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NEGOTIATED RESPONSIBILITIES AND DESERVINGNESS:

A STUDY OF TALK ON PROLONGED UNEMPLOYMENT
IN FINLAND

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DOCTORAL DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

This thesis summarises three original peer-reviewed articles and a concluding section from individual sub-studies. In general, this thesis focuses on the discursive constructions of prolonged unemployment in Finland drawing from interview data collected amongst 70 long-term unemployed individuals and 34 frontline workers, as well as the discourse from MPs during Finnish parliamentary discussions. Thus, this study analyses the talk from three actors vis-à-vis Finnish activation policy—that is, policymakers, those who implement the policy (frontline workers) and those who are the targets of activation (unemployed persons).

The three sub-studies focus on the analysis of:

(I) different resistance strategies adopted by long-term unemployed Finns as a means to address their deservingness in interview settings.

(II) positions frontline workers construct for their unemployed clients as a means to situate their responsibilities related to enhancing employability and activation.

(III) different constructions and factuality-enhancement strategies through which Finnish MPs construct the deservingness and undeservingness of unemployed individuals as a means to legitimise or object to policy addressing activation.

The synthesis of these three sub-studies sets out to understand how different actors involved in Finnish activation policy present unemployed people's agency in their discourse. In particular, the analysis focuses on how unemployed subjects are held as morally responsible as well as how freeing them from responsibility is enacted through talk. Methodologically, this thesis adheres to discursive and narrative methods, which can be placed under the rubrics of social constructionist 'discourse analysis' and 'discursive psychology'. The synthesis presented here is contextualised within the discursively oriented literature on deservingness and responsabilisation, as well as within research on policy developments aimed at promoting the employability of those individuals experiencing prolonged unemployment.

This synthesis reveals three key ways in which unemployed people's agency is presented across all actors' talk. These three key agential constructs are labelled othered, victimised and entrepreneurial agency, all of which influence the ways in which the responsibilities and deservingness of unemployed people is negotiated when talking about prolonged unemployment. In general, the findings presented here indicate that a deserving long-term unemployed subject is constructed either as exercising entrepreneurial or victimised agency

and not held responsible due to the demonstration of effort-making or genuine need. Othered agency, by contrast, associates with irresponsibility and morally unacceptable behaviour and a strong personal responsibility. Similarities across all actors' talk reveal the culturally dominant ways in which prolonged unemployment are constructed around age-old ideas of deservingness as well as contemporary ideals of personal responsibility related to 'active citizenship'.

Keywords: deservingness, responsibilities, prolonged unemployment, employability, activation, discursive methods.

TIIVISTELMÄ

Tässä väitöskirjassa tuotetaan yhteenveto kolmesta vertaisarvioinnin läpikäyneestä tieteellisestä artikkelista johtamalla osatutkimuksien tuloksia yhteen. Väitöskirja keskittyy pitkittyneeseen työttömyyteen liittyviin puhetapoihin 2010-luvun Suomessa. Sen aineistona käytetään 70:n pitkäaikaistyöttömän henkilön ja 34:n katutason työntekijän haastattelupuhetta sekä kansanedustajien täysistuntopuhetta. Väitöskirjassa analysoidaan kolmen aktivointipolitiikan toimijan puhetta. Nämä toimijat laativat aktivointipolitiikkaan liittyvää lainsäädäntöä (kansanedustajat), panevat sitä toimeen (katutason työntekijät) ja ovat sen kohteena (työttömät henkilöt).

Kolmen osatutkimuksen analyysin fokus kohdentuu:

(I) suomalaisten pitkäaikaistyöttömien henkilöiden erilaisiin vastustamisstrategioihin, joilla osoittaa omaa ansaitsevuuksiaan haastattelutilanteissa,

(II) katutason työntekijöiden tuottamiin työttömien asiakkaiden positioihin, joiden avulla paikantaa työntekijöiden vastuuta työttömien työllistyvyyden edistämisestä osana aktivointia sekä

(III) erilaisiin kansanedustajien puheessa tuottamiin ansaitsevuuskonstruktioihin ja retorisiin keinoihin, joiden avulla joko vastustetaan tai tuetaan aktiivimallia.

Näiden kolmen osatutkimuksen synteessin on tarkoitus auttaa ymmärtämään, miten suomalaisen aktivointipolitiikan eri toimijat esittävät puheessaan työttömien henkilöiden toimijuutta. Yhtäältä analyysi keskittyy siihen, miten työttömät subjektit esitetään eri toimijoiden puheessa moraalisesti vastuullisina, toisaalta siihen miten moraalisesta vastuusta puheen avulla vapautuu. Metodologisesti väitöskirja hyödyntää sosiaalisen konstruktionismin ja diskursiivisen psykologian alaisia diskursiivisia ja narratiivisia menetelmiä. Väitöskirjan teoreettis-metodologiset lähtökohdat kiinnittyvät diskursiivisesti orientoituneeseen tutkimukseen ansaitsevuudesta ja vastuullistamisesta. Sen lisäksi väitöskirjassa keskitytään tutkimuksiin poliittisista kehityskuluista, joilla tähdätään pitkäaikaisesti työttömien henkilöiden työllistyvyyden edistämiseen.

