpinned by Keynesian economics, a radical new approach that promoted increased state spending as the best way to keep the economy afloat as well as improve citizens' living conditions in terms of rights to education,

health, housing and relief from the effects of unemployment (Revi, 2014). Marshall (1950/1992) argued that these rights were necessary to facilitate full participation in society, and to transcend the inequalities associated with capitalism and class structure, by emphasising equality of status and opportunity. Marshall's idea of citizenship can be usefully seen as an attempt to fuse ideas associated with liberal and communitarian forms of citizenship. Liberalism, speaking generally, involves a conceptualisation of citizenship as a status or set of rights that does not have to be 'earned', while communitarianism conceives of it as a responsibility, involving contribution and virtue. Marshall's idea involves an attempt to combine the emphasis on individualism inherent in liberalism with the encouragement of community coherence found in the communitarian tradition (Dwyer, 2010).

Marshall's concept of social citizenship has attracted criticism, most commonly for being based on an outdated, exclusionary, Anglocentric, white, able-bodied, middle-class, male model. Feminist criticism of his work argues that it denies women substantive citizenship status as they are frequently engaged in unpaid 'caring' work in private rather than paid 'public' work (Lister, 1998; Morris, 1994; Young, 1989). It has also been problematized in terms of inclusion/exclusion for other groups, such as people with a disability (Oliver & Barnes, 2012), ethnic minorities (Dahrendorf, 1988) and people with a mental health diagnosis (Sayce, 2000). Dwyer (2000) argues that Marshall wrongly assumes a set of universal values shared by everyone in a community, evidenced by his statement that: 'Inequalities can be tolerated within a fundamentally egalitarian society' (Marshall, 1950/1992, p.44).

Lister (1998) argued that although this 'false universalism' of social citizenship was intended as a force for inclusion, it actually works to further exclude marginalised groups in practice. Both the liberal and communitarian traditions construct the citizen

as an abstract, disembodied individual, which serves to mask the degree to which ‘otherness’ – being female, black, disabled or poor – can exclude people from enjoying full citizenship (Lister, 1998).

Marshall’s (1950/1992) attempt to isolate the social element of citizenship from its political and economic context has also been criticised, as individuals and society coexist interdependently (Dwyer, 2000; Lister, 1998; Oliver & Heater, 1994).

Arguments for alternative ideas of citizenship have been proposed, such as economic citizenship – the right to work and responsibility to pay tax (Kessler-Harris, 2003); cultural citizenship, which involves rights related to language and sense-making (Turner, 1993); biological citizenship (Rose, 2009) and, in response to contemporary concerns, European, ecological and global citizenship (e.g. Dean, 2014; van Steenberg, 1994). Such fragmentation carries the danger of citizenship collapsing into a confusion of overlapping strands (Bulmer & Rees, 1996).

Marshall’s theorisation of the emergence of social citizenship has also attracted criticism, with Dean (2014) pointing out that the progression from civil to political and finally to social rights does not apply straightforwardly. Even within the same state, variations may be observed in the way in which rights were granted to different groups, such as the delayed granting of political rights to women. However, most scholars accept Marshall’s account of what social citizenship actually consists of. His description of social citizenship rights as those which allow people to “live the life of a civilised being according to the standards prevailing in the society” (1992, p.8) acknowledges that the normative expectations of what constitutes a basic level of welfare and security will vary between societies and over time. Marshall’s account of social citizenship, then, is flexible enough to allow an examination of the constantly changing, highly contested nature of how rights and needs are defined and met, which

particular rights and responsibilities may be privileged or contested in different contexts, and on what grounds.

Marshall's work maintains its status as the foundational text for studies of citizenship and social policy, and continues to inform social scientific approaches to citizenship (e.g. Dean & Melrose, 1999; Dwyer, 2000; Condor 2011; Gibson, 2009; 2011; Oliver and Heater, 1994; Roche, 1992; Turner, 1993). It has also been argued that social citizenship can supply a useful benchmark against which to measure the relative status of groups and individuals, and allow for the exploration of social divisions in a way that factors in other complex dimensions such as gender, class, disability and race (Dean 2004; Dwyer, 2010). However, the welfare state as Marshall knew it has seen enormous change in 30-plus years of neoliberal policies, which undermine many of the fundamental principles of social citizenship. In this context, Isin (2008) argued that it is vital to revisit social citizenship in the wake of neoliberalism, which has resulted in important ongoing changes in how the rights and responsibilities of social citizenship are configured.

