The poverty of our century is unlike that of any other. It is not, as poverty was before, the result of natural scarcity, but of a set of priorities imposed upon the rest of the world by the rich. Consequently, the modern poor are not pitied . . . but written off as trash. The twentieth-century consumer economy has produced the first culture for which a beggar is a reminder of nothing.

~John Berger

University of Alberta

Outside the City Walls: The Construction of Poverty in Alberta's Income and Employment Supports Act

by

Birte Hannah Katherine Ruth Goa

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Examining Committee

Rhonda Breitkreuz, Human Ecology

Lisa Givens, Library and Information Studies

Arlene Oak, Human Ecology

To Mackenzie,

for your insistence on presence.

In Loving Memory of:

Daniel Soosay (March 24th, 1986 - March 10th, 2009) and

Curtis Ponecappo (August 16th, 1989 - March 10th, 2009)

Abstract

Considerable research has been done on conceptions of poverty and on the welfare state; however, there is little research into the relationship between the two – the ways in which poverty discourses shape welfare states and how transitions in welfare states influence poverty discourses. Using Critical Discourse Analysis, I explore the underlying construction of poverty in Alberta's income-support policy as it has developed within an active social policy framework. In the government documents analyzed, poverty is constructed as an objective and neutral assessment of unmet basic needs and is effectively removed from political debate. Also constructed as a lack of labour-market attachment, the poverty discourse that does exist is subsumed within the market discourse. The thesis argues that we need to expand our conceptions of poverty to improve our poverty alleviation strategies, to revitalize the place of social policy in Alberta, and to enrich the way in which we live together.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

> *Destitution, or imposed poverty, no doubt hurts, degrades and drives people into desperation. In many places, hunger and misery cry out to heaven…Yet poverty is also a myth, a construct and the invention of a particular civilization.*
>
> Majid Rahnema

Poverty as a concept continually shifts and changes to reflect the ways in which people come into poverty, the variety of experiences they face, and the socio-political contexts in which poverty is experienced. As destitution, hunger, and homelessness, poverty relates to physical and material needs. In the form of unemployment and underemployment, poverty is understood within the economic dimensions of life whereas exclusion through social, political and legal structures and processes situates poverty within the social sphere. Across all of these facets cuts a moral dimension as well: With whom does the responsibility for poverty lie? What claims can the poor make on the community? What, if any, action is necessitated by society? While many without any money do not consider themselves to be poor (Sahlins, 1972; Thekaekara, 1999), in Western welfare states people with greater material wealth than most people throughout history are considered to live in poverty (Beaudoin, 2007). Clearly, as noted above by Rahnema (1992), while poverty "hurts, degrades and drives people into desperation" it is also "a myth, a construct and the invention of a particular civilization" (p. 158). To suggest that poverty is a construct and an invention is not to minimize the suffering and deprivation – physical, social, political, or economic – of those living in poverty but, rather, to highlight the inherently political nature of poverty and of the shifting ways in which it is conceived.

Alcock (1993) contends that "poverty is a political concept" (p. 19). How we conceive of poverty is a political act in that how we define the issue determines to a large extent what we plan to 'do' about it (Alcock, 1993; Cheal, 1999; Deaton, 2006; Himmelfarb, 1984). More than simply descriptive, conceptions of poverty are prescriptive. For example, if we define poverty in terms of physical survival (food and shelter), we would alleviate poverty by providing food and shelter to those without. Policies and programs that provide for Christmas gifts to children in poverty, however, are working from a different conception of poverty than physical survival. In his

discussion of poverty lines, Deaton (2006) notes that where we set poverty lines has implications for redistribution policies thereby not only affecting the poor but the middle and upper classes, as well. Beyond these more tangible and concrete ways in which poverty constructs determine action, poverty discourses can be political in the ways in which they are constitutive. Social constructionism (Burr, 1995), critical theory (Audi, 1999; Connell, 2002) and many understandings of discourse (Alvesson & Karreman, 2000; Foucault, 1994; Mills, 2004) suggest that reality is socially and discursively constructed, that language is not simply a tool for communication but an important element in constructing the world in which we live. Fraser and Gordon (1994) base their work on the assumption that terms are not simply descriptors of social life but that they are active forces shaping it. "A crucial element of politics, then, is the struggle to define social reality" (Fraser & Gordon, 1994, p. 310). As such, combining directive and constitutive potential, constructions of poverty are deeply political; the ways in which poverty discourses manifest has significant implications for policy, programs, and for those constructed as poor.

In addition to the ways in which constructions of poverty are directive and constitutive, poverty definitions can also contribute to and reflect changing notions of the relationships between the state, the market, communities, families, and individuals. Esping-Andersen (1990) challenges the notion that welfare states are defined by social spending or through the institution of certain basic social policies. Instead, he argues that welfare states are defined by the ways in which states, markets and families interact. Social policy plays a key role in delineating these relationships and the ways in which they can change. Within this configuration of relationships, social policy, including poverty policy, is a significant way by which citizens' claims on the state are defined. The ways in which poverty is constructed within these policies impacts and reflects fundamental assumptions of welfare states and citizens' claims upon it. As poverty is redefined in social policy – whether to incite or justify certain actions, or as a factor in the renegotiation of the relationships between the state, the market, and families – we redefine our society, how we relate to each other as neighbours, and how we care for each other as a community.

Esping-Andersen (2002) suggests that after two fairly intense periods of reform in the late 19th century and then in the 1930s and 40s, the current Western welfare states have largely developed as elaborations on the post-war welfare state. Over the last several decades, however, many of the underlying assumptions of the post-war welfare state have

become obsolete, or at the very least are no longer suitable to today's society (Esping-Andersen, 2002; Jenson, 2004; Scott, 2005). The second demographic transition and changes in global economic structures and processes are two key areas affecting these changes.

Over the past several decades, changes in family formation and dissolution processes have been so thorough that many have dubbed them the "second demographic transition" (Juby & Le Bourdais, 2006). This theory suggests that changes in sexual norms and the easing of traditional expectations have altered long-established family-related behaviours creating new conventions around family formation and dissolution. These emerging conventions include: low fertility rates, declining rates of marriage coupled with an increase in cohabitation and childbearing out of wedlock, and increased rates of separation and divorce (Juby & Le Bourdais, 2006). Jenson (2004) expands and adds to this list noting that over the last half century in Canada:

> Birth rates have fallen by over half; divorces have increased by a factor of six; the incidence of lone-parent families has almost tripled; the proportion of women in the labour force has tripled; the share of the population over 65 has increased by 60 percent. (p. 14)

Unlike the social climate in which much of our current social policy was developed, family instability predominates in today's familial life. The set of issues requiring attention through social policy that have arisen from changing family structures and processes are clearly significantly different from those addressed by welfare state reformers of the post-war years.

Just as families have undergone drastic changes in the past several decades, the labour market has changed dramatically. Jenson (2004) attributes many of these changes to a combination of globalization, new technologies, and shifts in the international divisions of labour. Globalization and open economies, she argues, increase cost competition, especially in the area of salaries, and they increase fiscal competition amongst countries. Furthermore, new technologies and a change in international labour divisions have established a prominent and growing knowledge-based economy encouraging developed countries to expand knowledge-based work and the corollary service sector while leaving the manufacturing sector to developing (and generally low-wage) countries. The result is that standard production and low-skilled workers can no longer count on the market to provide secure and decently paid employment.

A rise in precarious (non-standard) employment in Canada can be linked to the nature of a growing service economy (Scott, 2005). The reduction of middle-management and well-paid factory positions has forced people to either move up into higher level (and better paid) employment or down into lower level (precarious) employment (Jenson, 2004). Non-standard/precarious employment is defined by many factors including: low-wages, part-time or seasonal work, fewer benefits, own account self-employed, and little room for advancement. While unemployment was the primary focus of anti-poverty policy in the post-war years, increasingly underemployment and inadequate wages are raised as significant poverty policy issues (O'Connor, 2000; Saunders, 2005; Vosko, Zukewich, & Cranford, 2003). Despite an increase in employment rates, employment is by no means a ticket out of poverty. Largely because of the increase in what is referred to as the 'working poor', Harris (1996) determined that employment was the *problem* and not the solution for lone mothers in poverty. Given these changing family and employment processes and the emerging social risks, there is broad consensus that we are in the midst of another welfare-state reform, and active debate as to the shape of the new social architecture is widespread (Banting, 2005; Esping-Andersen, 2002; Jenson, 2004; Scott, 2005).

In the English speaking countries of the Western welfare states, neo-liberal discourse dominated the policy debates of the 1980s and early 90s – a discourse framing the overriding goal of social policy to be one of retrenchment of the welfare state through policies limiting and reducing state spending and taxes (Breitkreuz, 2005; Jenson, 2004; White, 2003). Since the mid-1990s, however, a shift in the discourse has been noted, of which the British Labour's "Third Way" is a prime example (White, 2003). This shift in discourse acknowledges that "social policies are powerful tools" (OECD, 2005, p. 1) and challenges the implicit neo-liberal assumption that the pursuit of market interests and social justice are competing values (Navarro, 2002; Saint-Martin, 2004). Instead, a new recognition of how good social policy can enhance markets is emerging. Economic and social goals are increasingly being viewed as interdependent, particularly in the ways in which good social policy can contribute to the growing knowledge-based economy (Saint-Martin, 2004). As such, neo-liberal ideas of social policy as slowing and confounding the processes of the market are giving way to social policy being understood as a productive factor in the economy (Hartman, 2005; OECD, 2005; White, 2003).

With the emerging sense of policy as an economically productive factor and the still prevalent market-centered discourse of neo-liberalism, active social policy –

alternately called activation, social investment, and a significant element in British Labour's Third Way (Banting, 2005; Esping-Andersen, 2002; White, 2003) – is well-positioned for broad-based support in welfare states such as Canada. The general thrust of active social policy is to reduce the barriers experienced in securing employment in the labour market by disadvantaged and marginalized people (OECD, 2005). As such, it reframes the role of government from that of supporting individuals unable to make a living through the market to one of mediating the fit between the market and marginalized people; instead of supporting people to live with minimal labour market attachment, the government's role becomes that of supporting people to develop stronger labour market attachments. From an understanding of the labour market as the *producer* of risk and the role of social policy as providing a safety net for those who are marginalized through market processes, active social policy shifts this understanding to the labour market being the *solution* for those marginalized because of poverty (White, 2003). In the words of Saint-Martin (2000), social policy is reconfigured from being a safety net for those affected by the uncertainties of the market to a trampoline to insert the poor and marginalized into the labour market (as cited in White, 2003).

Activation focuses on training and otherwise increasing the capacities of unemployed and underemployed people with the goal of improving their ability to adapt to a changing labour market (Banting, 2005; Knijn, Martin, & Millar, 2007; OECD, 2005). Within this policy framework, security no longer refers to protection *from* market disruptions but is understood as the capacity to change and adapt *to* these market fluctuations (Banting, 2005). Dominating much of the social policy discourse across the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and embraced in Canada (Banting, 2005), active social policy redirects the welfare state's attention from wealth redistribution to supporting people in overcoming barriers to work through education, labour, tax and employment policy (OECD, 2005). In their focus on increasing the labour market attachment of welfare recipients, welfare-to-work policies figure prominently in the implementation of active social policy.

In Canada, the federal policy shift which replaced the Canada Assistance Plan (CAP) with the Canada Health and Social Transfer (CHST) in 1996 removed the requirement that social assistance be provided without work requirements. Welfare-to-work policies which had been present since the 1970s were now able to be developed with fewer restrictions (Gorlick & Brethour, 1998; Peck, 2001). In Alberta, the Income and Employment Supports Act (IESA) was proclaimed in 2003 replacing seven pieces of

legislation including the Social Development Act, the Widows' Pension Act, and the Income Support Recovery Act (Alberta Work, 2004; Government of Alberta, 2003). Administered through Alberta Works in the Ministry of Employment and Immigration[1] (E&I), the IESA legislates Alberta's Income-Support Program as well as Employment and Training Services, Health Benefits, and Child Support Services. This new legislation reflects the logic of active social policy in its programs and in the discourse used to speak of it.

Research Problem

As a departure from Leonard Marsh's social protection welfare state of the post-war era, welfare-to-work programs, as outlined by policies such as the IESA, are indicative of a new type of welfare state based on active social policy. Shifting the focus from protection from the market to protection in the market, active social policy signifies a significant break with the past. In this shift, the solutions presented for dealing with poverty relate to increasing the labour market attachment of the poor (Banting, 2005; White, 2003). What conceptions of poverty are driving this prescription? What definitions of poverty are defining labour market attachment as the solution? The purpose of this research project is to unveil the ways in which poverty is constructed in Alberta's Income and Employment Supports Act (IESA) and related materials. Given the primary role this legislation plays in the lives of Albertans living in poverty, the IESA and related documents are key elements in the construction and legitimization of underlying concepts of poverty in the shift to active social policy in Alberta.

Organization of Thesis

This thesis is organized as follows. In chapter two I first review the literature relating to various conceptions of poverty. Reviewing the standard conceptualizations of absolute and relative poverty takes us into a discussion of Sen's capabilities approach as an alternate way to conceive of and measure poverty. Then, moving away from conceptions relating directly to empirical measurements, I elaborate on poverty conceived as material, economic, social, and moral. From this broad overview of poverty

[1] Over the time period under consideration in this research (2002-2008) the Ministry overseeing the IESA changed several times. At the time of its implementation (2004), the IESA was administered through the Ministry of Human Resources and Employment (HRE). In 2007, under a new premier, Ed Stelmach, the Ministry of Employment, Immigration & Industry (EII) was created and oversaw the IESA. The Ministry shifted again in 2008 to the Ministry of Employment & Immigration (E&I). Throughout this thesis, in referring to a particular statement or time period, I use the name of the Ministry of that time. When I speak of the Ministry in general terms encompassing the entirety of time from which documents were collected, I use the most recent name, the Ministry of Employment & Immigration (E&I).

conceptions, I move to a review of key transitions in Canadian constructions of poverty. I identify three primary transitions in Canada since the late nineteenth century: industrialization, the birth of the Canadian welfare state and welfare reform. Through this discussion I expose some gaps in how poverty conceptions are addressed within the context of welfare reform and show how this research fills some of these gaps. Chapter two concludes with an explication of the theoretical frameworks which inform this study: human ecology theory and critical theory. Chapter three addresses the methodology of critical discourse analysis followed by the methods I used for sampling, data collection, analysis and ensuring rigour. Chapters four and five discuss the findings. Chapter four focuses on the conception of poverty found in the data and its relative absence in the discourse while chapter five explores the relationship between income support and the labour market. Concluding with chapter six, I bring the discussion back to a consideration of poverty as a political concept and the implications of a conceptualization of poverty which consists of basic needs and labour-market attachment as the core dimensions.

CHAPTER TWO: PERSPECTIVES IN THE LITERATURE

The literature in the area of poverty is unending; causes, effects, strategies, and measurement of poverty are just a few areas in which encyclopaedias could be written. The vast majority of this literature, however, takes for granted constructions that relate poverty to income, food, shelter, and health. Historically, however, the array of circumstances listed under the umbrella of poverty was extended far beyond these categories to include a range of dimensions, many of which did not relate to the materialities of life and which did not oppose poverty with wealth. Rahnema (1992) argues that, with the rise of globalization and the dominance of neo-liberal ideology, multi-faceted understandings of poverty are being squeezed into a narrow construct supporting "the needs of a certain 'economy', a certain idea of poverty, and a particular category of consumers and tax payers whose rights and interests should be protected" (Rahnema, 1992, p.165). As such, we need to examine current social policy changes not only from an outcomes perspective but also through an analysis of the underpinning constructs of poverty and the ways in which these constructs serve global economic and political systems; in looking at conceptualizations of poverty, it is equally important to examine how they have been narrowed and what they leave out. In this literature review, I explore a variety of ways in which poverty can be constructed and three significant transitions in Canada's poverty discourses focusing on the province of Alberta.

This chapter is organized as follows. First, I begin with the literature on conceptualizations of poverty. I explore absolute and relative conceptualizations as well as the capabilities approach. In addition to these standard conceptualizations related to the empirical measurement of poverty, I also explicate material, economic, social, and moral conceptualizations. Second, I look at three key transitions in conceptions of poverty in Canada including industrialization, the birth of the welfare state, and welfare reform. I then summarize and identify gaps in the literature. Finally, I outline my theoretical lens, drawn from human ecological theory and critical theory, to highlight the relationships between poverty, policy and everyday life and to frame the methodological discussion in the next chapter.

Conceptualizing Poverty

Poverty as a term can initially seem relatively straight forward to define: poverty describes the man on the street who just asked me for change. But, is he poor because he does not have enough to eat to sustain himself? Or because he does not have the South

African Merlot that I just bought to go with dinner? Or, for any number of other reasons? Concepts of poverty can range from the denotation of material deprivation to economic position to social status and can be understood as absolute or relative (Spicker, 2007). Furthermore, people living in poverty are regarded anywhere from morally suspect to morally superior (Rahnema, 1992; Tévoédjrè, 1979). Mollat (1986) and Rahnema (1992) refer to the many numbers of words used to denote poverty. In Persian, for example, there are more than 30 words used to refer to those who are perceived to be poor (Rahnema, 1992). Mollat limits his inquiry to the West and states that until the 13th century only the Latin word *pauper* was used. In the 13th and 14th centuries, however, the vernacular languages picked up and diversified the term. Mollat further notes how the words used to denote poverty or to describe one living in poverty shifted and changed throughout the next several hundred years: "Though rather difficult to trace in all its complexity, this process of semantic change continued up to the sixteenth century at an ever accelerating pace closely correlated with the development of pauperism itself" (p. 2). Mollat does not elaborate on what happens in the sixteenth century; however, many authors comment on continuing shifts in the nature and conception of poverty with the advent of the industrial revolution and later with the process of globalization (Alcock, 1993; Rahnema, 1992; Tévoédjrè, 1979).

Conceptions of poverty (each of which is defined and elaborated on in the following section) are also linked to the political environment in which they are developed. For example, where absolute understandings of poverty result in targeted and modest programs, relative conceptions support broader and more generous programs (Williamson & Reutter, 1999). While policy developed using absolute measures of poverty ensure the physical sustenance of people living in poverty, policy using a relative conception of poverty has the potential to support the participation of society's members on levels beyond the physical and into the social and political spheres. Using a capabilities approach as the measure of a community's well-being turns this potential into the standard.

Due to their close relation to the empirical measurement of poverty, the distinction between absolute and relative poverty dominates most of the literature. Over the last couple of decades, however, the capabilities approach has been carving out a place for itself within this discourse. Although less explicitly, poverty as relating to material deprivation, economic position, social status, and as a moral dimension is also present in the literature within and beyond these discussions of absolute, relative, and

capabilities poverty. In this section, I explore these primary ways in which poverty is conceptualized in the literature. I begin with the more prominent conceptualizations – absolute, relative, and capabilities – and then move to other, less explicitly articulated although equally present, conceptualizations – the material, economic, social, and moral dimensions. Although presented distinctly these seven dimensions of poverty overlap in numerous and significant ways. To ensure a rich understanding of how poverty is constructed these dimensions need to be taken together. Indeed, the spaces in which these dimensions interact are often the most interesting.

Conceptualizations and Measurement – Absolute, Relative, and Capabilities Poverty

As mentioned previously, a key distinction in conceptions of poverty is the distinction made between absolute and relative understandings. Where absolute understandings of poverty focus on the most basic physical needs of people, such as food, clothing, and shelter, relative conceptions situate poverty within their cultural and historical contexts and extend into the social and political realms as well as the physical. In the last couple of decades, the capabilities approach advocated by Amartya Sen (Clark, 2006) uses capability and functioning as the measure of a community's well-being and turns the capacity for relative conceptions to deal with the social and political spheres into the standard (Sen, 2006). I outline each of these conceptions in the sections that follow.

Poverty as Absolute

Also referred to as extreme poverty, complete destitution, and subsistence poverty (Alcock, 1993; Beaudoin, 2007), absolute poverty primarily relates to the material dimensions of life, to what is often described as basic needs – i.e., food, water, shelter, and clothing (Spicker, 2007; see also Alcock, 1993; Beaudoin, 2007; Deaton, 2006; Glennester, 2002; Sarlo, 2001; Williamson & Reutter, 1999). In many absolute conceptions, poverty is understood to be a state of deprivation so extreme as to not be able to sustain life (Alcock, 1993; Deaton, 2006). Premised on the positivist assumptions that there is an objective threshold below which people are poor, absolute poverty lines are determined by calculating the very minimal physical necessities required to maintain life, largely food. The United States' poverty line is generally considered to be based on an absolute conception of poverty as it is largely determined by assessing how much it would cost to maintain basic nutritional needs (Beaudoin, 2007; Williamson & Reutter, 1999). Some absolute poverty measures have gone so far as to count caloric intake to determine poverty lines (Deaton, 2006). Alcock (1993) raises the question: if only people living below the level of subsistence required to maintain life are considered poor, how

do the poor maintain life? The answer given is that they are only able to survive for a very short period of time before they either move out of poverty or die. While the United States is the only example of an absolute poverty line in the developed world (Williamson & Reutter, 1999), the United Nations' $1/day measure for developing nations (Alcock, 1993) and the World Bank's $1/day for the least developed countries, $2/day for Latin America, and $4/day for the transitional economies of eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union (Townsend, 2000) are further examples of absolute conceptions of poverty.