Väitöskirja tuo esille kolme keinoa, joilla työttömien toimijuutta eri toimijoiden puheessa esitetään. Nämä kolme toimijuuskonstruktioita nimettiin toiseutetuksi, uhriutetuksi ja yritteliääksi toimijuudeksi. Nämä kaikki pitkittyneeseen työttömyyteen liittyvät puhetavat vaikuttavat siihen, miten työttömien henkilöiden vastuut ja ansaitsevuus neuvotellaan. Tulosten

mukaan ansaitseva pitkäaikaistyötön subjekti konstruoidaan puheessa joko yritteliäänä tai uhritettuna toimijana, joka ei ole vastuussa tilanteestaan joko ponnistelunsa tai todellisen tarpeensa vuoksi. Toiseutettu toimijuus yhdistyy vastuuttomuuteen, moraalisesti ei-hyväksyttävään käytökseen sekä vahvaan yksilönvastuuseen. Yhtäläisyydet kaikkien toimijoiden puheessa ilmentävät kulttuurisesti hallitsevia tapoja konstruoida työttömyyttä historiallisesti piintyneen ansaitsevuusdiskurssin sekä yksilön vastuuta ihannoivan aktiivisen kansalaisuuskeskustelujen avulla.

Avainsanat: ansaitsevuus, vastuullistaminen, pitkittynyt työttömyys, työllistyvyys, aktivointi, diskurssiiviset menetelmät.

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LIST OF ORIGINAL PUBLICATIONS

This thesis is based on the following publications:

I Tarkiainen, L. (2017). Long-term unemployed Finnish interviewees address deservingness: separating, declining and enriching as means of resisting. *The Journal of Poverty and Social Justice*, 25(3), 219–231.

II Tarkiainen, L. (2020). Motivated, Resistant, Unfortunate and Blameworthy – Positions Constructed for Finnish Long-Term Unemployed Individuals through the Employability Discourse [published online ahead of print April 6, 2020]. *Nordic Social Work Research*, <https://doi.org/10.1080/2156857X.2020.1749457>

III Tarkiainen, L. (2020). ‘Effortful’, ‘needy’ and ‘freeloader’: Constructions of unemployed people’s deservingness in Finnish parliamentary discussions. *Journal of Language and Politics*, 19(2), 290–310.

The publications are referred to in the text by their roman numerals.

1 INTRODUCTION

This thesis summarises three peer-reviewed research articles and provides a concluding chapter, all of which set out to understand how prolonged unemployment is discussed by different actors involved in ‘activation’ policy in contemporary Finland. Here, I define activation policies in a manner similar to Caswell, Kupka, Larsen and van Berkel (2017, p. 3), who refer to activation policies as follows: ‘those programmes and services that are aimed at strengthening the employability, labour-market or social participation of unemployed benefit recipients of working age, usually by combining enforcing/obligatory/disciplining and enabling/supportive measures in varying extents’.

This thesis draws upon data collected at three different time periods and contexts, representing activation during the 2010s in Finland. These activation contexts include: 1) EFS-funded employment project targeted to ‘disadvantaged’ and ‘hard-to-employ’ unemployed individuals; 2) the legally set service of the Multi-sectoral Joint Service Promoting Employment for long-term unemployed jobseekers,; and 3) the Activation Model for Unemployment Security targeted to all unemployed jobseekers. These activation contexts approach the issue of ‘prolonged unemployment’ as a problem in need of ‘tackling’ through a variety of activation measures.

Within these activation contexts, my analysis focuses on:

- (I) different resistance strategies adopted by long-term unemployed Finns as a means to address their deservingness in interview settings.
- (II) positions frontline workers construct for their unemployed clients as a means to situate their responsibilities related to enhancing employability and activation.
- (III) different constructions and factuality-enhancement strategies through which Finnish MPs construct the deservingness and undeservingness of unemployed individuals as a means to legitimise or object to policy addressing activation.

I perceive activation as intimately linked to language use, thus rendering the analysis of talk the object of my study. My empirical work draws upon interview data collected from 70 long-term unemployed individuals and 34 frontline workers, as well as the discourse from MPs during Finnish parliamentary discussions. In my sub-studies, I analysed what different descriptions of prolonged unemployment aimed to achieve by applying a methodology that perceives language use as a form of social action (Edwards, 1997; Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Wetherell, 2007). Thus, I deviate from

(‘mainstream’) policy orientated and an empiricist individual-psychological outlook of unemployment studies designed to ‘get the facts’ on topics such as the characteristics and the effects of unemployment (for more detailed reviews of such unemployment literature, see, for example, Ezzy, 2001, pp. 9–10, 15; Howe, 1990, pp. 8–10). Instead, I contribute to the field of research that focuses on the question of how Finnish unemployment is constructed and negotiated through discursive practices and language use (for previous studies, see, for example, Bök & Penttinen, 1997; Laakso, 2018; Nygård, 2007; Päivärinta, 1997; Renwall & Vehkalahti, 2002; Romppainen, Jähi, Saloniemi & Virtanen, 2010; Romppainen, Saloniemi, Jähi & Virtanen, 2012; Taira, 2001, 2006; Vehkalahti, 2000; Välimaa, 2011).

My research questions for this thesis are as follows:

- 1) How do different actors involved in Finnish activation policy present unemployed people’s agency in their discourse?
- 2) How are these agential constructs held as morally responsible? And, conversely, how is freeing from responsibility enacted?