Social citizenship and neoliberalism

The concept of neoliberalism has been criticised as overly vague, with different meanings that can be deployed for varying purposes (Dunn, 2017; Springer, 2012). However, as Cahill and Konings (2017) argue, it can serve as an entry point for examining contemporary political economy, and a recent definition by Peck, Brenner and Theodore (2018, p. 6) is useful for our purposes: "the ideology of neoliberalism is founded on an idealized vision of market rule and liberal freedoms, combining a utilitarian conception of market rationality and competitive individualism with deep antipathies to social redistribution and solidarity." The application of free-market

values to areas of life that had not hitherto been conceptualised in terms of market forces has led to the ‘responsibilisation’ of individual citizens (Clarke, 2005).

McGuigan (2016, p.117), among others, has argued that it has also impacted subjectivity by constructing a ‘preferred self’ of an enterprising, autonomous consumer.

Neoliberalism started to gain traction in Western industrialised nations from the 1970s onwards, when major economic changes such as rising unemployment, increasing inflation, more women in the workforce and globalisation led to the abandonment of Keynesian economics (Handler, 2004). There are debates about which factors were most influential in the cutbacks to the British welfare state from the late 1970s onwards, but Huber and Stephens (2001) suggest it was the high rate of unemployment and the accompanying realisation that this would be permanent. As Marshall’s model of social rights was based on the assumption of full employment, it has been suggested that social citizenship has been in crisis since that time (Dean & Melrose, 1999). However, many social scientists have used welfare – specifically the areas of provision, conditionality and membership – as a terrain to explore changing ideas about social citizenship (e.g. Dean, 2000; Dean & Melrose, 1999; Dwyer, 2000; 2004; 2010; Dwyer & Wright, 2014; Humpage, 2014; 2015; Taylor-Gooby, 2000; 2009; 2015). For example, accompanying the radical economic changes made by the Conservative government of the 1980s and 1990s (de-industrialisation, shifting production overseas and deregulation of the financial industry) was a construction of the ‘active citizen’ who is individually and socially responsible. Conditionality around social rights became increasingly important in this era, and the idea of ‘benefits dependency’ and the ‘underclass’ – a term referring to socially excluded citizens – started to grow (Deacon, 1994; Dean & Taylor-Gooby, 1992).

The New Labour government of 1997 ushered in ‘Third Way’ politics, characterised by four key themes: emphasising the centrality of paid work; downplaying Labour’s traditional focus on redistribution of income in favour of equality of opportunities; constructing the welfare state as active and preventative; and the balancing of rights with responsibilities (Powell, 1999). This was heavily influenced by the work of sociologist Anthony Giddens (1999), who argued for a new relationship between the individual and the community in which ‘no rights without responsibilities’ became the ‘prime motto’ (1999, p.66). In this era, Clarke (2005) argues, citizens were reframed as ‘empowered, activated and responsabilised’ (2005, p.447), reflecting the shift from thinking it is the government’s responsibility to ensure full employment to the idea that individuals bear the main responsibility to find and keep work. As a result, poverty and unemployment became more stigmatised (Clarke, 2005; Lister, 2002) and citizens were no longer seen as the bearers of rights but as consumers (Clarke, 2005; Humpage, 2014). As Tuffin, Morgan, Frewin and Jardine (2000) have argued, neoliberalism individualizes risk factors such as illness, poverty and unemployment.

This trend continued under the Coalition government of 2010 and the Conservative administrations of 2015 and 2017, particularly in the area of what Taylor-Gooby (2015) calls ‘new social risks’ (NSR) – services for low-income people, such as jobseekers’ allowance¹, tax credits and housing benefit. He argues that by targeting NSR services for dramatic cuts, despite them costing less (around 5 to 6% of GDP compared to 25% for ‘old social risk’ (OSR) services, which incorporate healthcare, pensions, education and disability benefits), the government has disproportionately affected women, children and low-paid people and created an increasing divide between provision of OSR and NSR services, with the latter being highly moralised by

political and media discourses. Taylor-Gooby (2015) regards NSR as having become central to the debate on the future of the welfare state, as public attitudes towards people claiming unemployment or disability benefit or people on low incomes are increasingly unsympathetic.