Poverty as Relative

Engel's Law, based on observations by Ernst Engel in 1857, states that as countries develop and individuals become better off, fewer resources are expended to secure food, thereby freeing up resources for other consumption and activities; in short, "economic growth makes it increasingly difficult to think of poverty *entirely* in terms of food" (Deaton, 2006, p. 5). Moving away from definitions rooted in nutritional needs opens up greater space for relative conceptions of poverty; when the majority of people's resources no longer go to securing food, the definition of poverty shifts as well. Instead of defining poverty in terms of survival, relative conceptions define poverty in relation to others in society; poverty is thus "socially defined" (Spicker, 2007). As a result, relative poverty conceptions "shift[] the spotlight from minimums to averages" (Beaudoin, 2007); instead of establishing a bare minimum, relative poverty looks to the cultural and societal average, to what is accepted in a given context (Alcock, 1993; Deaton, 2006; National Council of Welfare, 2006; Spicker, 2007; Williamson & Reutter, 1999). In this shift from 'minimums to averages', relative poverty conceptions also shift the spotlight from survival to participation (Beaudoin, 2007; Deaton, 2006; Williamson & Reutter, 1999). While relative conceptions of poverty can be used within the material and economic spheres they also extend notions of poverty into the social and political realms. "Relative poverty prevent[s] people from participating in activities which [are] customary in the society in which they live[]" (Alcock, 1993). As such, relative poverty is concerned with psychological and social well-being as well as physical (Alcock, 1993; Williamson & Reutter, 1999); while basic needs may be met, for those at the bottom many social expectations remain out of reach. These social expectations are different across cultures and over time and thus, poverty, when understood as relative, is continually shifting in how it is defined (National Council of Welfare, 2006; Spicker, 2007).

Capabilities Approach

Sen, a Nobel Prize winner in the economic sciences, has worked on the development of a third way of conceptualizing poverty within the empirical measurement discourse, that of the capability to function. His conception of poverty in relation to capabilities and functioning stems from a critique of income measurements. Sen's (2006) critique is rooted in the concern that income measurement is inadequate in measuring the extent to which poverty may pervade society. He argues that income measures are not sufficient to understand the complexities of social relations that exist in any given social context. "Economic data cannot be interpreted without the necessary sociological understanding" (Sen, 2006, p.45). He reframes the question from one of income or consumption to one of functioning:

> Whereas income is merely one of the *means* of good living, we have reason enough to look directly at the quality of life that people are able to lead, and the freedom they enjoy to live the way they would like. If life consists of various things that people are able to do or be (such as being able to live long, to be in good health, to be able to read and write, and so on), then it is the capability to function that has to be put at the center stage of assessment. (Sen, 2006, p. 34)

Consistent with relative conceptions of poverty, Sen (2006) articulates the importance of spheres outside of the economic in recognizing that "life consists of various things…" (p. 34). He calls for 'capability to function' to be the primary measure of well-being instead of income. Although relative conceptions allow for the social and political in conceptions of poverty, Sen (2006) takes it a step further and sets the ground for policy to guarantee social and political as well as physical considerations in conceiving of poverty.

Nussbaum (2006) correlates the capabilities approach with human rights: "capabilities, I would argue, are very closely linked to rights, but the language of capabilities gives important precision and supplementation to the language of rights" (p. 52). She argues that to secure a right requires corresponding action to ensure that the right can be exercised. She juxtaposes the capabilities approach with the neo-liberal concept of 'negative liberty' where rights are largely defined by the state's guarantee not to impede. Unlike negative liberty, the capabilities approach requires that rights are supported actively in policy. "[The capabilities approach] makes it clear that securing a right to someone requires more than the absence of negative state action" (p. 55). Using capabilities as a primary way of conceptualizing poverty shifts the policy focus from a lack of intervention to a requirement that the government intervene. "In short, thinking in

terms of capability gives us a benchmark as we think about what it is really to secure a right to someone. It makes clear that this involves affirmative material and institutional support, not simply a failure to impede" (Nussbaum, 2006, p. 53-54).

Material, Economic, Social, and Moral Conceptions of Poverty

While absolute, relative, and capability conceptions of poverty elucidate certain dimensions of poverty they cut across several others. Due to their prevalence in the literature, these conceptions are important to understand; however, there are other, and in some cases, more nuanced understandings as well. For example, relative poverty does not necessarily distinguish between the different kinds of poverty it may describe, only that it is measured in relation to the rest of society. Spicker (2007) suggests that "over time some of the most influential writers in the field have come to think that [the distinction between absolute and relative concepts] is not as crucial to the debate as they used to believe" (p.12). Although these three conceptions (as outlined previously) are critical ways in which poverty is conceived, they also conflate and diffuse other dimensions of poverty such as material need, economic circumstances, social position, and the moral dimension. These dimensions are also identified in the literature and I expand on them in this section.

Poverty as Material Need

Conceptualizing poverty as material deprivation locates poverty in the physical sphere. For this reason, absolute conceptions and material conceptions of poverty are closely connected. Material conceptions, however, are slightly more expansive than absolute in that they are often but not solely concerned with a minimum. Poverty as material need generally refers to 'basic needs', to food, water, shelter and clothing. While most authors do not refer directly to poverty as material need, the concept is adopted broadly. Deaton (2006) and Sarlo (2001) refer to poverty as a lack of consumption; Townsend (2000) talks of material deprivation and standard of living; Spicker (2007) also refers to standard of living as well as to specific needs and patterns of deprivation; Williamson and Reutter (1999) and Beaudoin (2007) discuss food, shelter, and clothing; and Rowntree (as cited in Townsend, 2000) refers to the "human needs of the worker" (p. 11) as the measure by which to set minimum wages. In discussing material needs Burman (1996) takes a step back from individuals and discusses the importance of infrastructure to ensure the material well-being of people, including water and sewage systems and technological infrastructure necessary for health care.

While absolute conceptions of poverty relate to the material dimension by definition, material need can be understood beyond an absolute conception and within the relative conception of poverty. In *The Wealth of Nations* (1776) Adam Smith talks of poverty in such terms:

> By necessaries, I understand not only the commodities which are indispensably necessary for the support of life but whatever the custom of the country renders it indecent for creditable people, even of the lowest order, to be without. A linen shirt, for example, is strictly speaking not a necessity of life…but in the present time…a creditable day labourer would be ashamed to appear in public without a linen shirt. (Smith as cited in Alcock, 1993, p. 59)

A linen shirt is a material need and yet its possession is a relative and not absolute need.

In Canada, several social planning and research agencies including Sarlo (2001) from the Fraser Institute advocate for a conception of poverty positioned within the material needs dimension (National Council of Welfare, 1999; Ross, Scott, & Smith, 2000). This approach is often referred to as a market-basket approach or, in the case of the Fraser Institute, a basic-needs approach. Focusing on consumption as the primary indicator of poverty, this approach is situated within a materialist understanding of poverty. For example, the Fraser Institute's basic-needs approach assesses the material needs necessary to sustain life in Canada. The Fraser Institute has calculated what they have deemed to be the minimum requirements, including things such as shelter, food and clothing expenses. Consistent with this approach to assessing poverty, they advocate for a consumption-based instead of income-based measurement, arguing that consumption is more closely related to material well-being than income (Sarlo, 2001). Income, the most widely used measure of poverty is more closely related to the economic dimensions of life, to which I now turn.

Poverty as Economic Circumstances

Within the economic dimension, there are two noticeable trends in the literature. The first conceptualizes poverty in relation to resources, most notably income, while the second refers to the relationship between the poor and the economic structures and processes of society. In this section I address each of these trends.

Resources. This first trend in conceptualizing poverty as a lack of resources is one of the most common conceptualizations of poverty. While material need refers directly to material deprivation, an economic conception of poverty of this nature refers to one's access to resources which in turn provides access to material, social, or political

well-being. With the term resources often referring to income, poverty is regularly defined solely in economic terms: people are poor because they fall below the (income-based) poverty line. The equation of poverty with income level is evident even in the language used around poverty; commonly the term 'low-income' is used synonymously with or even replaces the term 'poor.' People are poor because they do not have sufficient income, not because they are hungry or homeless.

Townsend (2000) challenges the almost exclusive focus on income and argues for a broader conception of resources to be used in the assessment of poverty. And, he is not alone in critiquing this focus on income; the critique of the ways in which this dimension is used to understand poverty is widespread. Several of these critiques serve as springboards and frameworks for the presentation of alternatives, including Sen's capabilities approach. Within this discussion, a great deal of attention is given to the question of whether income is an adequate space within which to define poverty. Sen (2006), Segal and Peck (2006), Deaton (2006), and Sarlo (2001) all critique the excess use of income as a means of understanding poverty. They would all concur with Townsend's (2000) assessment that "income is given a role that it cannot perform. It is too blithely assumed that income is easier to measure than poverty, and that the level of cash income in particular gives a good approximation of standard of living" (p. 14). With standard of living relating to the material needs dimension (Spicker, 2007), we see a common conflation of material need and economic circumstances, one of the key targets of critique. The economic dimension is used as a measure of whether or not people are experiencing material poverty as opposed to being a conception of poverty in its own right. Many of the critiques revolve around this conflation of the two dimensions.

Sarlo (2001) suggests that income is not an adequate way in which to conceive of poverty because people's available resources are not necessarily reflected through income measures alone; material well-being and income are not necessarily correlated. He gives the example of students whose network of resources is significantly greater than their income would suggest. Conversely, one could argue that what may appear to be an adequate income can easily be insufficient to meet even basic needs if other resources are absent; for example, when out-of-pocket medical expenses exceed the available disposable income. Like Sarlo (2001), Sen (2006) uses a critique of the income-based conceptions of poverty to frame his capabilities approach. Again his critique largely results from the inadequacy of the economic dimension to conceptualize and measure other dimensions of poverty. His challenge however is not with the conflation of material

and economic dimension but of the conflation of the economic with the socio-political. Instead of being concerned with material or economic well-being, Sen shifts the discussion to the 'capability to function' and questions whether or not income is the appropriate space within which to measure such a conception: "it is also necessary to ask whether the space of incomes, despite its relevance, can really be the appropriate informational basis for assessing *equity and social justice in general*" (Sen, 2006, p. 34).

Deaton's (2006) critique centers on the individualizing effect such a conception has: "if we confine ourselves to income-based measures, we risk missing important features of poverty" (p. 10). An example Deaton gives is the fact that by raising taxes incomes are reduced; however, depending on how tax money is spent it could effectively reduce poverty. Likewise, economic growth which benefits the wealthy can in fact reduce the accessibility of essential services and goods for the poor meaning that an increase in individual wealth can generate poverty for the community at large. For example, wealth accumulating to a few can drive up the cost of housing, while the majority who do not experience any increase in wealth are left with less disposable income as a result of more of their income flowing to housing. As Burman (1996) argues under the material needs section, Deaton (2006) makes it clear that poverty cannot be conceptualized in a purely individualistic way. Rather, the infrastructure and services available in the community contribute to the levels of poverty and the distribution of wealth is at least as important as the quantity when assessing poverty levels.

Relationship to economic structures and processes. The second trend in the literature relating to poverty as economic circumstance is more directly related to the economic dimension as such (and not a conflation of other dimensions) and has to do with the relationship between people and the structures and processes of the economy. Spicker (2007) talks of this relationship under the term economic class. Within this category he discusses Marx's understanding of economic class as referring to the relationship between people and the means of production. In today's literature a similar concept exists but it refers to the relationship between people and the labour market, commonly referred to as 'labour-market attachment' (Jones & Riddell, 1999; Peck, 2001). In the modern world, conceptions of poverty often center on this relationship between individuals and the formal economy.

Within the formal economy, Spicker (2007) outlines three classes vulnerable to poverty, whose relationship to the labour market puts them at risk of having a low-income. The first are those who are dependent on government benefits; this group has

some income and is thereby able to participate on the consumption side of the formal market, but are not participants in the formal labour market. The second class consists of those who are insecurely attached to the labour market, those who are engaged in waged labour through the formal economy but who have little job security. This class is not necessarily working at a low wage (such as people working in Alberta's tar sands) although it is not uncommon for insecure jobs and low pay to go together. The position of the third class is called 'sub-employment' and refers to those who are attached to the labour market but only marginally. This class is primarily composed of migrant workers, single parents, disabled people, and low-skilled workers. Spicker's (2007) outline of poverty conceived as one's relationship to the formal economy through labour market attachment is also addressed in the active social policy and welfare-to-work literature (Baker & Tippin, 1999; Banting, 2005; Breitkreuz, 2005; Jenson, 2004; O'Connor, 2000; Saint-Martin, 2004; White, 2003) and will be further explicated in the policy section below.

Poverty as Social Position

Poverty as social position covers an array of conceptions of poverty many of which are intertwined with relative conceptions and the capabilities approach. Social conceptions, like relative and capabilities conceptions, focus on how people are able or unable to participate and to function in society. A key marker of poverty when informed by social conceptions is "the inability to participate in the usual social exchanges of society" (Townsend as cited in Burman, 1996). Beaudoin (2007) expands on this notion by talking of poverty as the absence of choice:

> Poverty is thus much more than just a dearth of material goods. It is the inability to participate actively in life, from attaining the educational levels that optimize career choices, to acquiring both time and income to engage in various common leisure activities. It is also the absence of political freedom, personal security, dignity, and self-respect. (p. 6)

Throughout Europe in the early middle ages, the pauper was opposed to the *potens*, to the powerful, and not to the rich (Mollat, 1986; Rahnema, 1992). Poverty was not conceived as a lack of material wealth but as a lack of social status, privilege and power. Understandings of poverty through a social lens draw upon this tradition. "Poverty, for many, refers to the position of the lowest class, people who lack status, power and opportunities available to others" (Spicker, 2007, p. 4). While a number of elements within the social conception of poverty have been addressed under relative

conceptions and the capabilities approach, dependency is a key element within social conceptualizations that has not yet been addressed.

Dependency. A long-standing conceptualization of poverty has been that of dependency, more specifically, dependence on the state for income and other supports (Spicker, 2007). Sociologist Georg Simmel argues that the term 'poverty' has developed to refer specifically to those dependent on government support and not more generally to all low-income people or communities. This conflation is particularly evident in popular media (Spicker, 2007). O'Connor (2000) argues that much of the welfare-to-work policy that has been developed in the past decade is also premised on this conflation of poverty and dependency. Critiques of income support programs are commonly centered on this association particularly focusing on what is referred to as a culture of dependency. However, there are many challenges to this conception of poverty and to the negative association dependency conjures generally (Breitkreuz, 2005; Fraser & Gordon, 1994).

Fraser and Gordon (1994) trace the concept of dependency through the history of the United States' welfare state. They argue that dependence is an ideological term and differentiate between acceptable and unacceptable dependence. Acceptable dependence, for example, is found between a husband and a wife where the husband depends on his wife for food, maintaining the home, and raising the kids, or on his employer for a job; whereas the dependence of a single mother on the state is considered unacceptable. They further trace the progression of the individualization of dependency where independence was historically considered to be very rare and dependence considered within a social context where many people were considered to be dependent. More recently, however, dependency has been individualized and stripped of the social context, pathologizing dependence as an individual trait to be treated; "naming the problems of poor, solo-mother families as *dependency* tends to make them appear to be individual problems, as much moral and psychological as economic" (Fraser & Gordon, 1994, p. 311).

While dependency is commonly associated with poverty in the modern world (Spicker, 2007), historically there are many instances in which poverty is associated with freedom and independence (Tévoédjrè, 1979). In speaking of the Romans, Tévoédjrè quotes Bossuet: "Poverty was no evil for them. On the contrary, they regarded it as a means of keeping their freedom more intact, for they held nothing freer, nothing more independent than a man who could live on little" (p. 5). More recently, in Senate hearings on the confirmation of Rockefeller as Vice-President of the United States, the Senate's

main concern was his wealth and how it would compromise his independence (Nouwen, 1976).

Like with dependency, social conceptions of poverty more generally are not always negative. Although most often associated with powerlessness and a degraded status in the community, in some contexts, poverty can be understood as a status symbol. Several authors (Rahnema, 1992; Sahlins, 1972; and, Tévoédjrè, 1979) refer to traditions and conceptions of poverty that view poverty as an elevated position as opposed to one of degradation. Sahlins references the *Kansa-Osage*:

> The chiefs and candidates for public preferment render themselves popular by their disinterestedness and poverty. Whenever any extraordinary success attends them in the acquisition of property, it is only for the benefit of their meritorious adherents, for they distribute it with a profuse liberality, and pride themselves in being esteemed the poorest man in the community. (p. 255)

Likewise, in the caste system of India, the highest caste, carrying with it the greatest status, is that of priest, of Brahman. Brahmans, however do not live off of inherited wealth or trade but through the alms of others (Dumont, 1970). This is possible not because of any institutionally based care of the priests but because of the socially constructed nature of their poverty, because of the communal value attributed to it. The priests' poverty is individual; however, because of the value placed on it, it is carried communally but without any institutional or organizational structures.

Moral Dimensions of Poverty

Within the moral dimension of poverty there are two primary categories found in poverty discourses: the moral character of the poor, and poverty as requiring a response – poverty as a challenge to the moral character of the rest of society. Cutting across the other dimensions, moral conceptions highlight slightly different ways in which societies conceive of poverty and the relationship between those who are poor and the rest of society.

Moral character of the poor. Most commonly in this conceptualization, the responsibility for poverty is placed on the shoulders of those who are poor. These arguments assume that poverty results from a lack of moral character, or from behavioural characteristics or individual traits of the poor (such as dependency) (Spicker, 2007). In discussing modern families, Cheal (1999) notes that as modern society brings about a number of changes, so too the family has adjusted through continual innovation and accommodation. Poverty, then, suggests Cheal, is perceived to result from a family's

failure to innovate and accommodate in the appropriate ways. With individuals, as well, poverty is often seen as a failure to adapt, as the result of some kind of lack, deficiency, or moral failing with people living in poverty. Perceptions of the poor are often centered on ideas of laziness and incompetence. These charges levied in an industrial, economically driven society are equivalent to charges of sinfulness accounting for a fall into poverty in other times.

However, there are also long-standing traditions which view poverty as an essential element in increasing one's moral character. In championing poverty as an elevating and ennobling position, both Tévoédjrè (1979) and Rahnema (1992) make a clear distinction between poverty and destitution particularly in moral terms. Tévoédjrè acknowledges that:

> It is distasteful to hear well-fed people extolling the virtues of peoples that suffer from poverty. Poverty, when it destroys the flesh and the spirit, is no creator of positive values. Periods of want, famine and restrictions, though they call forth gestures of solidarity, also give rise to the worst forms of exploitation…I have no desire to confuse adversity that degrades with adversity that ennobles. (p. 10)

With this understanding, however, Tévoédjrè and Rahnema contend that poverty need not be considered a societal ill and that, in some cases, poverty can provide the path towards more sustainable and life-giving societies.

Poverty as requiring a response. In a slightly different vein, Alcock (1993) and Spicker (2007) consider poverty as a moral concept not so much because of how it can impute moral judgments on those who live in poverty but because of how our conceptions determine our response to poverty in general and to those we meet who are living in poverty. Spicker (2007) suggests that to define someone as poor is qualitatively different from, for example, saying that she is thirty-five years old or a mother or an animal lover. To designate someone as poor is more than a descriptor, it is to imply that something ought to be done about it. In this dimension, poverty is not about the moral character of those living in poverty but instead challenges the moral character of the wealthy, powerful, and the general population who do not live in poverty – of society as a whole. To a large degree, this conceptualization provides the basis for the welfare state: "this solidarity among strangers…gives us whatever fragile basis we have for saying that we live in a moral community" (Ignatieff, 1984, p. 9-10).

Conceptualizing Poverty: Summary

In examining absolute, relative, capabilities, material, economic, social, and moral constructions of poverty and some of the ways in which they overlap it becomes clear the extent to which the concept of poverty is political. Each of these dimensions has specific implications for the ways in which poverty is directive and constitutive, implications that are most readily evident in a welfare state through social policy. In *The Human Condition*, Arendt (1958) makes an important distinction between the public realm and its structure. She references how the Greeks understood law making as akin to the construction of the city walls in that both activities were necessary to secure a defined space within which citizens could act. Constructions of poverty informing legislation determine where these walls are built and who is inside of them and who outside.

Key Transitions in Canadian Constructions of Poverty

As the discussion presented here makes clear, the concept of poverty manifests in a number of ways. Throughout history, various conceptualizations of poverty have developed alongside different cultural, social, political and economic circumstances. In Canada, three significant societal transitions relate to shifts in poverty conceptualizations: industrialization, the birth of the welfare state, and welfare reform. In this section, I explore these three transitions and their impact on the social, political, and economic environments in which poverty has been constructed. Poverty policy plays an important role in this section as a tangible manifestation of the changing constructions of poverty, particularly as they relate to the relationship between society and the poor.

Industrialization

During the industrial revolution, urbanization meant that fewer people were making a living from the land (Alcock, 1993; Beaudoin, 2007). Furthermore, the increase in mechanization and factory employment decreased the level of skill required for production resulting in a de-skilling of society. Skilled artisans and craftsmen were replaced by assembly-line workers whose techniques required little training or developed skill (Beaudoin, 2007). This movement away from the land and intimate connection to the means of production (whether agricultural or trade) combined with the concomitant increase in material goods produced by the factories meant that poverty increasingly began to be understood as a lack of material goods and as a function of one's relationship to the new industrialized economy (Rahnema, 1992). The idea of limitless enrichment being available to all defined a new standard by which people were measured; "the belief in progress through wealth led to the illusion that moderation and a wholesome poverty

were no longer valid as principles for living" (Tévoédjrè, 1979, p. 8). Those who did not possess material wealth were increasingly considered to be poor and in need of 'development' or 'rehabilitation'. Self-sufficiency and an ability to provide the necessities of life for oneself and one's family were no longer valued as sufficient; consumption of material goods became the new standard for social inclusion and acceptance. This increase in wealth and consumerism increased the prominence of relative poverty in industrialized societies (Beaudoin, 2007).

These processes of industrialization "shattered the informal social security system" (Guest, 1980, p. 49) traditionally provided by extended family and long-standing relationships with neighbours and other community members. With fewer people on the land providing their own food and with the ease with which labourers on assembly-lines and other semi-skilled workers could lose their jobs, economic security was now dependent on the unpredictable fluctuations in the market (Guest, 1980) and poverty was increasingly intertwined in the workings of a global economy (Beaudoin, 2007). At this time, however, and up until after the Second World War, the Canadian government was still primarily reliant on the family and the market for the social security needs of its citizens (Guest, 1980).