Thus, this thesis focuses on the analysis of how responsible and deserving subjects are managed in the talk of different actors related to activation. In the table below, I present the combined research questions, data and methods, as well as the key results from each of sub-study. In addition, I summarise the key results from the synthesis across sub-studies.

Table 1 *The combined reseach questions, data and methods, key results from each sub-study and synthesis across sub-studies*

Sub-study	Research questions	Data and methods	Results	Unemployed individuals as agents
I) Long-term unemployed Finnish interviewees address deservingness: separating, declining and enriching as means of resisting (2017). The Journal of Poverty and Social Justice, 25(3), 219–231.	I) How do interviewees refer to the unemployment category and how do they make sense of their own and others’ unemployment? II) In which ways do interviewees resist the unemployment category assigned to them?	10 individual and 15 group interviews carried out in 2010 and 2011 amongst 70 long-term unemployed Finns 440 pages of transcribed data Category analysis	I identified three means of resistance: I) separating II) declining III) enriching through which the interviewees address deservingness — that is, their proximity to ‘us’, neediness and lack of control.	Othered agency - responsible for one’s irresponsibility and non-ideal behaviour - deemed undeserving as not belonging to ‘us’ and ‘our’ moral community

<p>II) Motivated, Resistant, Unfortunate and Blameworthy – Positions Constructed for Finnish Long-Term Unemployed Individuals Through the Employability Discourse [published online ahead print April 6, 2020]. Nordic Social Work Research.</p>	<p>I) How do interviewees position long-term unemployed individuals through the employability discourse? II) Within these positions, how are long-term unemployed individuals and frontline workers constructed as responsible for employability enhancement?</p>	<p>34 telephone interviews carried out in 2016 and 2017 with staff members working in the Finnish Social Insurance Institute's rehabilitation counselling tasks as part of a multi-sectoral team</p> <p>405 pages of transcribed data</p> <p>Positioning analysis</p>	<p>I identified four positions: I) motivated II) resistant III) unfortunate III) blameworthy</p> <p>that influence the way frontline workers act as agents and whether responsibility for employability enhancement is shared, individualised or falls upon frontline workers.</p>	<p>Victimised agency</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - not accountable due to genuine need - free from moral blame - legitimised sick role
<p>III) 'Effortful', 'needy' and 'freeloader': Constructions of unemployed people's deservingness in Finnish parliamentary discussions (2020). Journal of Language and Politics, 19(2), 290–310.</p>	<p>I) How do MPs discursively portray unemployed people as both undeserving and deserving as a means of legitimising and opposing the Activation Model? II) How are un/deservingness rhetorically accomplished as factual?</p>	<p>Three plenary sessions in which members of the Finnish Parliament debate the passage of the Act on the Activation Model for Unemployment Security in December 2017</p> <p>175 pages of transcribed data</p> <p>Rhetorical discourse analysis</p>	<p>I identified three constructions: I)'effortful citizen with a lack of control' II)'needy citizen deserving the state's reciprocal acts' III)'undeserving freeloader in need of an attitude adjustment'</p> <p>Rhetorical devices: 'truth talk', inviting 'knowledgeable' categories, maxi-/minimisation, extreme case formulations</p>	<p>Entrepreneurial agency</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - not fully in control and responsible since actions are somewhat constrained - showing ideal effortful, motivated attitude and appropriate actions

This thesis is structured as follows. First, I focus on the existing deservingness literature. Second, the chapter on responsibilisation offers an overview of individualised responsibility vis-à-vis activation and employability enhancement. In my literature review, I primarily focus on discursively oriented research on deservingness and responsibilisation as well as policy developments aimed at promoting the employability of unemployed individuals experiencing prolonged unemployment. Specifically, I focus on questions of how deservingness and responsibilities are negotiated, particularly during street-level encounters where activation is practiced. Next, Chapter 4 describes the data and methodological underpinnings of this thesis. Chapter 5 presents the primary results of the sub-studies and the meta-

analysis from this concluding monograph—that is, three key agential constructs labelled othered, victimised and entrepreneurial agency. Finally, I provide concluding remarks and implications for future research in the final chapter.

2 ON DESERVINGNESS

Judgments related to deservingness often occur in social contexts related to laws and norms as well as beliefs about rights and obligations, indicating socially acceptable or unacceptable behaviour and outcomes achieved or earned as products of a person's actions (Feather, 1999, p. 6). In previous studies, the concept of deservingness is often interchangeably used to refer to moral worthiness, entitlement and having earned something. Here, I agree with Feather and Johnstone (2001, p. 757), who argue that deservingness and entitlement differ, since in everyday discourse entitlement refers to a person's right in a specific situation and is not used in cases of punishment and negative treatment. Judgements of deservingness, however, may refer to both positive and negative outcomes.

As Feinberg (1970, pp. 75–76) illustrates, an unemployed person may be perceived as deserving unemployment compensation, but not entitled to it under legislation. In contrast, entitlement may exist without deservingness in the case of an unemployed person, who is entitled to unemployment benefits in legal-like terms, but perceived as not deserving them. In such cases, unemployed people are divided into 'truly and morally eligible' deserving claimants versus those regarded as morally undeserving. This latter category may not necessarily be regarded as fraudulent, but may be, for example, expected to try harder to get a job (Howe, 1990, pp. 108–109, 130). Thus, these two principles of justice—entitlement and deservingness—may well conflict with each other (Feather & Johnstone, 2001, p. 757; Feinberg, 1970 p. 85; Howe, 1990, pp. 130, 133–134).