These changes were justified with reference to long-standing ideas concerning the creation of a dependency culture (e.g. Dean & Taylor-Gooby, 1992). For example, Prime Minister David Cameron introduced the 2011 Welfare Reform Bill with a speech which emphasised that, ‘The benefit system has created a benefit culture. It doesn’t just allow people to act irresponsibly, but often actively encourages them to do so’ (2011, p.1). In this reckoning, the safety net provided for people who are unable to work or find employment is reframed as actively *contributing* to unemployment and *creating* ‘irresponsible’ behaviour. Controversially, Perkins (2016) advanced this argument to an epigenetic level, outlining his theory that state benefits actively lead to an ‘employment resistant’ personality, and calling for reduced welfare payments to discourage un- or underemployed families from having children.

These years of reforms have been theorised by Peck and Tickell (2002) as two distinct periods of neoliberal policies, the ‘destructive’ roll-back years (1979 to 1999), where Keynesian social-collectivist institutions were discredited and destroyed, and the subsequent roll-out period, when neoliberal modes of governance were constructed and consolidated. Humpage (2014) suggests an addition of the roll-over ‘normalising’ period of neoliberalism, which resulted from the financial crash of 2007-2008 in which public attitudes were seen to fall in line with neoliberal agendas in some – but not all – policy areas. The result of these phases of neoliberalism is that social citizenship rights have become increasingly conditional on conduct, with paid employment being the key citizenship marker (Clarke, 2005; Humpage, 2014; Lister, 2002; Wiggan, 2012). Those

excluded from membership have been constructed as deficient and in need of rectification. This conditionality around welfare is now expanding to encompass disciplinary practices aimed at modifying psychological properties such as attitudes and personality traits (Friedli & Stearn, 2015).

The discipline of psychology is thus faced with a choice. Making citizenship contingent on conduct opens up possibilities for the discipline to contribute to initiatives aimed at monitoring and altering behaviour, yet to do so requires the acceptance of the basic premises of the underpinning neoliberal agenda. An alternative approach is to place these psychological assumptions under the critical microscope and to explore how they are woven into both the policies themselves and the more diffuse set of commonplace assumptions about social citizenship.

Overview of social citizenship research

Examining the dominant ideologies that shape these shifting ideas of personhood, citizenship, welfare and conditionality is essential. However, there is only a small body of empirical work that explores how the grand narratives of individualism and neoliberalism might appear in everyday discourse and what the implications of this are for how we make sense of ourselves and others. Most of this work has been done by academics in the fields of sociology, political science and social policy (For overviews see: Dean & Melrose, 1999; Dwyer, 2010; Humpage, 2014), much of it focusing on tracking public attitudes about welfare provision and conditionality using questionnaire data derived from closed questions. In a recent example, Humpage (2014) investigated citizens' attitudes to neoliberal policies using data from public attitude surveys and case studies from different Western countries. While early neoliberal reforms generally created an outcry and led to policy reversals in some areas, she found that this public

resistance lessened in the late 2000s, concluding that neoliberalism *has* shaped social values. Attitudes to social security and, to a lesser extent, redistribution, have hardened over time in all the countries.

Large-scale survey analyses have been complemented by qualitative research that has explored people's commonsense reasoning about matters of welfare and social citizenship. For example, Dwyer (2000) and Dean (2004; Dean & Melrose, 1999) have analysed interview and focus group data about welfare in the UK – specifically issues around conditionality and membership. This work has highlighted the extent to which ordinary discourse around welfare draws on competing ideas about social citizenship. However, rather than exploring how these tensions are debated and resolved by participants themselves, researchers have noted that 'popular discourse is usually chaotic and often contradictory' (Dean, 2004, p. 68), and attempted to reconstruct a more consistent position for their participants.

However, we suggest that these analytical assumptions and conclusions are open to question in terms of how they interpret the conflicting discourses of citizenship drawn on by participants. As Gibson (2011) argued, important aspects of human discursive consciousness are overlooked by theorising individuals as rational actors with internal consistency of mind, who take up or resist one of a number of available discourses. Rather than taking the presence of competing ideological themes as an indication of confusion and contradiction, and/or as a methodological problem to be overcome, Gibson argued for an approach informed by the ideological dilemmas perspective (Billig et al., 1988). This perspective theorises human thought as informed and enabled by contradictory discourses, and highlights the inherently dilemmatic nature of citizenship ideology (Condor & Gibson, 2007; Gibson, 2011). Rather than 'subscribing' to a single ideological position, we should expect to find that people in

their everyday reasoning and action draw on the competing themes of formal/intellectual ideologies.