The Birth of the Canadian Welfare State

According to Guest (1980), the beginning of the modern era in social security did not occur until 1914 in Canada. While the empirical work of Rowntree and Booth in Great Britain and Bismarck's social insurance legislation in Germany sparked an increased implementation of state sponsored social security in Europe towards the end of the 19th century (Briggs, 1969/2006), the dominant discourse in Canada had been that Canada was "a land of opportunity for all who were willing to work" (Guest, 1980, p. 4) and that such government intervention was not necessary. Without any empirical evidence on unemployment and poverty rates, private philanthropy was deemed to be sufficient to deal with the 'negligible' incidences of poverty. The context of the depression and of World War II, however, shifted attitudes towards and discourses about the poor and poverty generally. As Leonard Marsh states in *The Report on Social Security for Canada*:

> Social security has become accepted as one of the things for which the peoples of the world are fighting. It is one of the concrete expressions of 'a better world' which is particularly real to those who knew unemployment, destitution,

> inadequate medical care and the like in the depression periods before the war. (Marsh, 1943/1975, p. 15)

And, like elsewhere, it was not until the Second World War years that Canada's social, political, and economic situation was such that its welfare state could be more fully defined.

Popular sentiment following the depression years combined with the economic prosperity brought by the war to enable the enactment of a new kind of social policy (Guest, 1980). The depression made it clear that Canada was not necessarily the land of opportunity it had previously been constructed to be and the economic prosperity resulting from WWII enabled the implementation of greater social programs than had been previously possible. In this shift towards more comprehensive social policy, a new poverty discourse emerged; from the idea that poverty stemmed from "personal incompetence and failure" (Guest, 1980, p. 1) the poverty discourse shifted to incorporate an increased understanding that the incredible increase in standard of living and material comfort made possible through industrialization also bore with it new social costs. While these social costs were the result of processes which benefited a majority they were borne by individuals (Guest, 1980). The emerging poverty discourse of the post-war years challenged the assumptions that poverty resulted from personal failings and defined poverty as residing within the emerging industrial market structures, refocusing the discourse on the systemic roots of poverty. While the poverty discourse shifted in significant respects, deeply held beliefs about poverty and poor relief continued to exert influence on social policy. These longstanding discourses of individual responsibility and hard work, however, were no longer the only ones at the table and the Canadian welfare state was possible (Guest, 1980).

With this mix of a new poverty discourse combined with more traditional beliefs, the welfare state that emerged at this time has remained the foundation of today's welfare state in Canada. Developed on elaborations of the post-war welfare state, today's social policy is largely based on the same assumptions about families and the economy, assumptions which no longer hold true. In a post-industrial age with the knowledge economy outstripping industry and in the midst of the second demographic transition, the nature of employment and of families is changing dramatically and new social risks are emerging (Esping-Andersen, 2002; Jenson, 2004). While the post-industrial employment structure has increased the proportion of low-waged jobs, meaning that standard production and low-skilled workers are no longer able to secure decently paid

employment, an increase in single parent families and extended retirement years as well as other changes in family forms mean that families are less well equipped to absorb the consequences of these lowered earnings. While the post-war welfare state outlined by Marsh (1943/75) addressed the emerging social risks of the time related to industrialization and urbanization, many argue that social policy based on these assumptions cannot address the social issues of today (Esping-Andersen, 2002; Jenson, 2004; Scott, 2005).

Welfare Reform – Active Social Policy and Welfare-to-Work

The 1990s brought welfare reform to many industrialized countries and Canada was no exception. These reforms began as a part of a broader neo-liberal restructuring that took place under leaders such as Thatcher in Britain, Reagan in the United States, and Mulroney in Canada (Bashevkin, 2002). The neo-liberal agenda is essentially characterized by the primacy of the market, individualism, small government, and deregulation (Breitkreuz, 2005; Navarro, 2002). In the interests of small government and deregulation, neo-liberal regimes concern themselves with reducing government deficits and cutting back social spending while increasing the role of the private sector. In this model, social protection previously ensured by governments is shifted to the market; "the result is that economic security for citizens is increasingly reliant upon an individual's attachment to the labour force" (Breitkreuz, 2005, p. 152). In essence, neo-liberalism extends the market and constrains social and political spheres; the largely private sphere of individual economic interests subsumes the public realm – from a narrowing of political debate to a retrenchment of the welfare state.

While dominating much of the policy debates in the 1980s and early 1990s, neo-liberal discourses on the retrenchment of the welfare state gave way to a new discourse in the mid-1990s. The 'Third Way' in Britain and the adoption of active social policy in other English-speaking Western welfare states, including Canada, presented social policy as a productive factor, a factor which could contribute to economic growth by increasing the quality of human capital through education and health programs (Saint-Martin, 2004; White, 2003). In practice, however, social assistance reforms in Canada and within the context of active social policy "were in important respects *more* punitive, more restrictive, and more obsessed with paid work than those of their predecessors" (Bashevkin, 2002, p. 9) which were informed by neo-liberal ideology. Welfare reform begun with the neo-liberal discourse of the conservative party under Mulroney continued and intensified with the Liberal government's employment of active social policy

discourses. While neo-liberalism provided some of the impetus for this policy shift, other contributing factors to the perceived need for a change in social policy were the emerging social risks associated with the second demographic transition and the post-industrial employment structure, as outlined in the introduction.

The emergence of these new social risks including an increase in low-wage, part-time and seasonal employment combined with changing family forms and population aging has meant that the assumptions that provided a foundation for post-war welfare policy are clearly limited in their ability to address these new social risks; the combination of the second demographic transition and the post-industrial employment structure suggests that new directions in social policy are necessary. What these changes need to be, however, are less clear. In the following section on social policy the literature indicates a clear shift from a retrenchment of the welfare state to active social policy and welfare-to-work.

Active Social Policy

Active social policy works to reduce the barriers experienced by the poor and marginalized in entering the labour market (OECD, 2005). Focused on training and job search, active social policy aims to increase the capacities of the unemployed and underemployed. With job training and other forms of capacity building, a key goal of active social policy is to enable people to successfully negotiate fluctuations in the labour market (Banting, 2005; White, 2003). With active social policy, the role of government shifts from that of protecting people from the uncertainties of the market to building their capacity to negotiate the changing nature of the labour market (Banting, 2005; White, 2003). Welfare-to-work policy is one of the primary ways in which active social policy has been implemented in Canada generally and in Alberta more specifically.

Welfare-to-Work

In Canada, welfare-to-work policies have been present since the 1970s (Gorlick & Brethour, 1998; Peck, 2001). Beginning in the 1990s, however, welfare reform increased the breadth and scope of welfare-to-work policies and programs and their mandatory nature (Breitkreuz, 2005; Gorlick & Brethour, 1998; Williamson & Salkie, 2005). Reforms included a reduction of benefits, more stringent eligibility criteria, and requirements to find employment or to attend job-training programs (Breitkreuz, 2005; Kornberger, Fast, & Williamson, 2001; Williamson & Salkie, 2005); temporary work opportunities, earnings supplements, and childcare subsidies were also included (Kornberger et al., 2001). Explicit welfare-to-work policy goals are to reduce the number

of people receiving welfare benefits and to increase the self-sufficiency of people receiving benefits through mandated employment (Williamson & Salkie, 2005).

Welfare-to-work policy reforms were possible in Canada because of the federal government's replacement of the Canada Assistance Plan (CAP) with the Canada Health and Social Transfer (CHST) in 1996 (Bashevkin, 2002). Prior to 1996 and with the goals of preventing poverty and assisting those in need, CAP was the mechanism by which the federal government distributed funds to provinces, importantly specifying that social assistance was to be provided without work requirements. The CHST, however, provides block funding to provinces to cover health, social services, and post-secondary education giving provinces greater discretion over how they allocate funds; it also eliminated the specification that social assistance be independent of employment status (Breitkreuz, 2005). The CHST, then, opened the door to mandatory welfare-to-work policy and programs.

The reforms taking place in Canada in the 1990s were consistent with an international shift in welfare policy. Governments in the United Kingdom, Australia, and the United States were also reforming welfare policy at this time in support of welfare-to-work policies and programs (Williamson & Salkie, 2005). In the United States a similar, but harsher, course was taken as that in Canada. In 1996, the US federal government replaced the long-standing Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) established under the Social Security Act of 1935 with Temporary Aid to Needy Families (TANF) under the new Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) (Romero, Chavkin, Wise, Smith, & Wood, 2002). Under TANF states were given much greater jurisdiction over social assistance within certain guidelines set out by the federal government. These guidelines include a five year lifetime limit on benefit receipt, a mandatory work clause after two years and a family cap, whereby women (and their families) are not allocated additional funds if they give birth while on welfare (Lichter & Jayakody, 2002; Seccombe, Battle Walters & James, 1990). The move from AFDC to TANF in the United States and from policies under CAP to those under CHST in Canada is indicative of a move towards active social policy and welfare-to-work. In Alberta, the Income and Employment Supports Act (IESA) came into effect in January of 2004 as a key piece of legislation in this shift (Government of Alberta, 2003; Alberta Work, 2004).

Summary of Literature Review

As is evident, there is no one static 'essence' of poverty (Spicker, 2007). Poverty is a continually shifting and changing concept, reflecting the ways in which people come into poverty, the variety of experiences they face, and the socio-political context in which poverty is experienced. In Canada, although innumerable shifts have no doubt occurred, three key transitions have shifted the ways in which poverty is experienced and how it is constructed. While the shifts in poverty discourses are not always explicit, they clearly emerge from the social, political, and economic contexts of the time, furthermore they also shape these same contexts. While broad shifts are evident, such as from a material and absolute conception at the beginning of the industrial age to a more social and relative conception in the post-war years, the subtleties of these shifts have not been explored in detail. A deeper understanding of these discourses would elucidate important assumptions about poverty, those who live in poverty, and the state's understanding of its role in relation to the market and to families.

Gaps in the Literature

While there are vast amounts of literature on the concept of poverty and an equally impressive collection on the development of the welfare state and significant policy shifts within welfare states, there is little exploration of the combination of the two. Given the power various conceptions of poverty have to shape policy and the ways in which policy can construct poverty, this omission in the literature is striking. Furthermore, the ways in which poverty discourses can construct those living in poverty and 'produce' the subject 'welfare recipient' (Watson, 2000), increases the importance of a developed understanding of poverty constructions in policy. Finally, constructions contribute to and reflect the ways in which the relationships between state, market and community/family/individual are understood. Changing poverty discourses shift the ways in which we relate to each other as neighbours and how we engage our community; however, little research has been done in this area. This research begins to address some of these gaps.

Theoretical Framework

Fundamental to the development and implementation of this research project are the theoretical orientations which inform it: human ecological theory and critical theory. In this section, I outline each of these theoretical positions as they relate to this project beginning with the human ecological perspective, moving to critical theory, and concluding with a summary of how they inform the study.

Human Ecological Perspective

There are three primary and inter-related assumptions drawn from human ecological theory which inform this study: i) context, ii) relationship, and iii) emancipation. The very research question, "how does the Alberta government construct poverty?", finds its significance in the conviction that context matters, that the poverty experienced by Albertans cannot be understood independently from the landscapes within which they live. To move such a question out of the realm of pure abstraction, context – ideational, political, social, and economic – needs to be taken into account. Far from deterministic, however, a human ecological perspective recognizes the mutually influencing factors between individuals, families, and communities and the systems and structures within which their lives are embedded. People are not passive recipients of the roles allotted to them through social structures and norms, rather, they shape their environments through choices and action (Bubolz & Sontag, 1993; Steiner, 1995; Visvader, 1986). Given this contextual and relational perspective, “ecological theory...is especially well-suited to examine issues of inequity and deprivation among groups in society with respect to resources, justice, power, and freedom” (Bubolz & Sontag, 1993, 427). Recognizing the ways in which contexts shape people’s lives and the dynamic nature of the relationship between people and these contexts, human ecological theory facilitates the next step towards using this knowledge to effect change in society to redress power imbalances and empower those who are marginalized through societal processes and structures. In the following sections, I outline these three assumptions in greater detail.

Context

O’Connor (2000) argues for a shift towards a contextual study of poverty stating that poverty research focuses too much on the characteristics of the poor and not enough on the political, economic, and social processes which “relegate[] so many people to economic insecurity and social marginality” (p. 557). Implicit in the dominant research is the individualization of poverty, a process by which problems are defined solely in relation to people living in poverty and, as such, the remedy is most easily defined in relation to these same people; this implies that the problem resides in this group and not in broader societal processes. However, as long as the focus of poverty research continues to be the individuals, families, and even communities living in poverty, answers to the complex issues of poverty will be partial at best.

A human ecological perspective provides a powerful framework for moving from an individualistic perspective to one which enables the exploration of layered contexts and facilitates the re-contextualization of poverty. Visvader (1986) tracks the rise of a new contextualism into which human ecological theory fits. He argues that this shift is more than a broadening of subject matter or analysis but in fact challenges the underlying metaphysical bias of atomistic research which elevates the elements within systems above the systems themselves. The use of an atomistic framework facilitated the development of human rights and of the broad acceptance of democratic institutions in the West; however, it has also contributed to a situation in which "the elements of analysis are treated as more basic or more 'real' than the system to which they belong" (p. 119). This atomistic approach has contributed to significant advances in the production of certain kinds of knowledge; however, it has also relegated other kinds of knowledge to the margins and resulted in a profound de-contextualization.

A human ecological perspective, however, is "concerned with the processes and conditions that govern the lifelong course of human development in the actual environments in which human beings live" (Bronfenbrenner, 1994, p. 1643). Using human ecological theory then redresses some of the limitations encountered in atomistic research and enables an exploration of poverty which moves from a focus on individual characteristics of poor people to examine broad societal structures and processes such as social policy. In this way the contextual element in the human ecological perspective dovetails with a transformative-emancipatory approach (addressed later in this section):

> The overall research questions need to be framed to acknowledge that it is not the individual's psychological, physical, or cultural deficits that are the focus of the questions. Rather, the focus should be on structural frameworks of authority and relations of power in institutions and communities. (Mertens, 2003, p. 299)

Relationship

While exploring the contexts in which people live is essential to a comprehensive understanding of human behaviour and experience, human ecological theory is unequivocal in its position on recognizing the importance of context while not subscribing to a deterministic model. While people are influenced by their environments these environments do not determine them. Instead, a human ecological perspective focuses on the inter-relationships between humans and their environments and the ways in which they are mutually influencing (Steiner, 1995; Visvader, 1986). As such, human agency is central to a human ecological perspective. The relationships between humans

and their environments shape each other in various and powerful ways. “The uniqueness of human ecology lies in its focus on viewing humans and their near environments as integrated wholes, mutually influencing each other” (Sontag & Bubolz, 1988, p. 118). As one of the program participants I once worked with in Edmonton’s inner city so vividly put it “with every new chin Ralph [Klein, Alberta’s premier at the time] gets, I seem to get poorer”.

While asserting the principle of human agency, human ecological thought recognizes that people are able to make choices and act upon their environments to varying degrees dependent on their contexts (Keating & Philips, 2008). While people have the capacity to shape their environments, the extent of this capacity and the ways in which it manifests is in turn largely shaped by context. As such, people in different positions within society and with varying resources and networks possess different types and levels of power which can shape environments at different rates and to varying extents. While the most powerful are able to shape societal structures and processes in ways which reinforce and sometimes increase the mechanisms by which they can continue to shape their environments “at the whole ecosystem level, no one is pulling the strings and manipulating or controlling the entire system” (Bubolz & Sontag, 1993, p. 421). Despite power differentials and the increased ability of some to consolidate their power, a human ecological approach rejects determinism and instead affirms that, although sometimes constrained, humans act on their environments.

Emancipation

Human ecological theory recognizes that “knowledge can be used to transform oppressive social structures” (Bubolz & Sontag, 1993, p. 428) and is well-positioned to do so given its contextual and relational approach to research. Moving away from an atomistic approach and refocusing poverty discourses on the structures and processes which marginalize certain people and groups while simultaneously examining individuals and their capacity to act in their own lives to shape and effect change in their environments, human ecological theory naturally lends itself to addressing issues of inequity and power differentials (Bubolz & Sontag, 1993). As such, human ecologists are educated to be change agents (Westney, Brabble, & Edwards, 1988), as catalysts to enhance participation in society (Firebaugh, 1995), and to work toward the social good (Sontag & Bubolz, 1988). In this vein, this research project intends to contribute to what Bubolz (1995) discusses as the “ultimate aim” of critical science: to effect “a change in the consciousness of humans and the liberation of individuals and groups from arbitrary

relations of power and illegitimate uses of power that do not serve the common good" (p. 228).

Using a human ecological perspective in exploring constructions of poverty contributes to and expands traditional poverty research in its challenge to the atomistic framing of research, from problem identification to data collection to analysis. Furthermore it asserts the relational nature of interactions between people and their environments emphasizing the possibility for human agency within societal structures and processes while recognizing structural constraints on such action. Finally, by using a human ecological perspective, I hope to contribute to a shift in discourse that effects change in policy and practice procedures and outcomes.

Critical Theory

Complementing my use of a human ecological perspective is critical theory. Critical theory is largely associated with the "Frankfurt School", an interdisciplinary group of scholars who converged at The Institute of Social Research at Frankfurt University in the 1920s and 30s. With the philosopher Max Horkheimer assuming directorship of the institute in 1930, the Frankfurt School included the philosophers Horkheimer, Adorno and Marcuse, the psychoanalyst Erich Fromm, and the literary critic Walter Benjamin (Audi, 1999; Joseph, 2005). Rooted in the philosophical works of Kant, Hegel, Nietzsche, Weber, Freud, and Lukács, critical theory expanded Marx's critique of economic and political systems to include psychology and cultural analysis (Connell, 2002). This integration enabled a greater link between theory and practice, one of its primary aims (Audi, 1999). Other key aims of critical theory were to 'provide insight', primarily by exploring the concepts of truth and power, and to foster emancipation, "to empower subjects to change their oppressive circumstances" (Audi, 1999). In this section, I address the ways in which critical theory seeks to 'provide insight'; secondly, I turn to the topic of emancipation; and, finally, I close this section with a discussion of the ways in which human ecological and critical theory inform this study.

Insight

Working to unveil traditional power relationships, critical theory seeks to demonstrate how 'truth' is historically and culturally constructed (Audi, 1999; Connell, 2002). Forced into exile by the Nazi rule in Germany and then living in the United States, Horkheimer and Adorno developed a nuanced comparison and extensive critique of the methods of fascist dictatorship and those of consumer capitalism (Connell, 2002; Joseph, 2005). They focused, in particular, on how social cohesion is achieved through the

production of conformity using political and cultural apparatuses (Joseph, 2005). In the United States they developed a critique of what they termed the 'culture industry' where "cultural products are now standardized, marketable, and interchangeable…contribut[ing] to social cohesion through the encouragement of pathological forms of collectivity" (Joseph, 2005, 196).

In recognizing the constructed nature of this social cohesion, Horkheimer's and Adorno's critical theory aims to enable people to recognize the historical and culturally situated nature of social norms and accepted truths. Using critical theory, insights into the otherwise opaque nature of power relationships is possible, relationships which draw their strength "at least in part, from the fact that these relationships have not been seen through" (Connerton as cited in Connell, 2002, p. 131). In seeing through these relationships the first step towards emancipation is achieved.

Emancipation

The significance of Horkheimer's and Adorno's inclusion of Freud's thought to expand Marx's social criticism is particularly evident with the emancipatory element in critical theory. While social critique can be done in any number of ways, to move from theory to practice critical theory turns to psychology. Horkheimer used psychology to elucidate connections between economy, class, ideology and psychic structure (Connell, 2002). Instead of the Marxist view where the individual is subsumed within economic and political structures, Horkheimer and Adorno connected the external structures of society with the internal processes of individuals without privileging one dimension over another much like the relational element in human ecological theory. Adorno, in particular, advocated for a theoretical approach which was anti-hierarchical arguing that "a social psychology which subsumes the individual level under the social ends up unconsciously mimicking the situation it ought to be criticizing" (Connell, 2002).

The prominence of psychic structure in critical theory is a key to the way in which Horkheimer and Adorno understood emancipation. With the interplay between economic and political and psychic structures constructing norms of truth, a shift in the psychic structures of individuals can effect emancipatory change. The development of people's consciousness or capacity for insight enables them to 'see through' the processes of which they are a part "making it possible for people to enter the historical process as responsible Subjects" (Freire, 1970).

In summary, critical theory's understanding of truth as a social construction and the potential for individuals to effect emancipatory change complemented with human

ecological theory's understanding of context, relationship, and emancipation gives us a powerful theoretical framework for examining underlying constructions of poverty in Alberta's social policy. Recognizing the concept of poverty as historically and culturally situated enables an analysis that does not privilege any one truth about poverty, but, instead supports an understanding of poverty constructs within their social, economic, and political contexts. Not simply emerging from these contexts however, poverty constructs and discourses are recognized as influential forces in shaping these same contexts. This mutually enforcing relationship combined with 'seeing through' provides the basis for moving the research forward to effect social change. As such, human ecological theory and critical theory serve as the theoretical foundations for a critical discourse analysis exploring the constructions of poverty in Alberta's Income and Employment Supports Act (IESA).

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

This Study

Given the prominence of the active social policy discourse when Alberta's Income and Employment Supports Act (IESA) came into effect in 2004 and the primary role this legislation plays in the lives of Albertans living in poverty, IESA and related documents are key elements in the construction and legitimization of underlying poverty constructions in the shift to active social policy in Alberta. The research questions that this project addresses are:

- How is poverty constructed as a social problem in Alberta's Income and Employment Supports Act?
- What underlying poverty discourses support this construction of poverty as a social problem in Alberta's Income and Employment Supports Act?
- How do these poverty discourses construct those living in poverty?

This study addresses these questions maintaining that a deeper understanding of these underlying constructions illuminates some of the ways in which the social policy discourse has changed. Furthermore, in understanding some of these changes a window is provided into the longer-term implications of how they might impact our families, communities, and society.