The primary aims within previous deservingness literature focus on identifying which criteria the public use to judge welfare deservingness amongst varying target groups. DeSwaan (1990, pp. 16–17) originally identified three criteria used to assess deservingness vis-à-vis poverty and care arrangements. These criteria are as follows:

- 1) disability (the incapacity to make a living through one's own efforts and an incapacity to deliver an equivalent contribution as a part of a reciprocal exchange);
- 2) proximity (identity-based boundary, such as kinship and residence, that qualifies them for support); and
- 3) docility (whether those in need behave in a passive, grateful and decent manner or are seen as ungrateful, impudent or aggressive).

Having examined a range of studies, including DeSwaan's, a decade later van Oorschot (2000) proposed an agreed upon list of five criteria of deservingness,

which people tend to emphasise when estimating deservingness amongst different target groups (see also van Oorschot & Roosma, 2017). The ‘CARIN criteria’ are:

- 1) control and responsibility;
- 2) the attitude of those in need;
- 3) reciprocity;
- 4) identity and proximity; and
- 5) the level of need.

According to van Oorschot’s (2000) findings, the most important criteria consist of control and responsibility, followed by identity and proximity and, then, reciprocity. Studies that apply the ‘CARIN criteria’ often utilise quantitative data as a means to examine the opinions, perceptions or attitudes of respondents in relation to a particular target group’s perceived welfare deservingness. The key to explaining modest support for unemployed people’s welfare deservingness is linked to the idea of perceiving unemployed people as much more in control of their situation than other groups, such as the disabled, sick and pensioners (van Oorschot, 2000; van Oorschot, 2006). Children, for example, fall firmly within the deserving category, since they are neither expected to work nor held fully responsible for themselves and their condition (Gordon, 2001; Katz, 2013, p. 13). However, the distinctions between deservingness also operate within each social category, whereby some individuals—including children—are deemed more ‘deserving’ than others (Meanwell & Swando, 2013; Møller & Harrits, 2013, p. 165, 171). In addition, within the unemployment category, deservingness distinctions can be made based on different characteristics, such as age and ethnicity (see Buss, 2019; Roosma & Jeene, 2017).

Larsen (2006) argues that these five ‘CARIN criteria’ are context-dependent within specific welfare regimes. According to Larsen, welfare states dominated by universal benefits and services typically define recipients as equal citizens who belong to a national ‘us’, thereby blurring the boundary between those who give and those who receive. This then closely mirrors the discussion of whether recipients receive benefits and services with a grateful, docile and compliant attitude. Yet, a welfare state dominated by selective welfare policy generates clear boundaries between ‘them’ and ‘us’ (who benefits from the welfare state, who pays little or no tax and who receives targeted benefits). Thus, according to Larsen, the reciprocity of the system will be perceived as very low, likely increasing the importance of grateful, docile and compliant attitudes amongst those who receive targeted benefits or services. However, some studies disagree with Larsen’s (2006) arguments on

welfare state–dependent differences on deservingness judgements. Since deservingness heuristics appear to apply across cultural and political contexts, such that when people face deservingness-related cues and contextual information, they are automatically and ‘universally’ prompted to assess who deserves help (Aarøe & Petersen, 2014; Jensen & Petersen, 2017; Petersen, Slothuus, Stubager & Togeby, 2011; Petersen, 2012). Special emphasis in these assessments is placed on cues related to making an effort (Petersen, 2012).

What makes welfare deservingness judgements particularly interesting is that they are considered consequential and influential in shaping social policy and targeting. Based on deservingness judgements, some target groups are better able to access social protection and solidarity, which are longer lasting and subjected to less reciprocal obligations amongst some groups (van Oorschot & Roosma, 2017, p. 7; Watkins-Hayes & Kowalsky, 2016). Policy then works as the primary means of legitimising and creating distinctive populations as deserving and entitled as well as undeserving and ineligible (Ingram & Schneider, 2005; Schneider & Ingram, 1993). Thus, both deservingness and undeservingness are produced and reified in broader public debates as well as within legal, political and public discourses (Amundson, Zajicek & Kerr, 2015; DeSante, 2013; Gast & Okamoto, 2016; McGormack, 2004; Soldatic & Pini, 2009; Yarris & Castañeda, 2015). Furthermore, the media and journalists work as active partners in constructing deservingness, since strategic framing can affect policy attitudes and public support on, for example, cutbacks to welfare policy programmes (Esmark & Schoop, 2017; Hopmann, Skovsgaard & Elmelund-Præstekær, 2017; Slothuus, 2007).

2.1 DESERVINGNESS DISTINCTIONS

Previous research has been robustly theorised deservingness, particularly in relation to welfare and poverty (see, for example, Howe, 1990; Katz, 2013; Larsen, 2006; Lister, 2004, p.102; van Oorschot, 2006; Schneider & Ingram, 2005). According to Katz (2013), the identification of who is and is not given assistance (e.g., financial assistance, food, housing, medical care and other forms of goods and services) in times of need has shifted with time and context, although the category of the ‘undeserving poor’ has endured. The idea of the ‘undeserving poor’ is specifically associated with the aim of separating the genuinely needy from vagabonds and rogues as well as distinguishing the able-bodied deemed capable of working from their non-able-bodied peers (Katz, 2013, p. 14). Thus, deservingness distinctions can be described as historically grounded attempts to assess both the potential and will of labour market participation amongst those of a working age (Grundy & Laliberte Rudman, 2018; Welshman, 2006).