This approach highlights the virtue of looking at what people are *doing* when they use conflicting ideologies of citizenship, such as the negotiation of one's own identity as a 'good' or 'successful' (as opposed to 'bad' or 'failing') citizen, and the construction of such identities for others (Clarke, 2005; McAvoy, 2009; Walkerdine, 2003). These insights have been developed most clearly by critical discursive psychologists, and whilst citizenship has not typically been a core concern within social psychology, the analytic lens of critical discursive psychology has recently begun to be used to explore the construction of citizenship and citizen identities.

A critical discursive social psychological approach to social citizenship

The small but growing engagement with citizenship in social psychology (for overviews, see Andreouli, 2019; Condor, 2011; Stevenson, Dixon, Hopkins, & Luyt, 2015; Xenitidou & Sapountzis, 2018), has, to date, paid relatively little attention to social citizenship. This is an interesting gap in the literature and one potential reason could be the academic division between sociology and psychology that arose in the early 20th century, which Stenner and Taylor (2008) argue resulted in sociology focusing on the social project of welfare, and psychology on individual 'wellbeing'. They call instead for a 'psychosocial' approach to welfare that merges the two, as the welfare state plays a fundamental role in constructing human subjectivity, and wellbeing cannot be fully considered outside the context of welfare. Indeed, as noted above, the discipline of psychology has become increasingly influential in informing welfare policies that now shape social citizenship rights and responsibilities. Recent examples in the UK include the 'behavioural change' initiatives used by government

social service contractors (Jones, Whitehead, & Pykett, 2011; Friedli & Stearn, 2015), the much-heralded rolling out of the Increasing Access to Psychological Therapies (IAPT) initiative (Department of Health and Social Care, 2007), offering free online cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) courses to jobseekers (HM Treasury, 2015), and the use of obligatory psychometric testing developed by positive psychologists in the US to 'nudge' benefits claimants into adopting attitudes that conform to neoliberal values, such as flexibility, independence, enterprise, competitiveness and individuality (Cromby & Willis, 2013).

We suggest that a critical discursive perspective is well placed to explore these matters. As Wetherell (1996) suggests, it makes little sense to theorise the individual outside of the social: 'In talking, people are constituting their social realities and collective cultures, manufacturing and constructing their lives, and are themselves manufactured as personalities and subjects in the process.' (1996, p. 281). The way we conceptualise the 'self' varies between cultures and over time, and Foucault (1976) accounts for this variation by showing how practices of the self are intimately tied to structures of power. The notion of 'governmentality' grew out of Foucault's ideas about power, and refers to the network of ideas, strategies and mechanisms through which various authorities (e.g. medical, governmental, economic) seek to act on the lives and behaviours of people (Rose, 1996). Discourses work to construct these regimes of knowledge and associated understandings of the world, and by actively operating within them, we come to understand ourselves and our social world in a particular way (McAvoy, 2009). However, this is not to suggest that people are simply the passive recipients of ideology. As Foucault (1984) suggested, discourses can also be potential sites for debate, resistance and alternative conceptions of 'reality', and Billig et al. (1988) contend that wrestling with the dilemmas conferred by competing

ideologies is a fundamental part of human thinking. However, analyses of this process in relation to social citizenship ideologies are rare, and there is thus limited exploration of how potentially competing ideological themes are reconciled and reproduced in discursive practice.

As we have seen, there is now a dominant neoliberal vocabulary with terms like *autonomy*, *choice*, *responsibility* and *enterprise* given a high political value. This works to impose a moral obligation on individuals to draw from the resources of the self, rather than the group or state (Andrade, 2014; Foucault, 1973; 1976; Miller, 1986; Rose, 1996). However, despite the growing body of work on governmentality and the small amount of social psychological work on social citizenship, there has been no explicit link made between the two that investigates how our understandings of social citizenship rights and responsibilities are shaped by current ideas about self and society. As Andreouli (2019) argues, analyses of citizenship often lack such a focus on everyday perspectives and practices of citizenship.