For this study, critical discourse analysis (CDA) presents itself as an appropriate approach. CDA is particularly suited to an investigation of underlying constructions of poverty because of its emphasis on how discourses are shaped by and how they shape the social, political, and economic contexts from which they emerge (Fairclough, 1993). In particular, CDA focuses on "*discourse as the instrument* of power and control as well as with discourse as the instrument of the social construction of reality" (van Leewuen, 1993). In understanding the nature of discourse as an instrument of power and social construction, critical discourse analysis seeks to unveil the ways in which this power operates and the historically and culturally situated nature of reality. Understanding poverty to be a political concept, in the ways in which poverty discourses determine action (Alcock, 1993; Deaton, 2006), construct those who live in poverty (Burr, 1995; Foucault, 1994; Fraser & Gordon, 1994), and reflect and shape the relationships between the state, the market, society and the poor, CDA provides a powerful methodological approach to investigating poverty discourses in income-support legislation.

In this section, I first outline my methodological approach with a discussion of discourse and discourse analysis followed by an exploration of the theoretical lens

through which I will conduct a critical discourse analysis. This lens incorporates assumptions from the Frankfurt School of critical theory, the theoretical approach of social constructionism, and the use of Foucault's conception of power. Secondly, I turn to procedures, including sampling and data collection strategies as well as a discussion of data analysis and rigour.

Methodological Approach

A great deal of confusion exists around what discourse analysis actually is (Cheek, 2004). This lack of clarity stems, in part, from the multiplicity of definitions which exist for the term discourse (Alvesson & Karreman, 2000; Cheek, 2004); in other cases uncertainty stems from the inadequacy of the reporting of research using, or claiming to use, discourse analysis (Cheek, 2004). In addition, in exploring the literature it becomes evident that clarity may be an unattainable, and some argue undesirable (Cheek, 2004), goal because of the variety of ways in which discourse analysis has been taken up and the broad spectrum of research that falls under the name. As a result, it becomes very important to explicitly outline the approach to discourse analysis being used in any given context. In the next several pages I aim to do this. In the first section I explicate a variety of ways in which discourse is understood and how these various understandings impact discourse analysis as a methodology focusing on how I employ the term. I then turn my attention to how I engage critical discourse analysis in my research on the constructions of poverty in Alberta's income-support legislation.

Discourse and Discourse Analysis

While there is a plethora of ways to understand the term discourse, I draw on Alvesson and Karreman (2000), Chalaby (1996), and Cheek (2004) to define my approach. Alvesson and Karreman (2000) identify two axes along which discourse can be situated. The first of these axes is the "formative range of discourse." Along this axis, Alvesson and Karreman situate a micro-discourse approach, a meso-discourse approach, a Grand Discourse approach, and a Mega-Discourse approach. This distinction between micro- and Mega-Discourses relates to Chalaby's (1996) differentiation between linguistic and sociological understandings of discourse. A sociological (or macro end of the spectrum) approach involves a methodological stance which finds meaning in the relationships between texts and the social and political context in which these texts emerge. Whereas a linguistic (micro) approach to discourse positions researchers as diving into the text "swim[ming] between its linguistic layers, and re-emerg[ing] at its surface, with its meaning in their hands" (Chalaby, 1996, p. 687), a sociological (macro)

approach moves in several directions. Sociologically, a discourse consists of several texts and their contexts; meaning is found intertextually and in the ways in which these texts are deeply integrated within the socio-political context in which they are produced. As a sociological category, discourse is not reducible to the component texts but is more than 'the sum of its parts'. For the purposes of this study I use a sociological approach to the term discourse.

These discourses, however, are not only products of their contexts; they also produce the socio-political environments in which they exist. Alvesson and Karreman's (2000) second axis brings in this second dimension to the definition of discourse – that of determination; with an understanding of discourse as emerging from social and political contexts there is a second element to clarify regarding the degree to which discourses also produce these contexts. Alvesson and Karreman (2000) place discourse determination and discourse autonomy at opposite ends of the spectrum referring to the degrees to which discourse is 'muscular' or 'transient', the degree to which discourse is constitutive. An approach, such as the one I am taking, which views discourse as being produced by but also producing the socio-political context in which it emerges uses a definition of discourse towards the determination and muscular end of the spectrum. What this means is that the discourses we use frame the ways in which we perceive reality; discourse is understood to be "a connected set of statements, concepts, terms and expressions which constitute[] a way of talking and writing about a particular issue, thus framing the way people understand and act with respect to that issue" (Alvesson & Karreman, 2000, p. 1131).

A Foucauldian approach takes the determinism of discourse a step further suggesting that it not only frames our understandings and perceptions but that "human subjects are themselves produced within discourses and the realm of the 'social" (Watson, 2000, p. 70). Using the example of income support in Alberta, a Foucauldian approach would argue that the explicit and implicit discourses around poverty in income-support policies and programs not only frame the ways in which recipients are viewed but actually produce the subject "welfare recipient". The discourse analysis that I engage in is an analytical process by which these discourses are unveiled by questioning how people are constructed by various discourses – how income-support policies and programs marginalize some groups, construct others as victims and still others as blameworthy (Watson, 2000).

Cheek (1996) and Potter and Wetherell (1987) make it clear that discourse analysis, however, is not a fixed method but an approach. There are no clear 'methods' to discourse analysis but instead a broad theoretical framework addressing the nature and role of discourse in society. When dealing with texts, discourse analysis uses these broad theoretical frameworks to inform the analysis, moving between the data and theory to come to some understanding of the underlying discourses informing a given text. While sampling and data collection methods may resemble other approaches, what is distinct about discourse analysis is the way in which researchers approach the data (Cheek, 1996). It is this approach and distinct theoretical lens that distinguishes between types of discourse analysis as well. In this next section, I explore the theoretical framework of critical discourse analysis.

Critical Discourse Analysis – Critical Theory, Social Constructionism, and Power

Mills (2004) and Wodak (2004) locate the development of critical discourse analysis (CDA) within the discipline of linguistics and include Fairclough, Fowler, van Leeweun, van Djik, Kress and Wodak as some of the prominent central scholars using CDA. Although CDA has strong roots in this linguistic tradition (some using the terms critical linguistics (CL) and CDA interchangeably), I do not approach discourse through a linguistic but a sociological lens. To this end, in the analysis I draw on Thorne, Reimer Kirkham, and O'Flynn-Magee's (2004) interpretive description method; however, the theoretical approach I use draws heavily on CDA. In the following pages I explicate this theoretical approach and discuss analysis and methods in greater detail in the next section. In outlining my theoretical lens, I draw on critical theory, social constructionism, and Foucault's conception of power. I explore each of these components below.

Critical Theory

While I outlined some of the fundamental assumptions of critical theory in the literature review, here I will briefly explore some of the ways in which it applies to methodology. Critical is an adjective added on to many terms to signify a focus on power relations, social action and justice, emancipation, and generally challenging the status quo. The term originated with Horkheimer of the Frankfurt School who coined the term critical theory to refer to the Freudo-Marxist philosophical tradition developing at the school (Connell, 2002). In short, critical theory is "a combination of theories capable of unmasking traditional power relationships and revealing the ideologies that cloak them" (Connell, 2002, p. 131). When used in conjunction with discourse analysis, the term indicates an analytical emphasis on the ways in which discourses construct and support

power structures and processes of marginalization. “In every society the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organized and redistributed by a certain number of procedures” (Foucault, 1994, p. 109); critical discourse analysis works to unveil these procedures.

Agger (1991) argues that critical theory is most relevant for what it can do for methodological and empirical inquiry. He highlights Horkheimer’s and Adorno’s critique of positivism as capitalism’s most dominant form of ideology in that it teaches people to accept the world ‘as it is’, thereby perpetuating it. With critical theory, however, social ‘facts’ become changeable pieces of history and empirical researchers are forced to recognize and reflect upon the underlying assumptions of their work and the ways in which the research is grounded in their own interests. In this way, method “is not simply a technical apparatus but a rhetorical means for concealing metaphysically and politically freighted arguments in the densely technical discourse/practice of quantitative analysis and figural gesture” (Agger, 1991, 119). In other words, critical theory blurs the distinction between epistemology and substantive social theory by arguing that method is “a persuasive, public text in its own right” (Agger, 1991, 122).

Social Constructionism

Another significant theoretical foundation of discourse analysis generally (and especially of critical discourse analysis) is that of social constructionism. While there is no one defining feature of social constructionism, Burr (1995) outlines four key assumptions one or more of which underpin any social constructionist theory: a critical stance towards taken-for-granted knowledge; historical and cultural specificity; knowledge as being sustained by social processes; and, that knowledge and social action go together. Of importance to critical discourse analysis is the idea that through daily interaction in our social lives we construct knowledge, that this knowledge is culturally and historically bounded, and that each construction invites different action.

While social constructionism informs all discourse analysis, critical discourse analysis’s focus on social change gives social constructionism a special place within its theoretical framework. By placing everyday interactions at the centre of knowledge and discourse production, social constructionism provides a framework for understanding the ways in which discourses are produced but also for how critical discourse analysts can work towards social change. If power relations and other processes of domination are historically and culturally situated and discursively produced, through critical discourse analysis the constructed nature of these relations can be exposed and alternative

discourses constructed. Toolan (1997) argues for the re-construction of discourse as a central element to critical discourse analysis: "CDA will specify, as a direct corollary of its uncovering of inequity and hegemony in discourse, how a particular communicative event…can be changed, corrected, so as to minimize inequity, hegemony, and control" (p. 89). Therefore, social constructionism provides an important theoretical lens not only for critical discourse analysis as an approach to social research but also as a way to inform how critical discourse analysts can effect change.

Power

A third element important to the critical discourse analysis theoretical lens is conceptualizations of power. I draw heavily on Foucault in developing this element. Contrary to conventional understandings of power as a negative, repressive force and as functioning top-down, Foucault views power as productive and circular. Power does not only repress but can have positive and useful effects; it produces knowledge and discourses and constructs the social (Hall, 2001; Watson, 2000). Power then is not something that is possessed but a strategy, something exercised. It moves through society like through a net, implicating all – oppressors and oppressed (Hall, 2001). Unveiling the relationships between power and discourse is key to critical discourse analysis: "Discourse is not simply that which translates struggles or systems of domination, but is the thing for which and by which there is struggle, discourse is the power which is to be seized" (Foucault, 1994, p. 110).

Interweaving critical theory, social constructionism, and Foucault's conception of power provides a nuanced and responsive theoretical framework from which to analyze the underlying poverty discourses in Alberta's income-support policy. Teasing apart the ways in which discourses function as instruments of power and as instruments of the social construction of reality are key elements to critical discourse analysis (Toolan, 1997). In this research, critical theory, social constructionism, and Foucault's conceptions of power inform my approach to teasing apart these elements within the discourse of the IESA and Alberta's income-support program.

Method

In this section I outline the "how-to" of the research. I first delineate my sampling and data collection strategies including inclusion and exclusion criteria and saturation. I then turn my attention to the process of analysis drawing on Fairclough (2000) and Thorne et al. (2004). I conclude with an account of how I ensured rigour in the design of the project.

Sample and Collection Strategies

In examining the construction of poverty in the Income and Employment Supports Act (IESA) and related documents, I explored government publications related to the IESA, in particular those published by the Ministry of Employment and Immigration (the Ministry responsible for overseeing the IESA) and Alberta Works (the primary governmental institution implementing the IESA and a part of the Ministry). Within the sample there were three categories of data: communications to the public; communications to clients; and legislation and policies. Within the first category were annual reports, news releases and other media focused communications from the Ministry. Communications to clients included brochures, pamphlets and other documents explaining the Alberta Works programs to existing and potential clients. Finally, within the legislation and policy category was the IESA itself and the accompanying Alberta Works Policy Manual as well as the debates which took place in the legislature when the IESA was debated.

Here, I describe the sample in greater detail including the inclusion and exclusion criteria I used to guide my research, how I knew I had reached saturation, my collection strategy, and some of the limitations of the approach I used.

Sampling

Qualitative research provides a means through which to develop deep understandings of phenomena, to make sense of complex situations, and to problematize assumptions (Kincheloe & McLaren, 1998; Richards & Morse, 2007). To this end, qualitative researchers deliberately seek out 'rich' data sources contending that phenomena are most easily discerned in the extremes rather than in their average manifestations. This approach to sampling is called *purposeful sampling* and is the primary approach to sampling used in this research.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Using purposeful sampling, the inclusion/exclusion criteria are based on what generates the richest data set. To this end, I included criteria relating to 1) publication date, 2) document types, 3) geography, and 4) relevance to research topic.

1. Given that the proclamation of the IESA occurred in 2003, I set the parameters of my data inclusion to include materials published from 2002 up to 2008. I extended the date range to one year before the proclamation of the new Act to ensure that materials relevant to preliminary stages in its development and subsequent proclamation were able to be included in the data sample. In my final data set, I

included documents which spanned from 2003-2008 as no relevant documents were found from earlier than 2003.

2. In the data set, I included all types of documents relating to poverty in Alberta's income-support program. As mentioned above, the types of documents fell into three categories, communications to public, communications to clients, and legislation and policy. Within these categories a number of different types of documents were included such as legislation, news releases, fact sheets, pamphlets, annual reports and other forms of publications from the Ministry of Employment and Immigration and Alberta Works. In addition to these published materials, I also included Hansard reports from the legislative debate on the IESA.
3. In terms of geography, I limited the study to the province of Alberta. The Canadian Constitution Act separates the purviews of authority of federal and provincial governments into two distinct jurisdictions. Under federalism, income support falls within the provincial jurisdiction and so my analysis focuses on the provincial construction of poverty.
4. Within each of these areas of inclusion and exclusion, data sources were determined by their relevance to income support, constructions of poverty, and active social policy. While the Ministry of Employment and Immigration covers a number of jurisdictions, only materials directly related to the IESA or its administration were included in the sample.

Saturation

Saturation is an essential element in qualitative research in that only with saturation of the emerging themes in the data and subsequent replication (when data begin to tell the same story) can a researcher be confident that the analysis is solid (Richards & Morse, 2007). Because of the nature of government documents, saturation of the dominant themes in this research was relatively easily achieved. The highly produced quality of government documents provides relative consistency in the message communicated. In many cases, phrases, and even entire paragraphs, were repeated verbatim in several documents. This consistency, to the point of the repetition of exact phrases, meant that the story told by the data was quickly replicated and the themes which emerged saturated without new directions or new questions being raised.

Collection Strategies

The majority of the publications I used in my data set were available on-line. In fact, only the 2003-2004 annual report was unavailable electronically. The rest of the data

were available on the Employment & Immigration website either directly through the publications link or under "family supports" where Alberta Works' website is located. While qualitative research is iterative and data collection often happens concurrently with analysis in a cyclical process in which analysis informs subsequent data collection (Morse, Barret, Mayan, Olson, & Spiers, 2002), because of the availability of the published documents and the consistency of the story within it, the data collection largely occurred over two days on-line and independently from the analysis.

Limitations

When using discourse analysis, a very small amount of data can provide sufficient material for extensive analysis meaning that the data chosen has a significant impact on the results. In developing a *theory of technique*, Bosio, Graffigna and Lozza (2008) stress the importance of recognizing and acknowledging "the influences of all contingent choices that he or she makes in the research process (from data collection to transcription and data analysis) on his or her results not only to achieve broader researcher reflexivity (Atkinson, 1990; Hertz, 1997; Steiner, 1991) but also to make the choices that are best suited to the research process" (p. 1).

In light of this, I recognize that collecting data from only published government documents affects the research in several ways. First of all, what is published and publicly available can differ somewhat from how such policies and procedures are implemented. Secondly, while the government has considerable influence over social discourses such constructions are not exclusively top-down. In focusing on governmental sources of data, I necessarily exclude significant aspects of the construction of poverty coming from other societal spheres (e.g., the poor themselves, the media, etc.). Thirdly, in focusing on income support policy the construction of poverty is limited to the poor dependent on income support and excludes a large number of Albertans who fall below the Low-Income-Cut-Offs (LICOs)[2] but do not draw on income support (e.g. people with severe long-term disabilities covered by Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped (AISH), people attached to the labour-market but not earning enough to rise above the LICOs, people who are not eligible for income support through IESA and have no other source of income).

[2] The Low-Income-Cut-Offs (LICOs) are a set of measures generated by Statistics Canada to indicate when Canadians are financially challenged due to needing to spend more on the basics (food, shelter, and clothing) than an average family. LICOs vary by family and community size. (Statistic Canada, 2010)

In response to the first two considerations, given that the research problem is concerned primarily with the construction of poverty by the Alberta government, the absence of data from other sources needs to be acknowledged but is an intentional decision to refine the data collection process and to maintain focus in the research. Acknowledging that policies and practices can differ is important to consider when drawing conclusions about the results; however, in looking at how poverty is constructed, the carefully produced materials available for public consumption are particularly salient *because* of their refined nature. Discourses embedded in such highly 'produced' documents are either intentional or have been rendered so invisible as to pass through numerous screenings unnoticed; in either case such discourses are of particular interest to the research questions at hand. And, finally, the limitation of *which* poverties are being constructed by income support policy and which ones are excluded was essential to keep in mind throughout the research process so as to avoid engaging in any totalizing discourses about poverty. The partiality and localized nature of the study needs to be recognized and acknowledged at every step of the research process.

Data Analysis

As Potter and Wetherell (1987) and Cheek (2004) make clear, discourse analysis is not as much a method as an approach. Although several analytical frameworks for the approach have been developed (see for example Fairclough (2001) and Forster (2006)) there is no prescribed 'recipe' for analysis within CDA. As discussed previously, CDA is largely rooted within the linguistic tradition; as such these analytical frameworks tend to be geared towards a linguistic as opposed to sociological approach to discourse and tend to favour micro and meso-discourse approaches (Chalaby, 1996). For this analysis I drew on Fairclough's (2001) framework as well as on the analytical process outlined by Thorne et al. (2004) for interpretive description. While Fairclough is situated within the linguistic tradition, the framework he presents draws primarily on the theoretical elements of CDA, with the inclusion of Thorne et al.'s analytical process this framework was consistent with the approach I outlined previously.

Fairclough's (2001) analytical framework includes five stages: 1) identifying the social problem or research question; 2) pinpointing obstacles to remedying the social problem in question; 3) considering the place and corresponding necessity of the problem within the social order; 4) identifying possibilities in circumventing or diminishing the obstacles; and, 5) reflexivity. The discourse analysis itself occurs in the second and fourth stages; however, the other stages are necessary to frame the work so as to situate it within

the socio-political context, an essential element in undertaking a critical discourse analysis. While the socio-political framing of the issue is taken up in the following chapters, I outline my process for the discourse analysis itself here.

In the analysis of the discourses themselves, I drew on Thorne, Reimer Kirkham, and Macdonald-Emes (1997) and Thorne et al. (2004). In developing the interpretive description method, Thorne et al. (2004) explicate an analytical approach useful beyond the bounds of interpretive description. In the initial stages of analysis Thorne et al. emphasize the importance and impact of an inductive approach on the analysis. They guard against techniques that can lend themselves to a deductive analysis such as highly defined predetermined analytic strategies, "overly small units of analysis", and premature coding (Thorne et al., 1997) and contend that the researcher must always remain somewhat sceptical of results that closely resemble conceptualizations outlined in the literature review (Thorne et al., 2004). "The researcher's questions search out alternative linkages, exceptional instances, and contrary cases as a mechanism for broadening rather than narrowing conceptual linkages. For this reason, breadth is more useful than precision in the earliest coding and organizing processes" (Thorne et al., 2004, p. 11). Instead of emphasizing the technical, Thorne et al. (2004) emphasize the importance of the researcher's intellectual curiosity and rigour over the processes of coding, sorting and categorizing. The constant questioning of the data (i.e., "Why is this here? Why not something else? And what does it mean?" (p. 13)), is an essential component.

In talking about the product of the research, Thorne et al. (2004) are clear that the responsibility of the researcher is to engage the theory and the data to avoid superficial analyses which result from imposing theoretical assumptions on the data or, at the other end of the spectrum, atheoretical description. Good analysis is evident when complex ideas and phenomena are made visible. Thorne et al. (2004) argue that this kind of analysis is most likely to be achieved through focusing on synthesizing, theorizing, and recontextualizing and through the researcher's "engagement, imagination, and conceptual creativity" (p. 18).

The analysis I engaged in consisted of many stages (for a detailed listing of these stages see Appendix A). I began with an initial reading of the 68 documents I had collected. The initial reading was intended to understand the documents as they were intended to be understood, to ensure that I comprehended the nature of the documents and their intent. At this stage I made initial cuts to my data sample. This first round of cuts was mostly due to documents being too technical (such as forms) or because they were

related primarily to the institutions administering the IESA without any specific relevance to the Act itself or the programs legislated by it (e.g. information about the appeal process). A second reading of the refined sample was done with more cuts made and copious notes taken. The second round of cuts was largely due to documents replicating each other and to focus the data more specifically on the Income Support program and not other programs legislated through the IESA and administered by Alberta Works. After repeated immersion in the data and from the notes taken during this second reading, I developed preliminary codes for subsequent readings of the documents (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Thorne, 1997). The codes fell into two larger themes: poverty and the market. In a sixth stage of working with the codes and moving between the theory and data, some of the codes shifted to focus the analysis. For example, under the theme of the market, the 'individual-market relationship' and 'investment in human capital' codes were collapsed into 'human capital and the individual-market relationship' to better reflect how the focus on human capital and skills development is an integral part of how the Alberta government conceives of the individual-market relationship in the discourse.