Due to ideological (international) shifts in current welfare policies, arguments call for a redefinition of and expansion to the category of the contemporary undeserving poor (Chunn & Gavigan, 2004, pp. 231–232;

Grundy & Laliberte Rudman, 2018). The contemporary deservingness bifurcation often distinguishes between the 'hard-working majority' and 'welfare dependents', and includes social policy attempts to transform the latter into the former (Patrick, 2017, pp. 6, 10, 39). These attempts also link to contemporary behavioural discourses on poverty, which construct people living in low income conditions as distinct from mainstream society with alternative behavioural patterns and dysfunctional values and attitudes entrenched and passed down through generations (Pemberton, Fahmy, Sutton & Bell, 2016; Shildrick, MacDonald & Furlog, 2016). Therefore, undeservingness vis-à-vis poverty can also be attached to a permanent lifestyle and frequent claims, rather than a temporary, periodic and transient phase of poverty (see Broughton, 2003; Grundy & Laliberte Rudman, 2018, p. 815, 818; Welshman, 2006, p. 590). The idea of 'us' and 'them' embedded in poverty rhetoric has historically persisted, and is closely linked to an inability to imagine people living in poverty as strong, ambitious, successful and responsible (Ross, 1991, p. 1542).

Social constructionist studies often examine how constructions of undeservingness ignore structural inequalities and macroeconomic forces, and are produced through gendered and racialised stereotypes (see Katz, 2013; Yoo, 2008). In the United States in particular, deservingness is framed as an issue inextricably linked to colour, reinforced by policy and social scientific analysis (see Bensonsmith, 2005; DeSante, 2013). Discourse on so-called welfare queens serves as an example of an intersectional construct of mothers as undeserving immoral cheats, lazy and irresponsible in terms of their use of money (see Bensonsmith, 2005; Chunn & Gavigan, 2004; Hasenfield, 2010; Katz, 2013; McGormack, 2004; Reid, 2013). When associating characteristics such as social pathologies, illegitimacy, dependency, patriarchy and crimes with African Americans, one contributes to framing whiteness, middle-class values, patriarchy, education and work with deservingness (Bensonsmith, 2005, p. 257).

However, the deservingness literature also recognises the construction of a deficient and dirty 'white culture' consisting of lazy and dependent unemployed and working class subjects, in comparison to those regarded as belonging to a 'clean' middle-class (Tyler, 2008; Valentine & Harris, 2014, p. 90). These class-related representations contribute to the idea of a particular social class as disgusting (Tyler, 2008). Therefore, as Skeggs and Lovejoy (2012) argue, deservingness is part of a historical class distinction marking certain subjects as having a bad culture and faulty psychology, whereby undeservingness results from inappropriate manners, morals, ambition, tastes and other symbolic values. Specifically in the UK, the construction of a 'Chav' relates to a process of stigmatising council housing and individualising poverty, which are understood as self-inflicted (Tyler, 2008; Valentine & Harris, 2014, pp. 86–87). Thus, deservingness represents a part of larger negotiations of 'the ordinary' associated with the 'erosion of' intraclass

solidarity (Chase & Walker, 2012; Shildrick & MacDonald, 2013; Valentine & Harris, 2014).

Yet, it is unsurprising that previous qualitative studies found deservingness as often constructed through the disidentification of the ‘other’ (for example Dos Santos, 2015; Kissová, 2018; Monforte, Bassel & Khan, 2018; Pemberton, Fahmy, Sutton & Bell, 2016; Soss, 2005; Yukich, 2013). Disidentification can be achieved, for example, by emphasising one’s own success related to self-discipline, agency and hard work, thereby defining ‘others’ as a product of their own poor choices, uncivilised behaviour, fecklessness, irresponsible consumption and a lack of self-management (Skeggs & Loveday, 2012; Shildrick & MacDonald, 2013, p. 286; Valentine & Harris, 2014, pp. 86–87). Disidentification can also be accomplished by embracing one’s own role as a ‘good worker’ and a tax payer, that is, presenting oneself as committed to the value of work, which also disidentifies those ‘happy’ not to work and who ‘choose’ benefits (Alho & Sippola, 2018, p. 351; Broughton, 2003; Casati, 2018, p. 802; Chase & Walker, 2013, p. 749, 751; McGormack, 2004, p. 375, 380; Patrick 2016, p. 255, 2017, pp. 157–158; Pultz & Mørch, 2014, p. 2392; Woolford & Nelund, 2013, p. 306, 312).

Deservingness distinctions can also be discursively framed as an issue resulting from, for example, ‘voluntary’ or ‘involuntary’ actions, ‘personal’ or ‘external’ reasons, which for imputations of agency and choice lie at the centre of the discursive construction of deservingness (i.e., actors are either forced or they choose to act) (Yarris & Castañeda, 2015). To illustrate this, refugees are often portrayed as deserving and classified as people in need of protection precisely because they were forced into displacement through war, violence and/or natural or manmade disasters, in contrast to those who cross borders as migrants of their own will (Holmes & Castañeda, 2016; Sales, 2002; Yarris & Castañeda, 2015). Portrayals of border crossers then distinguish between the ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ kinds of people—the ‘genuine’ and ‘bogus’—based on assumptions regarding who deserves access to a nation (Casati, 2018, p. 799; Holmes & Castañeda, 2016, p. 19; Lynn & Lea, 2003; Newton, 2005).