A critical discursive psychological approach to social citizenship is able to investigate the socially shared discursive resources that people use to talk about and make sense of their lives in relation to citizenship, welfare and conditionality. Certain constructions are generally more readily drawn on than others, indicating a cultural dominance of certain ways of seeing the world at any one time, and an associated moral hierarchy – what or who is seen as valued, and what or who is not (Edley, 2001). It also looks at discursive practices – what actions are carried out with talk around welfare rights and responsibilities. As our arguments are shaped by the material conditions of our lives and personal histories, as well as wider societal influences, this approach allows for a rich exploration that can also incorporate other complex factors such as class, gender, culture, ethnicity and even health status (McAvoy, 2009). Of the

small amount of discursive social psychological research that explicitly deals with social citizenship as a topic, Gibson, Crossland and Hamilton (2018) focus on the intersection of social citizenship and immigration. In their analysis of online comments about immigration, they found that issues around welfare were often invoked and a repertoire of ‘effortfulness’ was frequently used to negotiate debates about who was or wasn’t entitled to the status of full, competent citizen. Among the findings, the researchers identified a lay version of the ‘dependency culture’ argument (Dean & Taylor-Gooby, 1992; Wiggan, 2012) whereby people used the psychological constructs of laziness and unreliability to position a sub-group of British people as lacking the necessary psychological or moral resources in comparison to ‘hard-working’ immigrants. This builds on earlier work by Gibson (2009, 2011) who found ‘effortfulness’ to be frequently invoked when people were grappling with the dilemma between welfare as a citizenship right and the responsibility to contribute to society, reflecting the tensions between liberal and communitarian ideologies inherent in citizenship. As well as being used by policymakers, assumptions about the psychological can therefore be used to perform social actions in everyday discourse.

Similarly, in an analysis of interviews with officials responsible for the administration of applications for British citizenship, Andreouli and Dashtipour (2014) found contrasting ideas being drawn upon simultaneously. Specifically, participants could emphasise fairness for UK inhabitants on the one hand, versus the moral imperative to show compassion to asylum seekers on the other. These dilemmas were negotiated with a discourse of ‘earned’ citizenship – those deemed deserving were those who ‘put back into society’ (p. 106) through economic work and by fulfilling the moral obligation to be ‘proud’ of their new British citizenship.

Discursive analyses of media discourses and policy documents are also a fruitful area of social citizenship research, although they are often not explicitly framed as such. For example, Wiggan's (2012) analysis of the UK government's 2010 Green and White Papers on welfare reform found three linked themes: 'worklessness', which, he argues, serves to pathologise a lack of paid employment as both an individual failing and a societal phenomenon to be addressed; a 'culture of dependency' preventing people from taking up available work; and the rationality and necessity for punitive measures to reform welfare. More recently Goodman and Carr (2017) looked at how people involved in televised discussions concerning welfare mobilised discursive resources to frame arguments about entitlement to benefits. They found that people often drew on competing arguments that the world is both just and unjust, and that they frequently used just world arguments to legitimate social inequalities.

Such research is important in showing that citizenship identities are fluid and context-dependent, and draw on different ideologies of citizenship (Xenitidou & Sapountzis, 2018). By looking at how rights and duties are established and contested, it is possible to see what is achieved at an individual, relational and institutional level when ideas such as 'deserving' or 'undeserving' are used. The critical discursive approach also allows for an exploration of how subjectivities are constructed – how we understand ourselves as individuals – which, again, has an important contribution to make to the study of citizenship. In order to illustrate the potential contribution of this approach in more detail, we will conclude with an empirical example.

'People who can't be bothered': Using *effort* to resolve an ideological dilemma

As outlined by Wetherell (1998), critical discursive social psychology draws on multiple traditions in the analysis of discourse, ranging from the detailed micro-

To illustrate this in relation to social citizenship, we will consider an example from a study of young people's citizenship talk in which a sample of 14-16 year-olds took part in group interviews which covered a number of topics related to citizenship (for more details, see Gibson, 2011, 2015; Gibson & Hamilton, 2011, 2013). The following extract is from an interview with two 15-year-old female participants, who were given the pseudonyms Jo and Kelly, and is taken from a part of the interview in which the topic of employment rights and responsibilities are being discussed²:

- 1 I: Yeah (.) okay. Erm (.) and do you think everyone should
2 work?
3 Jo: Yeah cos I think it's like-
4 Kelly: Yeah. I think it's bet- it's better for like-
5 Jo: Everyone has their chances so I think they should take
6 that opportunity to like make their own money (.) and like
7 make their own way in life (.) rather than like living off (.) I
8 don't know. It sounds really harsh ((laughs)) but like
9 living off benefit or whatever.