Rigour

If research is the generation of new knowledge, then rigour is the mechanism that ensures that this knowledge represents reality and not simply the researcher's individual imagination. Using an ontological and epistemological paradigm other than positivism, however, the concept of rigour becomes more complex; where there is the expectation that there is not one objective reality but multiple realities and multiple ways of knowing about these realities, rigour, as ensuring that knowledge corresponds "one-to-one…between elements in the real world and our knowledge of this world" (Kvale, 1995, p.24), not only becomes an unrealistic goal but also an unattainable and irrelevant one. Instead, Kvale (1995) argues that "truth is constituted through a dialogue" (p. 24). Consistent with the view of reality being discursively constructed, Kvale's approach to rigour shifts the criteria from external measures to conversation: "a move from knowledge as correspondence with an objective reality to knowledge as a communal construction of reality involves a change in emphasis from observation to conversation and interaction" (Kvale, 1995, p. 24). Instead of setting out to prove one's theory or position, rigour is established through the defensibility of one's claims; instead of showing how the research represents one true reality, rigour focuses on the plausibility and credibility of the argument as established through conversation. As Lincoln and Guba (1985) say about the criteria they develop: "no amount of member checking,

triangulation, persistent observation, auditing, or whatever can ever compel; it can at best *persuade*" (p. 329).

Qualitative researchers have developed numerous approaches to establishing rigour often expanding the concept to include new dimensions (Kvale, 1995). Arguing that the concepts of validity and reliability are inappropriate to the naturalistic paradigm, Lincoln and Guba (1985) developed alternative criteria under the value of "trustworthiness". The four criteria are: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. While the criteria were presented as guidelines, many aspects of these criteria have become the standards by which qualitative research is evaluated. Morse et al. (2002) argue that these criteria largely focus on evaluating completed research as opposed to ensuring rigour built into each stage of the research process. To this end they discuss the role of "investigator's responsiveness" and "verification strategies" in ensuring rigour throughout the research process. Likewise, Kvale's (1995) *validity as quality of craftsmanship* "includes continually checking, questioning, and theoretically interpreting the findings. In a craftsmanship approach to validation, the emphasis is moved from inspection at the end of the production line to quality control throughout the stages of knowledge production" (p. 27). In this research project, I combined Morse et al.'s (2002) "investigator's responsiveness" and "verification strategies" with Kvale's (1995) "validity as craftsmanship" and focused on dialogue to ensure rigour. In addition, to satisfy post hoc evaluation and the accompanying value of being able to map one's work and decisions, I have included parts of my audit trail in Appendix A.

Investigator's Responsiveness

"Research is only as good as the investigator" (Morse et al., 2002, p. 10). Given the dynamic and iterative nature of qualitative research, the investigator's responsiveness becomes critical to the validity of the research. From the ways in which the data inform analysis which informs subsequent data collection to the recognition of attempts to squeeze data into inadequate frameworks or develop analyses around weak data, researchers are required to be attuned to the subtle and explicit requirements of the research project. In this project, I strived to remain sensitive to what the research said, willing to relinquish cherished ideas if they did not serve the research process, to entertain possibilities not previously considered and, most of all, to be surprised by the process.

For example, the most surprising finding in this analysis was the relative absence of a conception of poverty in the data. After basing the entire research project on the

assumption that the IESA would address poverty, it was somewhat disconcerting to find that the data had relatively little to say on the subject. In responding to this finding, however, I was forced to re-examine my questions and develop more nuanced and subtle questions appropriate to CDA. Asking of the data slightly different questions such as: 'where is poverty?' and, 'through what mechanisms is it excluded from the discourse?' my research questions were answered with more depth and greater congruency with the data.

Verification Strategies

Verification "is the process of checking, confirming, making sure, and being certain" (Morse et al., 2002, p. 9). Verification strategies are built into the research process ensuring rigour throughout the process by helping the investigator to know when to continue, stop, or modify the research. Using verification strategies appropriately results in a self-correcting analysis; a continual movement between research design and implementation is another way in which the iterative nature of qualitative research manifests. Morse et al., (2002) outline five verification strategies: methodological coherence; appropriate sample; collecting and analyzing data concurrently; thinking theoretically; and, theory development. Below I reflect on how this study exemplified these strategies. As discussed previously, however, for reasons of availability of the data and the consistency of the story told by it, I did not engage in data collection and analysis concurrently and, thus, do not explore this strategy.

Methodological coherence. Ensuring that the methodological approach is appropriate to the research question, that data collected will be able to address the research question and that the analysis is effective given the nature of the data is one of the central ways to ensure rigour. Methodological coherence developed in the initial stages of a research project is important but not sufficient. Coherence needs to be considered throughout the process as data may require to be treated differently either through a modification of the research question or through a shift in the analytical approach. Likewise, sampling plans may need to be adjusted to better address the question or analysis after initial sampling occurs.

In this project, as mentioned above, the absence of a poverty discourse required some changes in the approach to the research. To maintain methodological coherence a shift in the questions asked in the analysis was required. In addition, to better understand the relative absence of a conceptualization of poverty in the data, a need to better

understand the market discourse emerged. These adjustments as well as others like them were made to ensure methodological coherence throughout the project.

Appropriate sample. Of particular importance in this strategy is the role that negative cases play in strengthening and validating the developing analysis. Saturation and replication are significant indicators of sampling appropriateness; however, negative cases refine the analysis in important ways. The most significant source of negative cases in the data for this project was from the Liberal and NDP candidates in the Hansard debates. While there was considerable discussion of degree, what constitutes a basic need and what level of support is required to cover them, the opposition rarely spoke of poverty outside of the terms of the dominant discourse and the construction prevalent in the IESA – basic needs and labour-market attachment.

Thinking theoretically. This strategy is defined as requiring a "macro-micro perspective[], inching forward without making cognitive leaps, constantly checking and rechecking, and building a solid foundation" (Morse et al., 2002, p. 13). This was achieved through a very slow and careful development of codes and themes throughout the analysis process. For instance, preliminary codes were not developed until after two full readings of the data. The first reading, as described above, was intended to familiarize myself with the content and meaning of the texts. The second reading engaged the data on a slightly deeper level and involved me taking notes. The preliminary codes were developed from these notes.

Theory development. Extending from "thinking theoretically," this strategy also focuses on micro-macro processes between the data and theoretical understandings. It is in this aspect of Morse et al.'s (2002) treatment of rigour that I place Kvale's (1995) focus on dialogue. In this case, initially at least, the dialogue is between the data and the literature. Moving between the two in this research study enabled the development of findings which moved beyond the descriptive without prematurely imposing theoretical constructs onto the data. For example, that the stand-alone discourse on poverty consisted simply of a basic-needs dimension moved beyond description when brought into conversation with some of the literature on need. From this weaving together of data and literature, mechanisms for the exclusion of poverty from the dominant discourse became clearer, the final analysis stronger, and the implications and next steps more evident. In its final analysis, however, the rigour of this study will, in part, depend on how well this conversation extends beyond the data and literature to engage the reader and "advance sensible discussion" (Cronbach, 1980 as cited in Kvale, 1995, p. 23).

Summary

The goals of this research are to uncover the ways in which the Alberta Government constructs poverty within its income-support legislation after a shift from discourses of the post-war welfare state to active social policy discourses. Critical discourse analysis provides a powerful approach to the research question. Drawing on critical theory, social constructionism and Foucault's concept of power while intently responding to the data drawn from various government sources relating to the Income and Employment Supports Act (IESA) ensures a compelling and rigourous treatment of the material.

CHAPTER FOUR: CONCEPTUALIZING POVERTY

The Income and Employment Supports Act (IESA) "consolidates and updates existing legislation, integrates income and employment training programs, increases accountability for training service providers, and builds on Alberta's success in helping people prepare for, find, and keep jobs" (Alberta, Legislature, 2003c, 1159). This is the introduction given by the Minister of Human Resources and Employment for the incoming IESA at its second reading. If you blink, however, you might miss the reference to income support. The obliqueness of this reference, and the poverty that income support addresses, foreshadows the obfuscation of poverty in the IESA and the rest of the data, publications of the Ministry of Employment and Immigration and Alberta Works.

How does this happen? How is it possible to have legislation and entire institutions set up to deal with poverty and yet, not to talk about poverty in the initial or ongoing development and implementation of these institutions and the programs they administer? Furthermore, despite its absence in the discourse, the dominant spending area for the Ministry of Employment and Immigration is Income Support (see chapter 5). While they talk about poverty and income support less than almost any other program, they spend more money on it than anything else. Again, how does this happen, and why? In looking at the underlying conceptualization of poverty in these documents and how this conceptualization is embedded within the dominant discourse of the market, some of these questions are answered. In this chapter, I explore two key themes relating to poverty which emerge in the data: *poverty as need and deficiency* and *the absence of poverty*.

Poverty as Need and Deficiency

The Conceptualization of Poverty in the IESA

This section explores the underlying conceptualization of poverty in the IESA through an examination of the dimensions (categories) of *basic needs*, *lack of resources*, *economic class*, *dependence*, and *the moral character of the poor*. To better understand the nature of this conceptualization, I take a cursory look at some of the dimensions of poverty not present in the data. Then, drawing on the ways in which this conceptualization facilitates the relative absence of a stand-alone poverty discourse by moving poverty out of the political discourse, I move to a consideration of the second theme, the *absence of poverty*.

Poverty as Basic Needs

As discussed in Chapter 2, the category of *basic needs* falls within the material and physical dimensions of poverty and is often a defining feature of absolute conceptions of poverty. Spicker (2007) talks about it in terms of "specific needs" and defines it as a circumstance "where people lack certain things that are essential to them" (p. 4). The emphasis on *basic needs* is evident throughout the data. In defining the purpose of the Act itself, it reads: "The purpose of this Act is to provide programs for persons in need for such of their requirements for food, shelter, personal items and medical and other benefits as are essential to their health and well-being" (IESA, 2003, 1.2). In publications out of Alberta Works, the program is defined as helping "people in Alberta who don't have enough money for the basics, like food, clothing and shelter" (HRE, 2005d, p. 2). In these same publications, the core benefits composing the income support program are defined in terms of basic needs: "The core essential benefit is for food, clothing, household supplies, personal needs, transportation and telephone. The core shelter benefit is for rent and utilities. Together the core shelter benefit and core essential benefit make up the monthly core benefit" (HRE, 2005d, p. 12). From the purpose of the Act to the definitions of Alberta Works to what is provided for through income support's monthly core benefit, a fundamental category of poverty is material need. Provisioning for specific needs, for things such as food, shelter, and clothing, is at the basis of each of these elements of the Alberta government's income-support policy.

The material dimension of poverty as *basic needs* forms the core of the conceptualization of poverty in the data and the only stand-alone poverty discourse. With basic needs as the central poverty discourse in the IESA we can begin to see how the conceptualization of poverty in this legislation contributes to the absence of poverty in the data. Poverty as defined in terms of basic needs lends itself particularly well to a needs interpretation. When defined as a lack of shelter, food, or clothing, poverty is easily conflated with need and deficiency. Moreover, basic needs are perhaps the easiest category of need to be presented as objective, in fact, absolute conceptions of poverty, as discussed in Chapter 2, are often premised on a basic-needs approach and subscribe to an objective level below which people are considered to be poor. Limiting the poverty discourse to basic needs and presenting these needs as objective frames both the needs and the discourse as irrefutable (Robertson, 1998).

Given that this one-dimensional and objective construction of poverty is the primary stand-alone dimension of poverty in the discourse, it is the central, and almost

exclusive, one admissible to the political realm. Poverty as multi-dimensional is excluded through narrowing the poverty construct; the "messiness" of politics is avoided (Robertson, 1998). This "messiness" results from the engagement of competing interests and values in the political arena, the reduction of poverty to objective material need precludes the need for genuine political engagement. Poverty as a consideration of competing needs, as a result of inequality, as a social process, is not admitted to the public arena and the political, economic, and social complexities that such a multi-faceted understanding of poverty engenders are circumvented. I explore this further below but first turn to a consideration of the other dimensions of poverty evident in the data.

Poverty as Economic Circumstances

While at the most basic level, the conceptualization of poverty in the data is grounded in *basic needs* within a materialist understanding of poverty, the economic dimension drives the discourse. The purpose of the Act begins with the material dimension as noted above; however the emphasis is on training for employment:

> The purpose of this Act is to provide programs for persons in need for such of their requirements for food, shelter, personal items and medical and other benefits as are essential to their health and well-being and, *in particular* [italics added], to provide training and other measures to facilitate their movement toward independence and self-sufficiency. (IESA, 2003, 1.2)

Basic needs are provided for but the emphasis is on training and labour-market attachment. Again in the Message from the Deputy Minister, this acknowledgment of basic needs is overshadowed by the imperative of employment: "AHRE will always provide supports to those in need… However, our focus must also be to help those who can work, find work" (HRE, n.d.b, Moving forward…, para. 2). Consistent with an objective, therapeutic needs discourse, basic needs are taken as a static and apolitical fact, will "always be provided for" and then summarily dismissed in favour of the more nuanced and politically relevant "work" discourse.

Within this "work" discourse, both a *resources* and an *economic class* dimension emerge. These categories are evident even in the name of the Act: the Income and Employment Supports Act. As discussed in Chapter 2, 'Income' is almost synonymous with *resource* and 'employment' is the key signifier of one's *economic class*. Evident in the name of the Act and reflected in its purpose statement and other documents, income-support policy in Alberta is primarily focused on supporting the economic dimensions of

the poor and marginalized. In a more detailed examination of each of these categories, I explore this idea.

Poverty as a Lack of Resources. This cluster refers to a lack of the necessary resources to obtain what is needed, or desired, resulting in specific needs. However, instead of poverty being determined by the lack itself (e.g. food) it is defined as the lack of resources to fulfill needs (e.g. money to buy food or land on which to grow food) (Spicker, 2007). In a moneyed economy, it is not surprising that this dimension of poverty is evident in any conceptualization.

The term *low-income* or *lower-income* is one of the most evident indications of the resource dimension. In the data, these terms replace the term *poor*: "The Department provides the following programs and services to help *Albertans with lower incomes* [italics added] meet their basic needs and move into the workforce" (EII, 2007, p. 20); "Alberta Works helps *low-income Albertans* [italics added]…" (HRE, 2005d, p.2). In fact, other than instances in the Hansard debate, the term *poor* is hardly used; in the published documents, it occurs rarely and only as part of the term *working poor*. This shift could be attributable to any number of reasons – ideas about political correctness, sanitization of language, a general shift to more 'technical' terminology – however, whatever the cause, this shift in the language betrays a resource bias. It is a lack of income – not food, shelter, or social connectedness – which defines the poor.

Alberta Works and its income-support program are regularly defined in terms of providing resources to Albertans because they lack something deemed essential. For example, "Alberta Works provides income support to Albertans who don't have the resources to meet their basic needs" (Government of Alberta, 2004, Income Support, para. 1). And again, "Income Support (IS) provides financial assistance for individuals and families whose income and assets are insufficient to meet their basic needs" (HRE, 2005c, p. 16). Poverty here is understood as the result of a lack of resources. In addition, and consistent with the basic needs category outlined above, this lack of resources is specifically linked to a resulting inability to meet basic needs.

The resource dimension is most readily seen in the qualifying criteria for the income-support program:

> You may qualify for Income Support if:
>
> - you are doing everything you can to find a job if you are able to work, and
> - you and your spouse/partner have *income less than* [italics added] the financial benefits provided under Income Support (see page 8), and

- you or your spouse/partner are 18 or over, and
- you live in Alberta, and
- you agree to *apply for all resources available* [italics added] to support you and your family, including child support, and
- you and your spouse/partner have *assets lower than* [italics added] the limits allowed under Income Support. (HRE, 2005d, p. 5)

Three of the six criteria outlined focus on resources to determine eligibility for the income-support program. Eligibility is determined through an individual's income, exhaustion of other resources and the liquidation of almost all of their assets. If income support is indeed a poverty alleviation strategy, within Alberta's income support program, poverty is largely defined as a lack of resources narrowly defined in terms of income. Understood in this way, someone who is self-sufficient in terms of food, shelter, and other basic needs, while not wanting would qualify as *low-income* and be eligible for support. Conversely, a community which loses its land from which they had sustained themselves and, in the process, loses their sense of self-sufficiency and self-determination but receives monetary compensation thereby increasing their income and assets in the short term, would be considered to have moved out of poverty.

A third element in this conceptualization of poverty follows on this second one and dominates the discourse. If poverty is defined even in part by a lack of resources, it follows that a lack of capacity or favourable circumstance to obtain those resources would also be considered within this conceptualization. With the scarce resource primarily defined as income, it follows that employment – the means through which income is generated – becomes central. This is explored in the next section, *economic class*.

Economic Class. The concept of *economic class* as a dimension of poverty draws heavily on Marx and Weber and refers to the relationship between people and the system of production. In this dimension, people with little to no control over the means of production are considered to be poor (Spicker, 2007). As discussed in Chapter 2, however, today this dimension frequently manifests in terms of the relationship to the labour-force as opposed to the means of production. As noted above, a self-sufficient community with a strong sense of self-determination and control over production but without assets or income is considered poor until attached to a labour market or able to accumulate assets through other means. When we look at the data, indeed one of the key elements in the discourse is articulated this way – in terms of employment and labour-

market attachment. Regardless of the program offered by Alberta Works, whether it is income support, employment and training services, health benefits, or child support services, it is frequently framed within the labour-market attachment discourse: "The Ministry also increased the attachment of Albertans to the labour market through the provision of health benefits, child support services and financial assistance to those in need" (EII, 2008, p. 39). In the conceptualization of poverty underlying the IESA and its implementation, the nature of the relationship to the labour market does not appear to be significant. That the relationship is likely to be tenuous, part-time and result in low-wages is not of concern. That there is a relationship, or steps being taken by clients to attach to the labour market, is of primary significance. The greatest need expressed in this discourse is for employment, for the individual's labour-market attachment. The lack of this attachment connotes a need and this need is framed as a deficiency within clients.

While I take a deeper look at labour-market attachment in the following chapter, in this section, I begin unpacking some of the ways in which the idea of *economic class* acts as a dimension of poverty in the underlying conceptualization. As discussed above, *low-income* is a common signifier in this discourse for those living in poverty; *unemployed people* is another common identifier in the data. While the *working poor* are included in an increasing number of programs offered by Alberta Works, the majority of programs target the *unemployed* – people who, ostensibly, have no relationship to the labour market. Unattached to the labour market, the unemployed are not simply in a lower economic class but are outside of the economic class system. A key goal of the IESA is to provide a framework to usher the unemployed back into the economic class system. This goal is often repeated and is most frequently evident in one of the three goals of Alberta Works: to help "unemployed people find and keep jobs" (Government of Alberta, 2004, Alberta Works, para. 1; HRE, 2005b, para. 1; HRE, 2005c, p. 51; and, HRE, 2005d, p.3).

The ways in which we offer help often include assumptions about the problem. The fact that help from Alberta Works is so often offered in terms of job search assistance and skill development indicates that a lack of labour-market attachment, or partial labour-market attachment, is a core element in the conceptualization of poverty in the IESA and related documents. Furthermore, this dimension individualizes poverty in its almost exclusive focus on clients; these programs seek to remedy some individual deficiency, imputing new skills and training. Phrases such as "in this climate of steady growth, we continued to help Albertans by ensuring they received the training and supports necessary

to find and keep jobs" (EII, n.d.c, Message from the Minister, para. 2) and "Alberta Human Resources and Employment provides programs and services to help Albertans get skills and move into work" (Alberta, Legislature, 2003b, 1015) are typical statements within the data, statements focused on increasing the individual's capacity to attach to the labour market. In one of the key documents outlining the services Alberta Works provides it states:

> Alberta Works helps by providing people with:
>
> - up-to-date career, workplace and labour market information available in-person, by phone and online,
> - career planning and job-search assistance, and
> - job order bank and job placement services.
>
> Alberta Works also assists adults to get the academic upgrading, language courses or job skills training they need to find and keep a job. (Government of Alberta, 2004, Employment and Training Services, para. 1)

While poverty is a multi-faceted and complex issue, the discourse of the Ministry of E&I and Alberta Works is unvaryingly consistent in its prescription of labour-market attachment as the solution, furthermore, the responsibility for this attachment primarily lies with the individual. As is discussed below in the section on the absence of poverty, whatever the need may be, the discourse presents labour-market attachment as the solution.

It is interesting to note that not only are the Employment and Training Services framed in terms of an *economic class* dimension of poverty but all of Alberta Works' services are frequently framed within this discourse:

> Through numerous programs and services, EII staff in offices across the province helped Albertans develop skills, find and keep employment, and manage their careers. The Ministry *also increased the attachment of Albertans to the labour market* [italics added] through the provision of health benefits, child support services and financial assistance to those in need. (EII, 2008, p. 39)

Individually as well, these various programs are often framed as increasing attachment to the labour market. In fact, in a sweeping statement by the Minister in the 2004-2005 Annual Report, the entire Alberta Works program is drawn into this discourse: "We don't have welfare offices anymore. We have employment and training centres that help Albertans who can work, find work" (HRE, 2005c, p. 4). The issue at stake in this research is not whether or not these programs do increase labour-market attachment but

the way in which the discourse is framed and where poverty sits within it. With this consideration of the *economic circumstances* dimensions, we begin to see how poverty is colonized by the market discourse.

Poverty as Dependence

While it is clear that labour-market attachment is a key, and perhaps *the* key, element in the underlying conceptualization of poverty in the IESA, the question of *who* is being integrated into the labour market is made evident in an analysis of social position. In particular, ideas about *independence* and *self-reliance* permeate the data. In Spicker's (2007) model this element is referred to as the *dependency cluster* where poverty is conflated with benefit receipt. Referring to the purpose of the Act statement once again, the centrality of the principles of independence and self-sufficiency are evident: "in particular, to provide training and other measures to facilitate their movement toward *independence and self-sufficiency* [italics added]" (IESA, 2003, 1.2). As a key element in the IESA's purpose statement, this encouragement of "movement toward independence and self-sufficiency" permeates the data.