Moreover, deservingness distinctions are closely tied to issues of ill health and disability (Bambra & Smith, 2010; Garthwaite, 2011, 2015; Soldatic & Pini, 2009), as well as to the ethics of medical care (Brown, 2013; Castañeda, 2012; Dos Santos, 2015; Feather & Johnstone, 2001; Skinner, Feather, Freeman & Roche, 2007; Willen, 2011, 2012). Health-related deservingness constructions are produced through discourses that valorise moral expectations regarding self-sufficiency and the value of work, effort and individual responsibility (Snell-Rood & Carpenter-Song, 2018). Then, those who fail to fulfil their moral obligations to live a healthy lifestyle may be deemed as less deserving of healthcare than those considered ‘responsible’ and ‘reaction-worthy’ agents (Brown, 2013; Feather & Johnstone, 2001). Therefore, deservingness distinctions are also consequential in material and empirical terms, since different discursive renderings of deservingness shape access to social and

political rights as well as to services (Casati, 2018; Gordon, 2013; Reid, 2013; Seu, 2016; Yarris & Castañeda, 2015).

Deservingness is not just produced through discourse, but also as an embodied phenomenon that can be performed through particular self-presentations. Gerrald (2019, p. 435) examined how entrepreneurial work and deservingness are carried out in spaces of long-term unemployment and poverty by studying how homeless street press sellers use smiling and looking happy as a performative practice of deservingness, 'saleability', persistence and entrepreneurialism. In another example, citizenship needs to be deserved through particular self-presentations in citizenship tests that focus on a defined set of characteristics, such as language skills and 'knowledge of values'. These characteristics make distinctions between good and contributing citizens and 'failed' citizens, since the state's conditional hospitality is guided by principles of deservingness (Monforte, Bassel & Khan, 2018).

2.2 DESERVINGNESS AND STREET-LEVEL BUREAUCRACIES

Street-level organisations are considered mediators for welfare politics since they specify abstract policy elements and put policy ideas into action (Brodkin, 2008). Thus, some argue that street-level workers actually participate in establishing public policy through categorising, slotting and processing people both in routine and complex situations (Lipsky, 2010; Prottas, 1978). Slotting clients and simplification are, therefore, inevitable in street-level bureaucracies, since public service clients are heterogeneous and work must be somehow manageable (Prottas, 1978, p. 308). Implementing a policy through the delivery of services also requires analysis and making sense of the policy itself (Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2003).

Judging deservingness is heavily influenced by welfare institutions and the related service delivery, since the intended policy is translated into practice (Larsen, 2006). In everyday encounters with clients, street-level workers identify those worthy of services or deserving extraordinary treatment beyond the standard or those who require extra scrutiny. They, thus, make these moral judgements regarding a client's attributes, which then become irreducible elements of policy implementation and resource distribution (Altreiter & Leibetseder, 2015; Hasenfeld, 2000; Jilke & Tummers, 2018; Lipsky, 2010; Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2003). Consequently, street-level bureaucracies work as sites for the construction of clients as deserving or undeserving and involve practices that reinforce discourses related to undeserving groups and their moral worth (see Howe, 1990; Schneider & Ingram, 1993). Blomberg, Kallio, Kangas, Kroll and Niemelä (2017) argue that applying a deservingness perspective to the study of the implementation of welfare services may help to understand the perceptions of welfare recipients, including unemployed individuals, since policy outcomes may also result from deservingness

perceptions amongst those involved in the implementation process. In Finland, previous studies on deservingness primarily focus on street-level bureaucrats' perceptions of deservingness (for example, Blomberg, Kallio, Kroll & Niemelä, 2015; Kallio, Blomberg & Kroll, 2013; Kallio & Kouvo, 2015; Niemelä, 2011; Kallio & Saarinen, 2013).

Frontline staff take discretionary decisions about the amount and character of services provided to citizens based on various traits (Lipsky, 2010; Maynard-Moody & Leland, 2000). In deservingness assessments, frontline staff may strongly prefer to assist clients in a respectful manner, whilst confronting the need to balance competing demands against providing quality services and maintaining resources (see Jurik & Cowgill, 2005, p. 179). Jilke and Tummers (2018) argue that frontline workers employ three specific deservingness cues: earned deservingness through demonstrating significant effort (hard-working client), needed deservingness (the needy client) and resource deservingness (the successfulness of a client is based on bureaucratic success criteria in a situation characterised by scarce time and limited resources).

In street-level assessments, worthy clients are often those who are motivated, responsive and cooperative and individuals who possess realistic goals that are easily achievable (Jurik & Cowgill, 2005; Hasenfield, 2010, p. 149, 160; Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2003, pp. 104–105). However, clients possess a mixture of negative and positive traits, marking them both as worthy and as less-than-worthy, leaving frontline workers the task to determine which traits predominate and how to respond appropriately (Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2003, p. 132). Essentially, frontline workers base their judgements and moral reasoning on widely held social norms. These norms are not always articulated, and become somewhat taken-for-granted cultural representations and mainstream beliefs regarding worthiness and badness, safe and unsafe as well as traits considered trivial and serious (Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2012, pp. 520–521).