- 10 I: No (.) that's fine. Erm (.) what about people who don't have
11 a job? What do you think about them? Do you think
12 that they should – obviously you said benefits (.) do you
13 think that they should be allowed support?
- 14 Jo: Well (.) yeah (.) but I think they should be able to like-
15 Kelly: If- if they have got something wrong with them which
16 means that they cannot physically work-
- 17 Jo: [Yeah (.) yeah.]
- 18 I: [Like disability?]
- 19 Jo: Yeah (.) then I can understand them getting benefits
20 [but if it's just people]=
- 21 Kelly: [Yeah definitely.]
- 22 Jo: =who can't be bothered to like (.) get up and work.
- 23 Kelly: Yeah (.) who are too lazy like.
- 24 Jo: Yeah.
- 25 Kelly: I think that's really wrong.

Here we see what Gibson (2009) described as the *effortfulness* repertoire being used to construct a rhetorical bottom-line (Potter, 1996) in arguments concerning who should and who should not be entitled to receive welfare benefits. In these interviews, terms such as 'laziness' and references to people who 'can't be bothered' were used to hold people accountable for their employment status, and concomitantly to characterise undeserving cases for the receipt of unemployment benefits. After a couple of false starts (lines 3-4), Jo takes the floor in response to the interviewer's question concerning the responsibility/obligation to work, and draws on norms of equal opportunities (lines

5: *Everyone has their chances*) and the desirability of self-sufficiency (line 6-7: *make their own money ... make their own way in life*). When it comes to formulating the object of unfavourable contrast with self-sufficiency, Jo's talk shows features commonly observed in talk about 'delicate' issues (e.g. van Dijk, 1984). After marking the beginning of the contrast she does not complete her utterance, instead disclaiming knowledge (line 7: *rather than like living off, I don't know*). Several authors have pointed out that the use of 'I don't know' performs important discursive business in 'delicate' talk (e.g. Edwards, 1995; Potter, 2004). As Wooffitt (2005, p. 121) suggests, such formulations 'can be used by speakers to display their uninterest in, or distance from, claims, opinions or descriptions which are in some way sensitive, or which may be taken as the basis for sceptical or negative inferences about them.' The meta-discursive comment on line 8 (*sounds really harsh*) functions to anticipate, and thereby to inoculate against, the subsequent utterance (and note the extreme case formulation [Pomerantz, 1986] *really* here). This is followed immediately by another indication of the sensitive nature of the topic – a short burst of laughter (Jefferson, 1984). When the phrase 'living off benefit' is eventually produced, it is done in such a way as to present it as being an example of a range of unspecified possible alternatives. The use of 'like' serves to distance Jo from the exact phrase 'living off benefit', and 'or whatever' performs similar work to what Jefferson (1990) has termed generalized list completers, in that it implies alternatives without the need to specify what these might be.

The interviewer's subsequent response (line 10: *No, that's fine*) orients to the markers of delicacy apparent in Jo's talk. Rather than immediately posing a challenge or providing a counter-argument, the interviewer instead orients to Jo as requiring reassurance that she may say things which sound 'really harsh'. Nevertheless, the interviewer does pursue Jo's reference to 'benefits' (lines 10-13), and after Jo begins to

respond but fails to complete her utterance, Kelly's turn on lines 15-16 begins the joint production of two contrasting *if-then* conditional statements which unpack the category of people who are 'living off benefit' by offering two contrasting script formulations (Edwards, 1995) for judging the legitimacy of benefit claimants. Kelly constructs a category of people who 'have got something wrong with them which means that they cannot physically work', which is glossed as 'disability' by the interviewer. Jo takes over on line 19 to produce the *then* component of the first conditional statement (*then I can understand them getting benefits*) and, on lines 20-22, produces the *if* component of the second conditional statement (*but if it's just people who can't be bothered to like, get up and work*). The use of *just* (see Lee, 1987) functions as an extreme case formulation here insofar as it constructs a category of people whose sole reason for not working is that they 'can't be bothered'. Also of note here is the use of the phrase 'get up', which implies that people are *sat down* or *lying down* and that not only can they 'not be bothered' to work, they cannot even be 'bothered' to raise themselves to their feet. The implications of this are made clear by Kelly when she glosses these people as 'too lazy' (line 23), before going on to complete the conditional statement (albeit without explicit use of *then*) on line 25 in the form of an evaluative statement, again articulated through the use of an ECF, of such people's claims to receive benefit (*I think that's really wrong*).