In looking at the concept of independence in the data, however, it is important to first determine what people are striving to be independent from. In this case, it is clear that it is from government financial support. There are many statements indicating that dependence is equated with reliance on government financial support such as: "Applicants and recipients are to realize any and all non-exempt assets to reduce or prevent their dependence on Income Support" (HRE, 2009, 02-01-02, p. 1); "reduce reliance on income support" (HRE, 2009, 02-06-02, p.10); reduce their dependence on income support (HRE, 2009, 02-07-01, p. 1); "become or stay independent of government financial assistance" (HRE, 2004, p. 14); "so they can remain independent of financial assistance" (HRE, 2006, p. 46) or "so they do not become dependent on financial assistance" (HRE, 2006, p. 46). In the legislature as well, the Minister frames the dependence discourse in these terms:

> Bill 32 is a bold step forward for Alberta and takes us even further away from old approaches to welfare that simply did not work. They trapped people into ongoing dependence on government handouts instead of giving them the hand up they need to live independent and productive lives. (Alberta, Legislature, 2003c, 1160)

In the data, independence means independence from government income-support programs and, furthermore, self-reliance refers to a dependence on waged labour.

More than simply a lack of reliance on income support, terms such as independence, self-reliance, and self-sufficiency are invariably used in conjunction with labour-market attachment: “We help Albertans meet their basic needs and encourage them to become as self-reliant as possible through employment” (HRE, 2004, p. 34); “Clients in this sub-type should receive employment and training services to assist them in meeting expectations in becoming self-sufficient” (HRE, 2009, 02-02-02, p. 5); and,

> In an effort to foster independence, referrals may also be made to a variety of AHRE career and employment services, including:
>
> - the Career Information Hotline
> - Canada-Alberta Job Order Bank Services (JOBS)
> - Student Funding Contact Centre
> - Labour Market Information Centres. (HRE, 2005a, para. 5)

So prevalently combined with labour-market attachment, these terms are also conflated with employment. Often this conflation of independence with employment is juxtaposed with *basic needs* in statements about the Alberta Works program. “The Department, through Alberta Works, provides financial assistance, health benefits, and child support services to low-income Albertans so they can meet their basic needs and be as independent as possible” (HRE, 2006, p. 45). Instead of explicitly naming labour-market attachment here, “as independent as possible” becomes a euphemism for the focus on employment. While independence is a subjective and value-laden term, it is clear that in the data it refers to labour-market attachment and no longer requiring government income support and little else. Through a conflation with labour-market attachment, we see how the dimension of *dependence* contributes to the economic dimensions of the conceptualization of poverty.

However, terms such as *independence*, *self-sufficiency*, and *self-reliance* though they clearly refer to a reduction of dependence on government financial assistance through labour-market attachment, they are not technical terms with unique meanings but rather are laden with social and moral significance. While *poverty as dependence* in many ways simply echoes the *economic class* and *resource* dimensions, it also reframes the imperative in moral terms. While the labour-market attachment dimension frames poverty as a deficiency in skills, the emphasis on independence suggests deficiency in character.

The Moral Character of the Poor

As noted in chapter 2, the moral dimension cuts across the other dimensions of poverty with implications for the nature of the relationships between the poor and the rest

of society. A primary distinction within the moral dimension is between poverty being perceived as the result of individual failings or as the result of society's failings, whether poverty primarily reflects the moral character of the poor or whether poverty is a challenge to the moral character of the rest of society. In the data, poverty is individualized and with this individualization the moral character of the poor as individuals is called into question. Evident within the dimensions above, in this section I elucidate some of the moral elements embedded within the discourse.

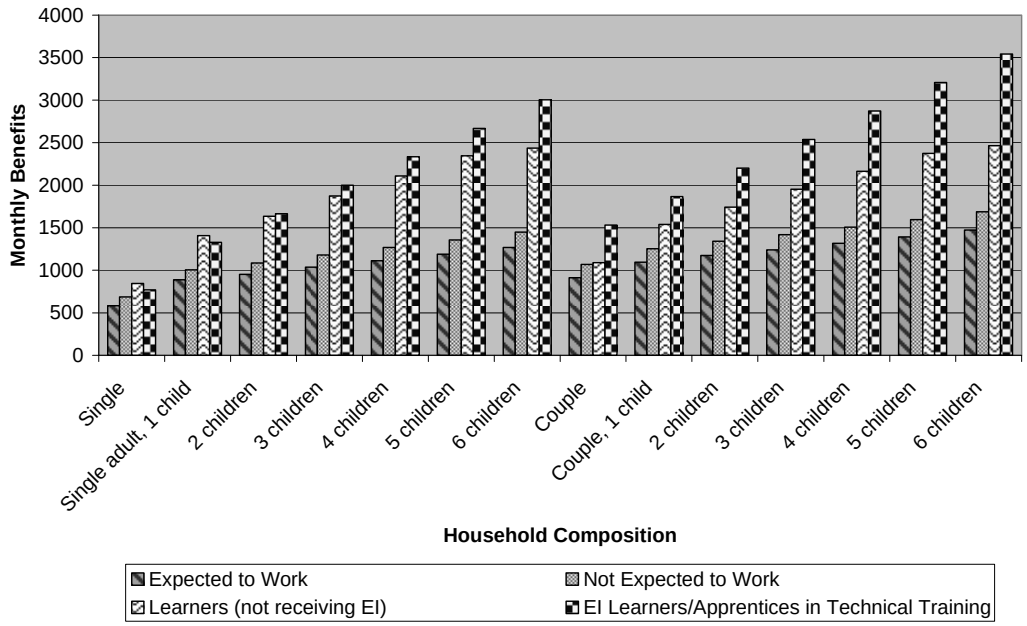
The preceding dimensions work together to delineate the morally acceptable role for Albertans. More than an expectation, labour-market attachment in the data carries with it the sense of a moral imperative. The top qualifying criteria in one of the key guides to accessing income support is that "you are doing everything you can to find a job if you are able to work" (HRE, 2005d, p. 5). Furthermore, the first of several circumstances in which benefits would be discontinued, suspended or reduced relate to employment or training and include:

a) refuses to seek or to accept reasonable employment for reasonable wages,
b) terminates employment that the applicant or recipient might reasonably have continued to hold,
c) refuse to make reasonable efforts
    i. to obtain compensation or collect income that the applicant, recipient or a member of his or her household unit is entitled to or eligible for, or
    ii. to realize on an asset or other financial resource that the applicant, recipient or a member of his or her household unit owns or may be entitled to,
d) …
e) refuses or neglects to take advantage of appropriate training or rehabilitative measures. IESA, 2003, 1.15

The moral implications of labour-market attachment are particularly evident in the categories of Expected To Work (ETW) and Not Expected To Work (NETW). This distinction as it appears in the discourse is largely based on assumptions of barriers within the control of clients and out of their control. People in the NETW category are "assessed as having **multiple** barriers to employment *beyond their control* [italics added]" (HRE, 2009, 02-02-03, p.4) and "receive a higher benefit rate and must not be placed in this category if resolution of their barrier or condition is *within their control* [italics added]" (HRE, 2009, 02-02-03, p.1). The underlying assumption in this

distinction is that for a number of people living in poverty the barriers they experience are individual barriers that can be overcome. The benefit rates received by the various categories of income support recipients reflects ideas of deserving and undeserving poor, where those working to overcome their individual barriers (learners) and attach to the labour market are rewarded with higher benefits while the NETW category receive lower rates even though their barriers are "out of their control" and, finally, those Expected To Work receive the lowest amounts.

Figure 1. Monthly Benefit Rates based on Client Category



Source: Data from Alberta Works fact sheets (Alberta Works, 2008b; Alberta Works, 2008c; Alberta Works, 2008d).

The moral element of this 'reward' system is particularly evident when juxtaposed with the primary poverty discourse of *basic needs*. The basic needs discourse in the data is premised on assumptions about its neutrality, objectivity and, therefore, irrefutability. The variance amongst benefit levels based upon one's relationship to the labour market is striking when one considers that the base poverty conceptualization is that basic needs are objective and presumably the same for everyone. Finding work is a clear expectation of Alberta's income-support program; the presumption that most barriers to employment are within the control of individuals and that benefits are

distributed based on labour-market attachment shifts this expectation into a moral imperative.

In terms of the response poverty calls forth from the larger society, the discourse defines societal responsibility out of the discussion and instead frames the government's role within this market-centred individualization of poverty. Consistent with the discourse and in contrast to a sense of communal solidarity or caring for one's neighbour through the "numberless capillaries of the state" (Ignatieff, 1984, p.10), the government believes that helping Albertans get jobs is "an honourable mandate and an honourable objective because we need to make the most of every person's potential…we're saying that each person has potential, and we're saying that the government will support that potential to find employment" (Alberta, Legislature, 2003b, 1014). From Confucius to Samuel Johnson to Gandhi, Churchill, and Truman, the measure of society has often been said to be how it treats its poor, in the discourse on Alberta's income-support program however, poverty does not reflect on the province at large beyond its capacity to support people in finding work. As the Minister Clint Dunford says: "I believe each Albertan wants to contribute to society, feels better working, and has a skill set to offer. It is our task to tap into that skill and facilitate the connection to the workplace" (HRE, 2004, p. 4). Through the individualization of poverty and the focus on labour-market attachment as the solution, the community's responsibility is akin to mining individuals for marketable skills in significant contrast to social contracts which focus on equality, solidarity, and the sharing of wealth. Within this discourse, the claims individuals have on the state are narrowed and limited to the facilitation of labour-market attachment and our relations as neighbours and care for each other as a community are negotiated through the market.

Summary of the Underlying Conceptualization of Poverty in the IESA

To summarize the underlying conceptualization of poverty in the IESA, I draw upon a story told by the Minister of Human Resources and Employment in presenting HRE's estimates for 2003-04. He tells of a married couple with a young child who could not pay their bills and had had their utilities cut off. The father had had his hours cut back significantly and, while the mother had a new job, she would not begin for a couple of weeks. They received help from the Ministry in paying their utility arrears. And, as the Minister tells it:

> Frankly, they were embarrassed to see our staff….A few months later our staff received a note. The family was back on track, and both parents were working.

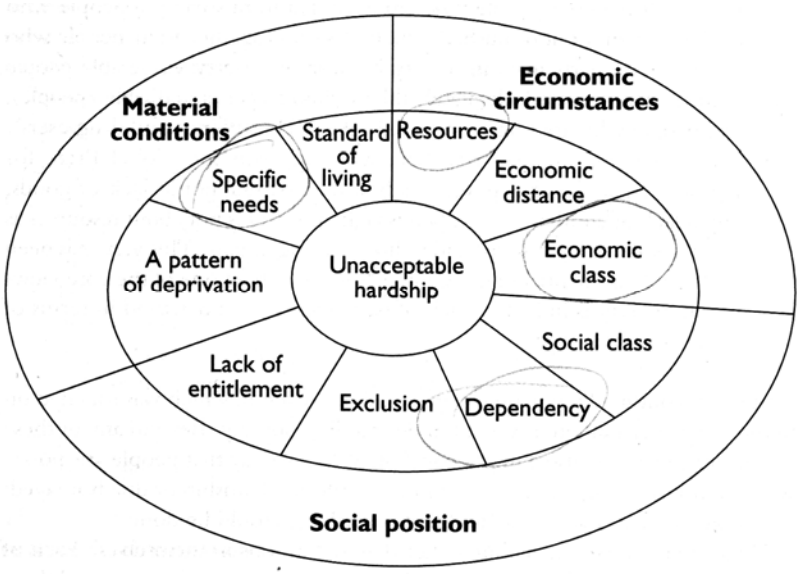
> They just needed that hand up and required no further assistance from us. (Alberta, Legislature, 2003b,1014)

This story suggests that poverty is short-term, located in the physical and basic needs realm, alleviated through employment, and the result of an unusual combination of individual circumstances. Focusing on *basic needs* and the virtues of employment, this conceptualization of poverty is limited in its capacity to incorporate the social and political elements of life and adheres in many ways to an absolute conception of poverty, as described in Chapter 2. While absolute approaches to poverty are often focused on the physical and resource based dimensions, the relative and capabilities approaches shift this focus on minimums and survival to averages, participation, and the capability to function. Using the example of utility arrears as short-term need defines poverty out of the realm of the social and political and the corresponding concern with participation and the contexts in which these individuals live is minimized if not entirely absent. The context the Minister provides in his story is that of the couple's labour-market attachment status. In doing so, this status is defined factually and as individual characteristics as opposed to mutable effects of the market. The father's hours had been cut back but we do not know why; the nature of the employment the mother has secured is not given. What we do know is that the couple was appropriately ashamed for having to depend on the government to get through this time in their lives. We also know that they are, despite this setback, hard-working Albertans; while their poverty resulted from an ostensibly unusual constellation of circumstances they were able to get "back on track" with even a thank-you note to the Ministry. Their moral character is not questioned; they were both working when the Ministry got their note and needed nothing more. Perhaps most importantly, what this family's story did not do was challenge underlying assumptions of poverty in such a way as would perhaps require a shift in thinking about how we respond; the story does not challenge the moral character of the wealthy, powerful, and general population of Alberta.

Conceptualizing poverty as *basic needs* supported by a strong discourse of the virtues of employment dismisses many other dimensions of poverty, particularly those which contextualize poverty and the lives of individuals living in poverty. In looking at Spicker's (2007) model of poverty dimensions (see Figure 1), this becomes even more clear. Whether in the social, economic, or material realm, dimensions absent from the conceptualization of poverty in the IESA are those that lend themselves to a relative understanding of poverty, those that see poverty within its societal context. Dimensions

such as *economic distance*, *social class*, *social exclusion* and *standard of living* do not figure into the conceptualization of poverty informing the IESA. Likewise the dimension *a pattern of deprivation* which considers poverty as occurring over time is absent. The only conception of poverty admissible to the poverty discourse in the data consists of the short-term deficiency of a specific, basic need, (such as utilities) because of a lack of waged employment.

Figure 2. Model of Poverty Dimensions.



Source: Spicker, 2007, p. 6 (used with permission).

The absence of the *lack of entitlement* dimension is of particular interest because with this absence, the ways in which the dimensions that are present in the conceptualization – *basic needs*, *resources*, *economic class*, and *dependence* – are circumscribed to two-dimensional and individualistic interpretation. Related to Amartya Sen's capabilities poverty (2006), the *lack of entitlements* dimension does not define poverty as a lack of goods or income but as a lack of entitlement related to legal, social, and political arrangements. Much of the entitlement discourse centers on rights – civil and political but also social and economic. At its core, however, this dimension is concerned with how social structures and processes enable or prevent people from 'functioning.' Without a consideration of *entitlement* in a conceptualization of poverty, structural conceptions are overwhelmed by individual needs which are able to be simplified and objectified. Instead of a conception of poverty with the capacity to

recognize the multi-faceted and structural nature of poverty, the underlying conceptualization found in the IESA, by the nature of its component parts, reduces and simplifies the concept of poverty in such ways that exclude it from the public sphere and from political discourse.

In the data, poverty, although a multi-faceted concept, is effectively reduced to "basic needs" – to the need for shelter, food, and clothing. These specific, material needs combine with conceptions of the moral character of the poor to provide the basis of the conceptualization of poverty within the IESA and are the extent of any stand-alone poverty discourse. Alongside these dimensions of *specific needs* and *moral character* stand three other dimensions of poverty: *resources*, *economic class*, and *dependency* (Spicker, 2007). These dimensions define poverty, respectively, in terms of lack of income, lack of labour-market attachment, and dependency on government benefits. In part, dimensions of the underlying conceptualization of poverty within the IESA, these elements are also key elements within the discourse of the market. While these latter three dimensions are considered independently below, taken together, they tell a story of the virtues of employment – a dominant story within the market discourse. A combination of basic needs and the virtues of employment provide the key conceptualization of poverty in the data with a moralizing discourse focused on individual responsibility and deficiency cutting across them all. Through Alberta Works, a minimal amount of food, shelter, and clothing will be provided for, alongside this value-laden discourse of the imperative to engage in waged labour. Informing the poverty discourse and underlying these dimensions, however, are subtle and pervasive assumptions about *need* which frame this construction of poverty.

Poverty as Need and Deficiency. While many dimensions and conceptualizations of poverty do not necessarily translate into need and need does not necessarily connote deficiency, the poverty addressed in the IESA and corresponding documents is constructed as both – need and deficiency. Underlying all dimensions of the conceptualization of poverty in the data is an assumption of lack situated in individuals: a lack of basic needs due to a lack of employment because of a lack of skills and training and subsequent dependency on the government (a lack of self-reliance and independence). While the term poverty is almost entirely absent from the data the term *need* is pervasive. In his critique of professionalized service, McKnight (1995) outlines three professionalized assumptions of need, the first two of which are relevant here: "the translation of a need into a deficiency" (p. 43) and "placing the perceived deficiency *in*

the client" (p. 43). He argues that "a need could be understood as a condition, a want, a right, an obligation of another, an illusion, or an unresolvable problem. Professional practice consistently defines a need as an unfortunate absence or emptiness in another" (McKnight, 1995, p. 43); an absence or emptiness that needs to be filled. In this case, basic needs such as shelter, food, and clothing need to be provided for and labour-market attachment achieved. In fact, in the data, the conceptualization of poverty which underlies the IESA is often most evident not in an exploration of the poverty discourse itself (given its general absence) but in what is prescribed, in what is provided to fill the various needs.

The second assumption outlined by McKnight (1995), that of placing need as deficiency in the person, provides the foundation for an individualization of poverty in the data. The IESA's programs and services target individuals, isolating them from their contexts and thereby "the interpretation of the need necessarily becomes individualized" (McKnight, 1995, p. 44). Robertson (1998) talks of this individualization of need in terms of a therapeutic discourse where citizens are turned into patients and clients, and needs are commodified. Through this discourse of need as individual and therapeutically provided for, need and the poverty it defines are effectively removed from the political discourse; needs are no longer considered to be competing values debated in the public sphere, but, instead, are objective criteria determined by professionals. By narrowing the discourse in this way, need ceases to be political and poverty, collapsed into this unidimensional concept, ceases to be worthy of public engagement. Drawing on Arendt's (1958) consideration of the Greeks, and their understanding of legislation as the walls within which political life occurs, we see how through the IESA, and these base assumptions of poverty, the "city walls" are built excluding poverty.

The Absence of Poverty

With basic needs as objective deficiencies located in individuals and professionally ministered to, they become technical problems to solve rather than political issues to engage (McKnight, 1995). Furthermore, because of the employment focus of all but the basic needs dimension, the poverty discourse is subsumed within a market discourse. Despite the categories discussed above, in the data, poverty plays a very small part in the discourse around the IESA. Over the years considered, the absence of poverty is most evident in the Ministry's Annual Reports generally and specifically in messages from the Ministers and Deputy Ministers, however, it is evident elsewhere as well. The

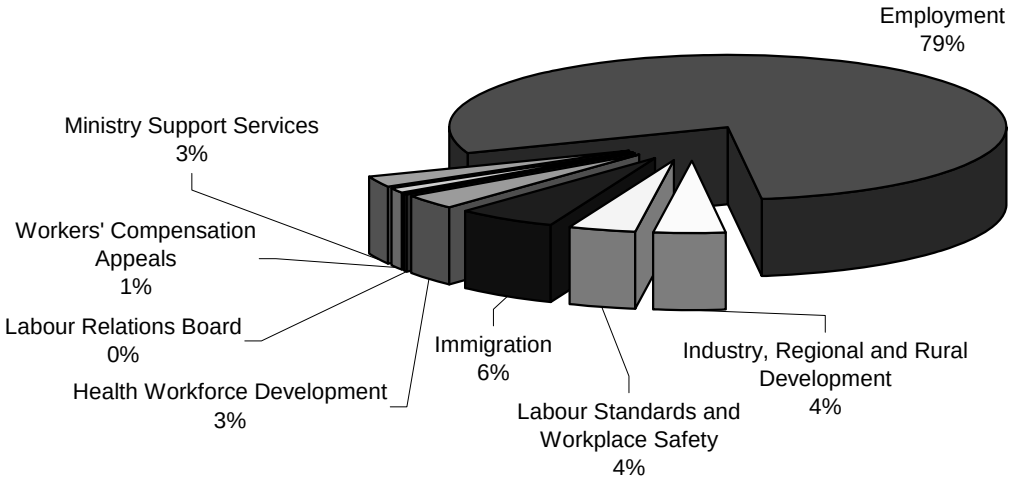
discourse of labour-market attachment is so dominant that whether the IESA is in fact related to poverty, or whether it should be, bears consideration.

In considering whether poverty *should* be an element in the discourse within the Ministry of Employment and Immigration, once again I begin with the purpose statement for the Act: "The purpose of this Act is to provide programs for persons in need" (IESA, 2003, 1.2). As discussed above, the purpose statement then outlines material and economic needs that will be provided for. When we look at who the Act is addressing, according to this statement, it is *persons in need*. Furthermore, in presenting the Bill in the legislature, the Minister bringing forward the IESA, Clint Dunford, states that the government is "very anxious to see [the IESA] move forward. It is a meaningful attempt, a sincere attempt to move to a more integrated system as to how we deliver services *to the most needy people* [italics added] that we have here in our province" (Alberta, Legislature, 2003b, 1015). In these statements, we see not only the centrality of poverty in the Act but the equation of poverty and need and the absence of conceptions which move poverty out of a need discourse. Finally, the Minister speaks directly about poverty as well. In defending the $20 benefit rate increase that accompanied the IESA, despite the MLA low-income review which had called for greater increases in benefit rates (MLA Committee to Review Low-Income Programs, 2001), he states that "more government spending isn't a long-term answer to poverty. Employment is the best answer, and we help people gain employment" (Alberta, Legislature, 2003b, 1014). Poverty *is* the question and employment is the answer, an answer that overwhelms and subsumes the question.