In employment services, categorisations determine who is granted priority for institutional support and who is granted little if any attention (Caswell, Larsen, van Berkel & Kupka, 2017; Mäkitalo & Säljö, 2002). Extensive knowledge exists indicating that frontline staff select and mould most likely successful and well-performing clients, often defined as 'creaming' the easy-to-employ clients (Lipsky, 2010; Jurik & Cowgill, 2005). This may result in focusing on resource deservingness, whereby the cost of deservingness is based on evaluations of need (Jilke & Tummers, 2018). For instance, Gordon's (2013) work shows how youth empowerment programmes only serve deserving subjects, that is, youth who 'are ready to make changes in their life', and those who are capable of 'success' and goal-setting receive priority and rewards. Those positioned as unsuccessful, needy and irresponsible, however, are viewed as undeserving of further attention, care and outreach, and are placed into the category of 'some other programme's responsibility'.

Rosenthal and Peccei's (2006) study on British welfare administration revealed that in order to distinguish 'ideal' and 'non-ideal' client types, clients are classified based on their perceived attitudes towards work, body language and demeanour as well as their expressions of gratitude, aggression, social status and age. Clients, in particular, are assessed according to their 'job-readiness', which primarily refers to clients' work attitudes as well as how pleasant, amenable and grateful clients are. Howe's (1990, pp. 108–109, 129, 134) ethnographic work from Northern Ireland shows that the 'undeserving' clients of street-level bureaucracies comprise those claimants who are assertive, importunate and pursue their claims with persistence. In addition, Howe found that those bureaucracies identified undeserving clients as those who deviate in some way from the 'traditional' moral community, such as those lacking a work ethic, individual responsibility and the virtue of self-reliance. Hence, deserving claimants tend to be compliant, deferential and undemanding, on the one hand, and conforming to the same set of moral values endorsed by frontline staff, on the other.

3 ON RESPONSIBILISATION

Prolonged unemployment is constructed by linking it not just to deservingness, but also to a broader policy change related to an advanced liberal government and the ways in which social risks—and the responsibilities linked to them—are managed (Dean, 1995). Sociological research on individualised responsibility is often explored through the framework of the Foucauldian notion of governmentality. This framework refers to the ‘conduct of conduct’—that is, how social actors act upon themselves through self-governance and are governed by other agents in order to attain ‘active citizenship’ (see Dean, 1995; Rose, 2000).

Responsibilisation refers to governance-at-a-distance as a means to make people ‘do as they ought to’ (Colvin, Robins & Leavens 2010, p. 1184). For instance, Clarke (2005) examined how New Labour policies not only produce ‘responsible’ and independent agents, but also render them a product of responsibilisation. Clarke argues that the responsibilisation of an individual is wide-ranging in policies aimed at producing independent, ‘hard-working’, choice-making and self-directing individuals who manage their lifestyles in a way that promotes their own health and well-being. Clarke (2005, p. 451) reflects as follows:

‘Responsible citizens make reasonable choices—and, therefore ‘bad choices’ result from the wilfulness of irresponsible people, rather than the structural distribution of resources, capacities and opportunities.... There is an unstable assemblage of what is deemed ‘reasonable’ and ‘decent’ across a variety of sites and practices from teenage pregnancy, through the etiquette of summoning ambulances, to clearing up your dog’s faeces’.

Responsibilisation is then exercised through a variety of choice engineering, such as marketing healthy lifestyles, climate change initiatives as well as social shaming and normative campaigning on smoking (Peeters, 2019, p. 58). Rose (2000, p. 335) claims that in advanced liberalism ‘those who refuse to become responsible, to govern themselves ethically, have also refused the offer to become members of our moral community’. Thus, the notion of ‘who counts’ as a responsible citizen remains a core interest within the social sciences (Whiteford, 2010, p. 203). Therefore, as Trnka and Trundle (2014) argue, ‘responsible subjects’ are nested within multiple frames of reciprocities, obligations and dependencies—that is, the political rhetoric regarding responsibilisation related to social contract ideologies.

3.1 ACTIVATION AS RESPONSIBILISATION

Profound shifts have taken place regarding construction of unemployment and governmental responsibilities throughout the past century. These shifts have recast varying social, economic and moral-behavioural objectives, such as highlighting or muting charitable mentalities or focusing on the behaviours and attitudes of subject populations (Harris, 2001). Thus, constructions of unemployment differ at various points in history and are constantly renewed (Welshman, 2002). Simply put, when the concept of the welfare state was established, structural notions of poverty and unemployment requiring supply side measures (e.g., job creation, rather than labour) took hold, supplemented by discourse on human rights and citizenship-based entitlements (Marston, 2008, p. 360). The period following the construction of the welfare state has been associated with an international shift, moving from needs and rights to work-based obligations, and from supply-side to demand-side measures, a reform often referred to as activation.

In Finland, this paradigmatic shift towards activation was introduced through several reforms beginning in the mid-1990s, such as the introduction of labour market subsidy benefits and the Act on Rehabilitative Work (Kananen, 2012; Keskitalo, 2008; Nygård, 2007). Finland has a multi-tiered unemployment benefit system that includes both earnings-related and flat-rate benefits, which have both undergone reforms that have reduced the maximum duration of earnings-related benefits and made flat-rate benefits sanctions and eligibility criteria stricter (especially for young and long-term recipients) (Lähtenmäki, 2020; Van Aerscht, 2011; Varjonen, Kangas & Niemelä, 2020). According to Kananen (2012), together, these reforms constitute the essence of what may be labelled as ‘workfare’ policy, referred to as ‘activation’ in Nordic countries.