Of particular interest here is the way in which the terms 'can't be bothered' and 'lazy' function to apportion accountability in such a way as to avoid the problems which Jo encountered with her initial reference to people 'living off benefit'. Once they begin to unpack this category into legitimate and illegitimate benefit claimants, Jo and Kelly construct versions of canonical deserving and undeserving cases. Deserving cases are defined by their physical abilities (*they cannot physically work*), whereas the

undeserving cases are defined *by their psychology* – they are lazy and ‘can’t be bothered to ... get up and work’. In the former case individuals are not accountable for their situation and are thus entitled to support, whereas in the latter case individuals are held accountable and are thus not entitled to support.

We may note how these arguments parallel the assumptions of wider neoliberal discourses concerning welfare, and that the shifting cultural norms identified by authors such as Humpage (2014) are effectively drawn upon by these speakers in order to manage the delicate business of not seeming to appear too ‘harsh’. Thus the participants in this example not only assume the existence of a category of people who ‘can’t be bothered to ... get up and work’, but are also able to invoke this category in order to manage the interpersonal business of self-presentation in the local context of the interview setting. This can be understood as an example of Latour’s (1987) idea of *blackboxing* in which the factual status of some object or phenomenon is so taken for granted that it is able to be deployed in the pursuit of other ends. Here, those other ends are the management of a dilemma between the responsibility to reward effort, and the requirement to display compassion for those who have fallen on hard times. The straightforward mobilization of a category of persons characterized by their psychology exemplifies the extent to which this has become part of everyday commonsense beyond the language of policymakers.

Concluding remarks

Social citizenship has been the focus of much work in social policy, with analysts highlighting the extent to which social rights have increasingly come to be made contingent on conduct. As Rose (2000, p. 1406) has argued, in neoliberal regimes, welfare recipients have increasingly come to be ‘characterized as failures,

lacking personal skills and competencies'. Yet this focus on the broad sweep of policy has only rarely been matched by an attention to ordinary discourse. A perspective informed by critical discursive psychology enables us to see how people draw on the psychologised tropes of neoliberalism in order to manage dilemmas of commonsense. The psychological criterion of *effort* is mobilised in order to resolve a dilemma between the responsibility to contribute and the right to receive welfare payments when one is not able to contribute through no fault of one's own. Yet in drawing on psychologised understandings of welfare, not only are individualised explanations of unemployment and poverty assumed, but so the idea that people should be held accountable for their psychology is reproduced. In the absence of physical disability, people should be able to *make an effort*. If they cannot do this, then they can indeed be 'characterized as failures' and held to account. Such everyday ideologies underpin and legitimate a range of interventions designed to work on the conduct of the unemployed, such as the therapeutic and behaviour change initiatives described above. In a context which prioritises research 'impact', psychology – and psychologists – can see this as an opportunity and contribute to the design and delivery of such interventions. Yet this would be to neglect the structural disadvantage that is obscured by the focus on psychologised understandings of welfare. In developing a social psychology of social citizenship, we therefore need to go beyond psychology in order not to lose sight of the oppressive potential of a focus on the narrowly psychological.

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Endnotes

¹ Jobseekers' allowance is the benefit paid to unemployed people, provided that they can meet certain requirements around seeking employment. Indeed, the very name *jobseekers'* allowance makes clear that the payment is for people actively seeking employment.

² Transcription notation is based on Jefferson's (2004) conventions. A full stop in single parentheses indicates a brief pause; square brackets indicates talk in overlap; comments enclosed in double parentheses indicates comments from the transcriber; a question mark indicates questioning intonation, rather than a grammatical question as such; a full stop indicates stopping intonation; a dash indicates a sharp cut-off of the preceding sound; equals signs indicates that one turn latches onto the end of the previous turn.