While the Act clearly targets poverty-as-need, the Ministry of Employment and Immigration encompasses many areas not legislated through the IESA. Looking at the name of the Ministry – Employment and Immigration – it is entirely possible that the IESA only legislates a small percentage of the programs run through the Ministry and that employment or immigration require a considerably larger portion of the Ministry's resources. However, looking at the Ministry of Employment, Immigration and Industry's (EII) spending in 2007-2008 (Figures 2 and 3), programs legislated through the IESA comprise the bulk of the Ministry's budget, income support alone being the largest spending area. In Figure 2, we see the breakdown of EII's entire budget. The largest portion (79%) is 'Employment' the area within which we find the programs legislated by the IESA, Income Support, Employment and Training Services, Alberta Adult Health

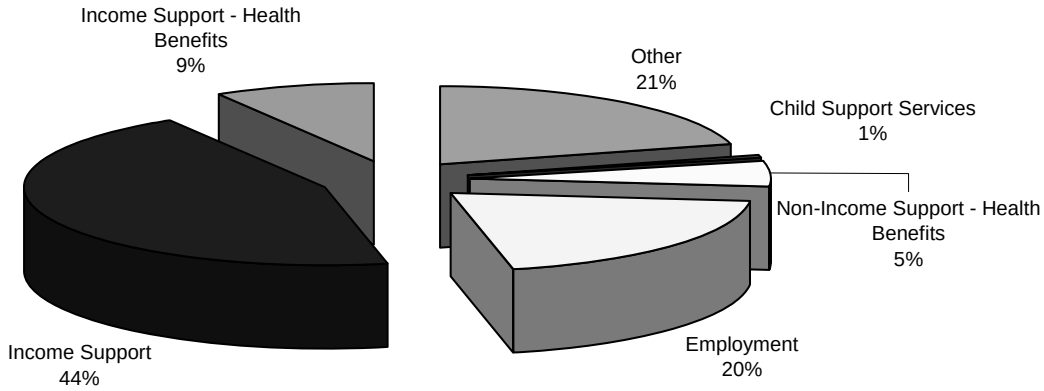
Benefits, Alberta Child Health Benefits, and Child Support Services. Figure 3 shows the breakdown of expenses within the 'Employment' sector.

Figure 3. Ministry of Employment, Immigration, and Industry Expenses, 2007-2008.



Source: Data from the Ministry of Employment & Immigration Annual Report 2007-2008.

Figure 4. Employment Spending Compared to Income Support Spending within the Employment Sector of EII, 2007-2008.



Source: Data from the Ministry of Employment & Immigration Annual Report 2007-2008.

As is evident in these figures, 'Employment' comprises the large majority of the Ministry's spending at 79%. Furthermore, within the 'Employment' sector, the majority

of spending (44%) is going to the Income Support Program (including Expected to Work, Not Expected to Work, and Learners), more than doubling what is spent on Employment (20%). The category 'Other' is predominantly 'Program Delivery and Support' (18 of 21%). If we combine Income Support with Health Benefits (for income-support recipients (9%) and the "working poor" (5%)) with a conservative estimate of half of Program Delivery and Support category (9%), we find that two-thirds (67%) of the Ministry's spending within the 'Employment' sector is focused on non-employment directed programs targeting the poor. Clearly, the absence of poverty in the discourse is not because of an absence of poverty alleviation in the Ministry's activities. If poverty is the question the IESA addresses and income support and related programs are the Ministry's largest spending area, why are poverty and income support absent in the discourse?

One of the key areas where this absence is evident is in looking at what gets measured and what kinds of statistics are used to support statements and make arguments. "Currently we support 30,000 households on SFI, which is the lowest ratio in the country, but can we get that number even lower, and can we help more people find jobs?" (Alberta, Legislature, 2003b, 1014). Statements such as this one made by the Minister of HRE, Clint Dunford, focus on caseload numbers, on moving people off of the welfare roll and into employment. These same ideas and types of measures were used in framing the introduction of the IESA to the public: "We have the lowest percentage of the working population receiving income support and the lowest unemployment rate in the country" (Government of Alberta, 2003, p. 1). However, as noted in the introduction, employment no longer provides the same security against poverty as it did in the post-war years. The post-industrial employment structure has increased the amount of non-standard/precarious employment and low-wages, part-time or seasonal work; jobs with fewer benefits and little room for advancement are becoming increasingly common (Jenson, 2004; Sauders, 2005; Scott, 2005). In 2007, 13.4% of full-time working Albertans lived at or below the LICOs, a rate higher than the national average of 12.7% (Saunders & Brisbois, 2007). The previous year, however, had seen 118,000 new jobs in Alberta, an increase of 6.5% (Saunders & Brisbois, 2007). While jobs have been abundant in Alberta, finding employment that lifts one above the LICOs could very likely be harder in Alberta than in other parts of Canada. Employment is only a ticket out of poverty if poverty is defined as a lack of labour-market attachment. The focus of moving people off of income-support and into employment dominates the discourse whereas the idea of moving people out of poverty by any other definition (such as the LICOs) is

entirely absent. This fixation on employment of any kind is demonstrated once again in the Legislature when a member of the opposition (Brian Mason) is interrupted by a member of government while challenging Bill 32:

> Mr. Mason: Mr. Chairman, the act will not address the main problems face by low-income Albertans, and that includes a few things. First of all, the lowest minimum wage in the country… I know that some members have argued in the past…
>
> Mr. Smith: What's the unemployment rate? (Alberta, Legislature, 2003d, 1437)

The concern is clearly with employment rates and labour-market attachment and not with a more complex and nuanced response to the problems encountered by low-income Albertans.

The measures used to evaluate the success of the Ministry reflect this same partiality. While there are several measures included in the Annual Reports, none of them look at poverty rates in the province, however, several measure labour-market attachment outcomes for clients. For example: "Percentage of participants employed post-intervention" (EII, 2007, p. 59; EII, 2008 p. 50) and "Percentage of participants employed after leaving Income Support" (EII, 2007, p. 62; EII, 2008, p. 51). What gets measured is what gets dealt with. In fact, in 2007 changes to the performance measures were made. These changes included the addition of measures to evaluate labour force participation, recruitment and productivity (EII, 2007). No measures were added to look at poverty. In fact, the one measure most closely related to poverty was removed: "Satisfaction of individuals with program/service: Income Support" (EII, 2007, p. 51). Clearly, while the purpose of the IESA and the largest portion of the Ministry's budget target poverty alleviation, the discourse defines poverty not only as a secondary consideration but defines it out of the discourse almost entirely.

In this section, the absence of poverty is evident, without question. In reading through Annual Reports from the Ministry, it is entirely possible and perhaps even likely that you would not realize that this is the Ministry most directly responsible for poverty programs in this province. More subtle, however, and perhaps more insidious, is the absence of a stand-alone poverty discourse outside of the most basic needs discourse which is made invisible through its presentation as neutral and objective. When poverty does enter the discourse of the Ministry of Employment and Immigration, it is always tied to the labour-market attachment discourse:

> As the provincial department supporting both social and economic policy, AHRE is uniquely positioned to ensure that opportunities created by economic prosperity and growth benefit those in the workforce as well as Albertans who are looking to find their place in the labour market. (HRE, 2004, p. 136)

Social and economic policy are coupled and poverty and labour-market attachment collapsed. While social policy and the unemployed are included in this discourse, they are hollow shells, Trojan horses perhaps, bringing the economic discourse into the social realm. Supporting both the social and economic in the province, the Ministry of E&I has in effect collapsed the social into the economic. Consistent with active social policy, in the data social policy supports economic policy; however, the ways in which it is framed in this discourse strip it of its inherent value. Social policy in general and poverty more specifically serve to fuel a discourse dominated by the needs and priorities of the market and which reduces the multi-faceted, textured, and complex concept of poverty to a two-dimensional construct.

CHPATER FIVE: POVERTY ECLIPSED – THE DISCOURSE OF THE MARKET

Through the objectification and neutralizing of *basic need*, the only stand-alone poverty discourse is excluded from the political discourse. The remaining dimensions composing the conceptualization of poverty in the data, *lack of resources*, *economic class*, and, *dependence* are easily subsumed within the market discourse. This chapter explores this discourse of the market as it is evident in the data particularly in the ways in which it eclipses that of poverty. In the analysis, three key themes emerge: *the alignment of social and economic policy*; *human capital and the individual-market relationship*; and, *Albertans as a ready labour supply*. I examine each of these themes individually below.

Alignment of Social and Economic Policy

A key assumption of this research is that the IESA signifies a shift from the logic of Alberta's post-war welfare state towards active social policy. Indeed, in HRE's 2003/04 Annual Report, the fact that significant changes had occurred was made explicit: "The Department has undertaken a substantial redesign of income support during the 2003/04 fiscal year" (HRE, 2004, p. 55). While the research is not of a comparative nature, in exploring the Act it is evident that this substantial redesign includes the incorporation of active social policy as the driving policy logic underlying the IESA. As a key element in active social policy, evidence of the integration of social and economic policy in the discourse is not surprising. What is surprising, however, is the unidirectional nature of the integration; the extent to which social policy serves the economic discourse with no concomitant integration of economic policy into the social policy discourse is striking. In the data, viewing social policy as productive, as a factor which can contribute to economic growth (White, 2003; Saint-Martin, 2004), seems to have stripped it down to the barest form of what can be considered 'productive' within a narrow economic realm. In this section, I first look at the integration of social and economic policy in the discourse, and then I explore the unidirectional nature of this integration and the hollowing out of the social policy discourse to accommodate the economic.

The name of the Act, the Income and Employment Supports Act, foreshadows the coupling of income support and employment throughout the data. A news release about the IESA coming into force has as its headline: "New Act strengthens link between income support and training" (Government of Alberta, 2003). This link is reiterated regularly in descriptions of the new program, Alberta Works: "Alberta Works: income

support and employment training program" (HRE, n.d.a, para. 2); " Alberta Works – a blended approach to helping people through job search assistance, training, income support" (HRE, 2004, p. 4); "an integrated system of supports" (HRE, 2004, p. 42); and, "develop Alberta's broad economic and social spectrum" (EII, n.d.a, para. 4). The Minister makes the integration explicit when he addresses the legislature: "With Bill 32, Mr. Speaker, we make a direct link in legislation between income support and employment support. Instead of having two parallel tracks, we will integrate them into a new approach" (Alberta, Legislature, 2003e, 1531). The idea of social policy as a productive factor, as a potentially key factor in increasing human capital and economic growth (White, 2003; Saint-Martin, 2004) and, as such, embraced by the economic sphere is evident in the data.

In this alignment, however, we see that these "two parallel tracks" of social and economic policy – of income support and employment support – are not equal partners in their integration. In the second half of his statement, the Minister expands on what this integration will achieve: "a new approach that focuses squarely on people and helping them have the skills they need to contribute to Alberta's growing economy and meet some shortages in the labour market and support themselves and their families" (Alberta, Legislature, 2003e, 1531). While there are plenty of statements in the data about a blended approach and integrated system, the majority of phrases incorporating the social and economic elements of the IESA focus on the economic dimension with social policy playing a supporting role: "helping people move from income support to the work force" (Government of Alberta, 2003, para. 1); "moving people into employment wherever possible" (HRE, n.d.a, para. 2); "from income support to meaningful jobs that contribute to safe workplaces, healthy homes, and vibrant economies" (EII, n.d.a, para. 4). Statements such as "Income Support (IS) is based on the premise that clients want to work and become independent" (HRE, 2009, 02-01-03, p. 1) normalize the expectation that the foundation of IS is as a trampoline into the labour market as opposed to a safety net to protect against the uncertainties and risk inherent in the economy (Saint-Martin as cited in White, 2003). Within this discourse, income support, and social policy more generally, are framed as providing starting points from which individuals can embark into the economic sphere as opposed to being attributed any inherent value; the value of the social sphere for its own sake is not recognized within the discourse: "By integrating social and labour market legislation, we are establishing that training for work is as much a part of our social supports as financial and health benefits" (Government of Alberta,

2003, para. 3). In fact, in the discourse, training is not only "as much a part" but is the central part of income support programs in Alberta.

In this theme, it becomes clear that indeed social and economic policy are aligned; however, they are aligned in that social policy has become tailored to the needs of the market. This is particularly well illustrated in the Legislature through a discussion about the minimum wage:

> If the minimum wage in Alberta is irrelevant because the market has already outstripped it and people are paying higher wages then $5.90 an hour, then what's the problem with moving up the minimum wage? The minimum wage should not be set according to how many people are working and for how much at a given point in the economic cycle affecting the province. The minimum wage should be set at a rate that will in effect give people a certain amount of dignity and the bare essentials that they need to survive. (Alberta, Legislature, 2003d, 1437)

In this excerpt, a member of the opposition is arguing for the regulation of the economic sphere to support the social. Instead of the minimum wage being set according to the vagaries of the province's economic cycle, the argument is put forth that it should be set according to the standard of living of the citizens; instead of the minimum wage being determined by the economic sphere, it is argued that it should be set according to the social sphere. He asks, "what's the problem with moving up the minimum wage?" especially given that wages had already long outstripped the minimum wage at that time. The problem, perhaps, is that the principle behind the question is a challenge to the hegemony of the economic sphere.

The post-industrial employment structure and the second demographic transition have significant implications for the labour market and for social provisioning. As discussed earlier, changes in global economic structures and processes have resulted in an increase in precarious/non-standard employment in Canada making secure and well-paid employment for low-skilled workers increasingly difficult to find (Jenson, 2004; Scott, 2005). With changes in family formation and dissolution processes, we see an increase in single parent families, a tripling of the proportion of women in the workforce, a decrease in fertility rates and an aging population (Juby & Le Bourdais, 2006; Jenson, 2004). The Ministry's "substantial redesign of income support" (HRE, 2004, p. 55; HRE, 2005c, p. 231), is, in part, a response to some of these changes: "The social fabric of Alberta is changing which may change the demand for the Department's programs and services"

(HRE, 2004, p. 138). In this shifting landscape requiring changes to the nature of social provisioning, the discourse surrounding these changes is one in which social provisioning is largely seen as a means to an economic end, in which goals such as poverty alleviation are absent while labour market attachment as an end in itself is elevated.

Peck (2001) argues that income support programs have always informed a larger labour regulation agenda and vice versa: "Relief systems shape the way labor markets work, while labor markets shape the way relief systems work" (p. 36). With the post-industrial employment structure comes a new social welfare logic in Alberta, that of active social policy. Likewise, active social policy as it is implemented in Alberta informs the ways in which the labour market develops.

> It is important to recognize that these 'market relations' do not exist independently of relief systems themselves: political pressure for the 'reform' of relief systems, particularly where this is exerted by employers or their representatives, has as much to do with remaking labor-market rules as it does with concerns about social provision per se. 'Market relations' are not in this sense outside, separate from, or above state action, just as relief systems are not 'external' to the labor market. These two spheres – state and economy, relief systems and the labor market – are fundamentally and irretrievably linked; their logic is a conjunctural one, their structures and dynamics mutually constitutive. (Peck, 2001, pp. 44-45)

In the way in which the discourse frames social policy within the data, the fact that Alberta's relief system supports the labour market is evident. In fact, the discourse gives little space to the social sphere (i.e. income support) other than the ways in which it can support the economic. This leads to the question: Is welfare reform simply the provisioning of labour for "flexible" markets? In the next section, I explore this relationship between individuals and the market as it is framed in the discourse.

Human Capital and the Individual-Market Relationship

Following on the integration of social and economic policy is the relationship between people accessing income-support services and the labour market. Much like the way in which social policy is used to facilitate the economic policy discourse without a similar concession on the part of the economy (i.e., increased regulation of the economy to support the social), the relationship between individuals and the labour market is dependent on individuals moulding themselves to fit the labour market and not on any changes to the labour market itself. Peck (2001) suggests that:

> stripped down to its labour-regulatory essence, workfare is not about creating jobs for people who don't have them; it is about creating workers for jobs that nobody wants. In a Foucauldian sense, it is seeking to make 'docile bodies' for the new economy: flexible, self-reliant, and self-disciplining. (p. 6)

This section explores the extent to which this statement applies to the discourse found in the data through an examination of the theme *human capital and the individual-market relationship*.

"To help unemployed people find and keep jobs" (Government of Alberta, 2004, Alberta Works, para. 1; HRE, 2005b, para. 1; HRE, 2005c, p. 51; and, HRE, 2005d, p.3) is one of the often repeated goals of Alberta Works. Through "workforce development initiatives" (HRE, 2004, p. 138; HRE, 2005c, p. 232), "human capital development" (HRE, 2005c, p. 30), and "human resource capacity" (HRE, 2005c, p. 232), the Ministry works to achieve this goal of helping to employ people: "The division is responsible for Alberta Works and other programs to ensure Albertans have the skills, supports and information they need to succeed in the labour market" (HRE, 2006, p. 15). As is evident through these excerpts, the means through which this support comes is in developing the capacities and abilities of the individuals seeking employment; the emphasis in the discourse is on skills and training initiatives. "Alberta has proved [*sic*] that with the right skills and training, many unemployed people become successful in the workplace" (Government of Alberta, 2003, para. 2). In the discourse, functions of the market and labour-market regulation do not contribute to individuals' success in the workplace; the success of these individuals is because of training and skills development.

Consistent with a skills development approach, responsibility for labour-market attachment is individualized: "Alberta Works offers information and services on career planning, training, employment assistance such as résumé writing or job search techniques, and workplace and labour market information that can help you identify jobs and skills that are in demand" (E&I, 2008a, p. 7). The task before the individual is to figure out the labour market and hone their skills to fit into the gaps. "Alberta's Supply Outlook Model: Special Equity Groups (2006-2016)" is a prime example of this (EII, n.d.b, p. 4; EII, 2007, p. 56). This model informs people of the occupational supply outlook for groups under-represented in the labour market enabling them to focus their skill development to "find their place in the workforce". The discourse recognizes the changing nature of the employment structure but instead of questioning it, the economy is framed as an objective and immutable reality; the discourse targets individuals and their

need to change to keep pace. The mission statement for the Department of Human Resources and Employment reflects this position: “To provide a continuum of services and information that enables individuals to succeed in the changing workforce…” (HRE, 2004, p. 34; HRE, 2005c, p. 238; HRE, 2006, p. 232). Under the future challenges sections of the 2003/04 and 2004/05 annual reports we see it again: “ensuring that Alberta workers have the right skills for a rapidly changing economy” (HRE, 2004, p. 136; HRE, 2005c, p. 230). The onus is on Albertans to develop the “right skills” for the economy, in no way is the economy understood to be in service to Albertans.

Important to note at this point is the marked difference between the discourse of skills development within the data and the broader discourse of education within the active social policy literature. Active social policy largely focuses on raising the education levels of all people with a special emphasis on the importance of early childhood education for later human capital gain (Banting, 2005). However, the discourse in the data does not adopt this longer-term view of education and does not address the social determinants of educational attainment – the educational gap between the top income quartile and the bottom income quartile (Banting, 2005). Instead, the skills development and training discourse focuses on the quickest and easiest way of moving people off of income support and into the labour market. In the data, the adoption of active social policy’s focus on education is adapted to a narrowed discourse of short-term training.

Supporting and buttressing this emphasis on training is the concomitant narrowing and disappearing of the poverty discourse. With the understanding of poverty as a lack of basic needs, income, and employment, training for employment is a natural response. “EII helped Albertans, including those with barriers to employment, get the skills they need to find and keep a job” (EII, 2007, p. 42). Getting the skills is the primary missing ingredient; in the discourse, even those with barriers to employment are able to secure a job with the right training. Without a more nuanced conceptualization of poverty, ‘those with barriers to employment’ are understood as simply requiring extra training. The definition of multiple barriers in the Alberta Works Policy Manual (HRE, 2009), however, includes several factors for which additional training is unlikely to make a significant difference including, medical impairment, work history, and age. Included in these criteria are other factors such as “Social Skills” which is defined in part by “a client whose behaviour is such that it is not acceptable in a work environment” (HRE, 2009, 02-02-03, p. 3) and “Other Social Factors” defined as “any other relevant social factors such

as family situation and/or extensive criminal record" (HRE, 2009, 02-02-03, p. 4). Family situations, behaviour, and extensive criminal records are factors that may inhibit labour-market attachment but that skills development and training are unable to address. While these and some other factors in the 'multiple barrier factors' list demonstrate an acknowledgement of dimensions of poverty beyond those of basic needs and employment, the discourse does not admit these. The discourse is based on an assumption that the sole ingredient necessary to improve job prospects is training, generally short-term and part-time: "We continue to help Albertans who most need our support by ensuring they get the training and supports necessary to find and keep jobs" (EII, n.d.b, p. 3). The way in which help is provided to those "who most need our support" is through training and other assistance to achieve labour market attachment, concepts of poverty which reside outside of this construct are absent from the discourse.

Given that the relationship between Albertans and the labour market is unidirectional and that the supports offered reflect the predominant construction of poverty, the discourse on labour-market attachment is often analogous to that of a dating service. In the overview brochure for Alberta Works, it states:

> Albertans want to work and employers need to fill job vacancies. Alberta Works helps by providing people with: up-to-date career, workplace and labour market information available in-person, by phone and online; career planning and job-search assistance, and; job order bank and job placement services. (Government of Alberta, 2004, Employment and Training Services, para. 1)

There are Albertans looking for jobs and employers looking for employees. Alberta Works supports both of these parties through their many job searching services. In the Alberta Works Policy Manual, the vast majority of the interventions listed for clients in the Expected To Work category are of this nature: "assistance with resume writing; interview techniques; job search techniques; short-term courses, pre-employment programs or skill training; employment preparation services; job maintenance skills; job search strategies" (HRE, 2009, 02-02-02, p. 6). And the list goes on. The approach is reminiscent of someone with a history of abusive relationships to work on updating their Lava Life profile to break the cycle. As a "dating service", the discourse frames poverty as a lack of labour attachment because of not having found a willing employer. "The vast majority of people receiving income support have told me they would rather be working, and we need employers who will give them a chance; through Alberta Works we will bring these two groups together" (HRE, 2004, p. 4).

This discourse is based on "better connect[ing] Albertans with employment and labour market information" (HRE, 2006, p. 4) enabling them to "succeed in the labour market" (HRE, n.d.b, Moving forward…, para. 3). What is interesting is that this focus on cosmetics such as résumé writing and the slightly more substantial emphasis on training is not backed by evidence supporting its effectiveness in alleviating poverty or even in increasing the attachment of low-income Albertans to the labour market (Cancian and Meyer, 2000; Edin & Lein, 1996; Harris, 1996; Kornberger et al., 2001; Peck, 2001). This point is raised in the legislature: "We are looking at the training-on-the-job programs, and we don't know if they are working or whether they're not working" (Alberta, Legislature, 2003d, 1435); and "Now, the Auditor General wrote that risks associated with the administration of training and employment support programs where reliance is placed on external service providers are significant and require careful management" (Alberta, Legislature, 2003e, 1532). Given the absence of evidence, or even concern in the discourse, for the alleviation of poverty through labour-market attachment and training for this purpose and the absence of a poverty discourse more generally, one asks the question what the purpose of this focus in the discourse achieves. The focus on training seems to be about the discourse itself and not necessarily because it achieves the goals it espouses.

In the next section, I explore the third theme of the market discourse evident in the data, *Albertans as a Ready Labour Supply*. The pursuit of the discourse, and indeed the practice, of human capital development is seen in the final theme of this discourse to be the individual fitting into the market, not for the individual's benefit in terms of poverty alleviation but for the benefit of the market: "To offset ongoing labour shortages and sustain our economic growth we will maximize the skills and talents of Albertans" (EII, n.d.d, para. 2). The skills and talents of Albertans are to serve economic growth; the goal of human capital development is not for people but for the economy.

Albertans as a Ready Labour Supply

In the data, Albertans are primarily, if not exclusively, constructed as workers. The name of the program Alberta Works betrays an unrelenting discourse of the primacy of waged labour; the primary categories for clients within this program – Expected To Work and Not Expected To Work – reveal the dimension by which people are measured, their actual and potential attachment to the labour market. Consistent with the conceptualization of poverty discussed in chapter 4, this construction of Albertans as workers both diagnoses and prescribes a remedy for the problem of poverty.

In applying for the income-support program the questions largely address the "worker" within the applicant: "To qualify for Income Support, you and your family will be assessed depending on ability to work and placed in a group or category that determines benefit levels and work expectations" (HRE, 2005d, p. 7). Categorization and then expectations within Alberta Works revolve around these central groupings into which individuals are inserted. Within the Expected To Work category, the expectations of individuals participating in short-term programs are articulated in terms of employer expectations: "Maintain the same level of commitment and behaviour in their program as an employer would expect in a work situation" (HRE, 2009, 02-02-02, p. 8). The measure of client behaviour is based on a market constructed relationship between employer and employee as opposed to other models of relationship such as citizenship or familial relations; people accessing social supports are assessed based almost exclusively on economic criteria without consideration for the social and political arenas. Constructed as workers, not only their behaviours but also their aspirations are framed within this discourse: "each Albertan wants to contribute to society, feels better working and has a skill set to offer" (HRE, 2004, p. 4). The Ministry's role according to the discourse is to support this economic construction of clients. Through the focus on human capital development, the IESA helps income-support recipients develop "the skills they need to contribute to Alberta's growing economy and meet some shortages in the labour market and support themselves and their families" (Alberta, Legislature, 2003e, 1531); the role of these income-support recipients is defined solely in terms of economic value.

As the theme of *human capital and the individual-market relationship* indicates, this construction of workers and their insertion into the market is not primarily about poverty alleviation but about providing a supply of labour. Within this discourse, 'workers' play a purely instrumental role. One of the key goals for Alberta Works relates to this theme: "to help employers meet their need for skilled workers" (Government of Alberta, 2004, Alberta Works, para. 1; HRE, 2005b, para. 1; HRE, 2005c, p. 51; and, HRE, 2005d, p.3). Employers, industry, and the economy all have needs for these workers and the programs delivered by Alberta Works are tailored to meet these needs: "Workforce development initiatives that acknowledge industry's need for specific skills" (HRE, 2004, p. 138); "industry's need for greater access to skilled workers" (HRE, 2005c, p. 231); "industry and employers need innovative solutions to ensure they have the supply of skilled and knowledgeable workers they require to move forward" (HRE, n.d.b, Moving forward…, para. 1); "Goal 3: Alberta has a productive workforce that

meets the needs of the economy today and in the future" (HRE, n.d.b, Goal 3, para. 1; HRE, 2006, p. 29); and, "develop a skilled and productive workforce that meets the changing needs of the growing economy" (EII, 2007, p. 27; EII, 2008, p. 28). Income-support recipients hardly figure in this discourse other than as changeable objects to support the global economy.

Rahnema's (1992) statement about the needs which poverty-eradication programs seek out being "the needs of a certain 'economy', a certain idea of poverty, and a particular category of consumers and tax payers whose rights and interests should be protected" (p. 165) is evident in a new light in this discourse. The needs of the economy are increasingly those of 'flexible' labour markets where precarious jobs dominate, and the primary way in which any ideas about poverty enter the discourse is through the conceptualization of poverty as a lack of labour-market attachment. While the needs of Albertans (reduced to *basic needs*) are objectified and removed from the discourse, the needs of the economy dominate and are supported by the conceptualization of poverty most prominent in the data.

> The boundary between welfare and work is, therefore, socially constructed and perpetually reconstructed. The state is deeply implicated in shaping patterns of labor-market inclusion and exclusion… Hence the need to see 'welfare reform' as a significant site of social struggle, framed by the shifting imperatives of the labor market, and not just some discrete arena of social-policy intervention. (Peck, 2001, pp. 49-50)

Social policy does not exist independently from other areas of legislation. In Alberta, active social policy as evident through the implementation of the IESA is deeply entrenched and dependent on other facets of political and economic life. Circumscribed by the economic discourse, the post-industrial employment structure, and the needs of the global economy, ideas about poverty in the IESA can indeed be seen to be "a myth, a construct and the invention of a particular civilization" (Rahnema, 1992, p. 158), in this case, ours. This is not to say that in Alberta there is not a poverty that "cr[ies] out to heaven" (Rahnema, 1002, p. 158). On the contrary, it is meant to demonstrate how the multi-faceted nature of the poverty experienced by Albertans is systematically reduced in the discourse and how the city walls, as they are built and defined through the IESA, exclude poverty from the political arena.

CHAPTER SIX: IMPLICATIONS & FUTURE RESEARCH

This research project looks at the interaction between concepts of poverty and shifts in the welfare state in distinctive ways. While there is extensive research on the welfare state and on conceptions of poverty, there is little which looks at the ways in which they inform each other. Working from a human ecological perspective, I have shown how these interactions are fundamental to the ways in which people living in poverty are constructed and to the relationships between the state, market, and family in a welfare state. Using critical discourse analysis (CDA) to unveil the construction of poverty within Alberta's Income and Employment Supports Act (IESA) has provided insight into the way active social policy has been implemented in Alberta. Furthermore, through the analysis, opportunities to present alternative re-constructions of the discourse become evident. In the following sections, I explore some of these opportunities through a discussion of the discursive and policy implications of the research. I then move to a consideration of future research questions which come out of this research project. Some of my concluding thoughts close the chapter.

Discursive Implications

The single most surprising finding in this research was the absence of a poverty discourse within the data. A key assumption of the research was that the IESA was a document explicitly about poverty alleviation and that related documents published through the Ministry of E&I would also be about poverty in Alberta. However, with *basic needs* as the primary stand-alone poverty conceptualization and the other dimensions subsumed within a market discourse, the underlying construction of poverty is effectively absent from the discourse and easily circumvented in the political realm

The construction of poverty as an objective and neutral assessment of unmet *basic needs* removes it from political debate; conceiving poverty through the *lack of resources*, *economic class*, and *dependence* dimensions narrows the concept to fit within a market paradigm; through the *moral dimension* analysis, we see how poverty is individualized and constructed as the result of deficiencies within those who are poor. Combining these elements, the multi-faceted concept of poverty is narrowed and reduced to an apolitical construct to serve the purposes of a changing global economy. This narrowing of the discourse may serve the needs of an abstract economy but people, the rich and the poor, are also thereby bound to serving this abstraction and are alienated from each other because of it. Poverty constructed in this way requires little from society

beyond remedial efforts to increase labour-market attachment amongst the unemployed. Poverty so thoroughly individualized and social responsibility so attenuated precludes attempts to examine structural elements contributing to poverty in our society.

At a discursive level, if the construction of poverty is to be returned to the political arena, it is necessary to expand the concept to include dimensions which broaden and even challenge the conceptualization present in the IESA. It is within this political sphere that public debate takes place and where citizens create a world together. With circumscribed discourses, however, individualistic, market-centered ideals dominate the public sphere and these discourses frame debate in such narrow terms that our capacity to be creative, or even realistic, about how we address the diversity of needs and experiences of marginalized people is compromised. Adding economic inequality, social exclusion, and lack of entitlement to the poverty discourse would expand and encompass a more complex concept of poverty, thereby providing the elements for a genuine public engagement. Where neo-liberalism constrains the social and political spheres through its almost exclusive focus on market functioning, critical discourse analysts need to expand these concepts at the foundation of those key circumscribed debates. Poverty is about more than individual need and labour-market attachment and any attempt to reshape the nature of the welfare state in Alberta needs to recognize this.

Policy Implications

The Ministry of Employment and Immigration presents active social policy as the alignment of the social and economic. However, in the discourse present in the data, active social policy manifests as a colonization of the social by the economic. The discourse does not admit any stand-alone social discourse just as it does not admit any significant poverty discourse; it does not recognize the inherent value of social policy as anything more than a means to an economic end. However, a cursory glance at active social policy in social democratic countries demonstrates that this is not always the case. Interestingly, in the Nordic countries, active social policy has been a central element of social and economic policy for decades. In its adoption in North America, Esping-Andersen (2002) notes two ways in which its implementation outside of the Nordic social democratic countries has been partial and "unduly selective" (p. 5). The first of these critiques is of particular relevance here: "it has a tendency to believe that activation may *substitute* for conventional income maintenance guarantees…the minimization of poverty and income insecurity is a *precondition* for an effective social investment strategy" (p. 5). While active social policy may have a role to play, this role was not intended to be

poverty alleviation per se. In fact, welfare states with the least amount of destitution are those where poverty policy has played a relatively insignificant role.

> Where universal and broad social insurance measures are predominant and where they are complemented by economic policies designed to achieve full employment and promote the retraining of unemployed workers, both the incidence of poverty and concern about poverty as a policy issue are more modest. (Haddow, 1993, p. 4)

While retraining for labour-market attachment is a central piece in this design, universal programs and economic policies with an explicit goal of full employment are part of a comprehensive package. While targeted poverty policy plays a minor role in these welfare states, significant portions of their policy landscapes work together to alleviate poverty.

The research laid out in this thesis demonstrates that in Alberta the conceptualization of poverty as evident in the IESA, and active social policy in general, have been constructed to serve the interests of a global market. The fact that Alberta's primary poverty policy is within the Ministry of Employment and Immigration may narrow the conception possible because of the constraints on the Minister in working within the Ministry's portfolio. The construction of poverty as basic needs and labour-market attachment may be due, in part, to the fact that those are the dimensions of poverty the Ministry of E&I is able to address. Working in a culture of risk management and narrow spheres of influence necessarily limits the scope of discourse and of policy. Through this analysis it becomes clear that poverty has been constructed to fit within these narrow confines instead of constructed in relation to the experiences of people living in poverty in Alberta. With an expanded poverty discourse based on the lives of Albertans in poverty, policy would need to be broader-based and integrated across jurisdictions. Furthermore, with an expanded discourse on poverty, the issues facing Albertans in poverty would no longer be able to be squeezed into the constructs of a purely economic focus; while poverty is an economic problem, it is also a social and political issue and the social and economic spheres working together could achieve far more than either can alone.

In this analysis, the tools appear to be driving the solution; the IESA constructs poverty as basic needs and labour-market attachment at least in part because of the Ministry within which it is administered. As Mark Twain said, "if your only tool is a hammer, all problems look like nails." Within the issue of poverty are several dimensions

some of which look like nails and are able to be addressed by the use of hammers. However, there are several other dimensions for which a hammer will do little more than leave dents. A key implication of this research is that we need to develop a range of tools able to respond to the lived experiences of the poor in this province and not simply dismiss from the discourse and public debate elements of poverty that do not fit our solutions. The regulation of rent (rent caps), implementing a minimum wage based on a living wage (instead of profit margins), wealth redistribution through tax law, and a policy of full employment, are just a few examples of tools that could be used to respond to an expanded poverty discourse and to the experiences of those living in poverty.

Future Research Questions

A number of important questions for future research rise out of this research. First of all, if indeed this construction of poverty is circumscribed by the nature of what the Ministry of E&I is able to provide, the question of whether other Ministries similarly circumscribe poverty discourses arises. Do the Ministries of Education, Health and Wellness, and Children and Youth Services have constructions of poverty corresponding to their respective portfolios and services? Secondly, while this research focused exclusively on published documents from the Government of Alberta, from a human ecological perspective, a social construction of poverty extends much further and is influenced by significantly more than government documents. To have a more comprehensive understanding of the ways in which poverty is conceptualized in Alberta, an exploration of conceptions within various other communities in the province would strengthen and complement this research. Media portrayals, understandings within business communities and non-governmental agencies, the perspectives of the general public and of those living in poverty are all necessary to develop a comprehensive understanding of the ways in which poverty is constructed in Alberta. Finally, what conceptions of poverty inform poverty policy across Canada? Given that income support falls within the provincial jurisdiction under federalism but is still framed by the Canada Social Transfer, what kinds of differences exist between provinces? Do provinces with a different conceptualization of poverty underlying their income-support policies demonstrate corresponding variations in the types of programs implemented? Do different income-support programs indicate differences in poverty constructs?

Theoretically, human ecological theory and critical theory provided an appropriate, responsive, and engaging framework for the research. The principle of context in human ecological theory was particularly helpful in focusing the analysis on

the ideational and political environments in which poverty is constructed and in moving poverty research away from an individual focus. Furthermore the insight element of critical theory, that of 'seeing through', was useful in identifying what was absent as well as what was present within the dominant discourse. Future research in this area would benefit from an expansion of the 'relationship' and 'emancipation' principles within these theoretical frameworks. This would move the research from a focus solely on government policy and discourse to the relationships between government, the market, and families, on how these relationships contribute to constructing the poverty discourse, and on how arbitrary relations of power are challenged in the day-to-day lives of people living in Alberta.

Methodologically, combining CDA with a sociological understanding of discourse proved to be an ideal approach to the research questions. The sociological focus on finding meaning intertextually and between texts and their contexts was essential to the mega-discourse approach that I took. Critical theory, social constructionism, and Foucault's conception of power were also invaluable methodologically in sensitizing me to the processes through which knowledge and power are produced to construct the social. Through the integration of these ideas, I was able to focus on processes and techniques used within the discourses as opposed to simply reiterating superficial descriptions of the discourses themselves. In recognizing the historically and culturally bound nature of the discourses under study, I also became keenly aware of how, as I unveiled subsumed discourses within the Ministry of Employment and Industry, I was concurrently constructing the government in particular ways.

The methodological approach used in this study would be particularly useful for future research of structural elements contributing to the marginalization of certain populations. Through this type of CDA document analysis, one could look at different elements in the construction of a variety of marginalized populations. Members of marginalized communities are often hard to reach but also overstudied; this approach increases the possibilities of research on issues relevant to these communities without increasing the stress on already overburdened households and individuals. Furthermore, the approach shifts the focus from the individual to broader social, political, and economic structures and processes and is therefore particularly useful for projects exploring the structural roots of inequality, marginalization, and other power imbalances.

Concluding Statement

In comparing the Greeks with the Romans, Arendt (1958) observes that where the Greeks saw legislation as a pre-political activity, as the drawing of the boundaries within which politics happened, the Romans founded their empire on legislation in an effort to mitigate and contain political activity. In this exploration of the concept of poverty within the IESA, political activity is not only mitigated and contained but its possibility is significantly compromised by the ways in which the lines are drawn. “In every society the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organized and redistributed by a certain number of procedures whose role is to ward off its powers and dangers, to gain mastery over its chance events, to evade its ponderous, formidable materiality” (Foucault, 1994, p. 109). In Alberta’s income-support program, the poverty discourse has been accordingly “controlled, selected, organized and redistributed” resulting in a politics in which the poor are not considered within the city walls in terms other than as unmet apolitical need and potential labour to serve the global economy.

While this research has unveiled this discourse in terms of the poor within a limited and specific government program, it begs the question, is this discourse indicative of how we understand humanity in general? Purposeful sampling within qualitative research deliberately seeks out data sources where phenomena manifest in extremes where they are more easily discerned. Is an exploration of a concept of poverty an equally ‘rich’ data source for understanding our conceptions of human society in general? Lewis (2000) calls for a rethinking of social policy, not only “because of the potentially exclusionary or subordinating effects of existing welfare practices, but also for an expanded conceptualization of the very elements of human life that social policy is concerned with and has effects upon” (p. 17). In looking at the poverty policy in Alberta, we need to consider how this legislation defines the type of society we live in, not only in terms of benefit levels, not only in terms of a paternalistic moralism, but in terms of how we are all reflected in and defined by the kind of city we build, in terms of what it is to be human beyond this historical and cultural moment.

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APPENDIX A – STAGES OF ANALYSIS

1) Initial reading and refinement of the data (68 government documents).
    a) The first stage of refinement of the data involved cutting documents based on three general criteria:
        i) The largest number of cuts (15 documents) was due to the technical nature of the documents and their resulting lack of richness. These documents were primarily forms and would potentially be more useful using a different analytical technique.
        ii) The next group of documents cut at this stage (7 documents) were cut because they related to one of the other key programs within Alberta Works and not directly to the Income Support program.
        iii) The final group of documents cut at this stage (2 documents) were cut because they related primarily to the institutions administering the income-support program and not directly to the program itself. These documents were primarily focused on appeal processes within Alberta Works.
2) The second reading informed the second cut of the data. In addition I took notes and formed some loose categories.
    a) The second stage of refinement of the data involved three reasons for cutting data:
        i) Several documents (7) upon closer consideration were not specifically relevant to income support and/or did not provide rich enough data.
        ii) A couple (2) of documents were duplicates of more recent versions of the same document with very minor changes.
        iii) And, again, another piece of data was excluded for being too technical and not rich enough for the analysis.
    b) The first stage of organizing the data was a very loose outline of general thoughts which fell into six categories:
        i) the absence of poverty in published documents
        ii) the Ministry's spending on income support despite the lack of a poverty discourse
        iii) Albertans as a ready labour supply
        iv) Independence and Self-Reliance
        v) Alignment of Social and Economic Policy
        vi) Deficiency Model - Need

3) All subsequent analysis of the data was based on the remaining 33 documents consisting of legislation, legislative debate (Hansard), the policy manual, annual reports, government statements, news releases, brochures, booklets, fact sheets, and information sheets.
4) The third through sixth readings focused on coding themes within the "market" cluster:
    a) alignment of social and economic policy/linking IS with training & employment
    b) individual-market relationship/labour-market attachment
    c) investment in human capital/skills/training
    d) Albertans constituted as workers/ready labour supply for the global economy
5) The seventh reading focused on coding themes and categories within the "poverty" cluster:
    a) absence of poverty
    b) material/physical/economic/absolute
    c) independence
    d) moral/individualization
6) With additional interaction with the data and through the initial writing stages a secondary coding of the "poverty" themes and categories resulted in this refinement:
    a) poverty as need
        i) basic needs
        ii) resources
        iii) economic class
        iv) dependence
        v) moral character of the poor
    b) absence of poverty
7) With additional interaction with the data and through the initial writing stages a secondary coding of the "market" themes resulted in this refinement:
    a) alignment of social and economic policy
    b) human capital & individual-market relationship
    c) Albertans as a ready labour supply

APPENDIX B – FINAL DATA SET [3]

Alberta Hansard - April 15th, 2003	Alberta. Legislature. (2003b)
Alberta Hansard - April 22nd, 2003	Alberta. Legislature. (2003c)
Alberta Hansard - March 20th, 2003	Alberta. Legislature. (2003a)
Alberta Hansard - March 2nd, 2004	Alberta. Legislature. (2004)
Alberta Hansard - May 5th, 2003	Alberta. Legislature. (2003d)
Alberta Hansard - May 7th, 2003	Alberta. Legislature. (2003e)
Alberta HRE 2004-2005 annual report highlights	HRE, n.d.b
Alberta HRE 2005-2006 annual report highlights	HRE, n.d.c
Alberta HRE 2006-2007 annual report highlights	EII, n.d.b
Alberta HRE 2007-2008 annual report highlights	EII, n.d.c
Alberta Works	E&I, n.d.
Alberta Works Income Support Contact Centre	HRE, 2005a
Alberta Works Overview	Government of Alberta, 2004
Alberta Works…for Farmers	E&I, 2008a
Canada Child Tax Benefit and the National Child Benefit Supplement	Alberta Works, 2008a
Earn While You Learn	E&I, 2008b
Employment, Immigration and Industry Annual Report 2006-2007	EII, 2007
Employment, Immigration and Industry Annual Report 2007-2008	EII, 2008
Financial Benefits Summary	Alberta Works, 2008b
Human Resources and Employment Annual Report 2003-2004	HRE, 2004
Human Resources and Employment Annual Report 2004-2005	HRE, 2005c
Human Resources and Employment Annual Report 2005-2006	HRE, 2006
IESA Policy Manual	HRE, 2009
Income and Employment Supports Act	IESA. (2003)
Income Support	HRE, 2005b
Income Support for Eligible apprentices in Technical Training 2008/2009	Alberta Works, 2008c
Income Support for Eligible Employment Insurance (EI) Learners 2008/2009	Alberta Works, 2008d
Message from the Minister 2004	HRE, n.d.a
Message from the Minister 2007	EII, n.d.a
Message from the Minister 2008	EII, n.d.d
New Act Strengthens Link Between Income Support and Training	Government of Alberta, 2003
Your Guide to Income Support	HRE, 2005d

[3] For complete citations, please see the reference list.