In the literature, Finland often refers to activation approaches such as ‘social investment’ and ‘human capital development’, in comparison to the ‘work first’ approaches predominantly existing in liberal welfare regimes (Minas, 2014). The former primarily promotes long-term employability, including the gradual enhancement of skills and personal development delivered through ‘holistic’ coping services, whereas the latter focuses on job search and short-term intervention facilitating a quick return to work (Lindsay, McQuid & Dutton, 2007). In recent years, however, Finnish activation policy has moved closer to the idea of the ‘work first’ approaches in which an unemployed individual’s responsibilities related to gaining employment are emphasised more (Keskitalo, 2013; Saikku, 2018). National activation policies are actually difficult to place given these ideal types, since policies contain a mixture of both types of characters, specifically including an increased conditionality and additional obligations for benefit recipients (Caswell, Kupka, Larsen, & van Berkel, 2017, p. 3). Currently, there are Finnish political initiatives that aim to strengthen the conditionality of unemployment benefits and services in which social work is a key profession to support,

monitor, assess and activate ‘at-risk’ target groups towards active citizenship (Raitakari, Juhila & Räsänen, 2019).

In general, activation policies stem from the rationale that citizens who are at ‘risk’ for state dependency must transform, becoming self-reliant, independent and responsible citizens—that is, they should transform from passivity and dependency to responsibility, effort, activity and enterprise (Dean, 1995; Harris, 2001). Thus, justifications towards activation reforms depend upon a ‘new paternalism’ resting upon the notion that the unemployed subject’s moral standing is enhanced through programmes that promote ‘self-reliance’ (Marston, 2006, p. 86). Often, the transformation from a ‘passive’ to an ‘active and motivated jobseeker’ involves both statistical risk management technologies (of responsibility) and sanctioning the unemployed subject (Caswell, Marston & Larsen, 2010, p. 390). Activation, therefore, includes measures aimed at reforming individuals through interventions related to their employability as well as the retrenchment of income security, including limiting the amount, availability and duration of income security benefits (Grundy & Laliberte Rudman, 2018; Boland & Griffin, 2015, 2016; Marston, 2008; Peck & Theodore, 2000).

The activation of benefit recipients can also be identified as an international reform agenda item resting upon the idea of behavioural change by punishing and rewarding individual behaviour and shaping motivational deficiencies (Wright, 2012). Activation then aims to provide guidance to individuals to make the ‘right choices’ by ensuring financial incentives, such as increasing rewards attached to paid employment (Patrick, 2017, p. 37). Thus, activation also involves ‘motivational’ strategies as a means of responsabilisation through which unemployed people are encouraged to maintain an optimistic and positive outlook and to continue ‘looking forward’ (Arts & van den Berg, 2019) as a means to become ‘productive citizens’ (Lantz & Marston, 2012, p. 861).

Through a neoliberal lens, the unemployed subject is expected to view themselves as a jobseeker, a term that situates the problem as the individual’s effort to fulfil obligations related to actively seeking a job (Boland, 2016; Boland & Griffin, 2015, 2016). Therefore, responsabilisation and individualisation — practices played out within workfare and activation programmes — not only construct unemployment, but also construct notions of class, citizenship and poverty (McDonald & Marston, 2005, p. 376, 379). At a broader level, unemployment becomes increasingly personalised through the use of psychological discourse and individualised social policy, discursively setting up unemployment as embedded within psychology, motivation and the inactivity of an unemployed person (Caswell, Marston & Larsen, 2010, 399; Gibson, 2009; Laliberte Rudman & Aldrich, 2016; Marston, 2006; McDonald, Marston & Buckley, 2003, p. 499; Patrick, 2012; Wiggan, 2012). Typically, in the psychological and therapeutic discourse, the individual is constructed as ‘deficient’ and is, therefore, invited to work on the ‘problem of unemployment’ (McDonald, Marston & Buckley, 2003, p. 517; Patrick, 2012). Within this

therapeutic and rehabilitative discourse, the unemployed subject is assumed to have a 'decayed human capital' (Boland & Griffin, 2016), which requires therapy and training to rectify a lack of self-control and responsibility (Ezzy, 2001, pp. 9–10). Thus, the varying 'psy' discourses transform the subject of welfare into a 'motivated subject', who should be engaged in a therapeutic 'project of self' (Rose, 1996). Indeed, much of activation focuses on the self as a project, including expectation to market their skills including their talents and desires (van den Berg & Arts, 2019, p. 302).

3.2 EMPLOYABILITY DISCOURSE

Activation and responsabilisation are also discussed within the concept of employability (Rose, 2000). Specifically, through activation, individuals are increasingly portrayed either as employable or unemployable (Garsten & Jaconsson, 2004). As such, Chertkovskaya, Watt, Tramer and Spoelstra (2013, p. 701) define employability as:

'gestures to a new arrangement, wherein the state and employers are no longer committed to nor deemed responsible for providing those they govern and/or employ with lasting and secure jobs. Instead, individuals' capacity to take the initiative, relentlessly update and improve their knowledge and skills, and to be flexible and adaptable, i.e. to constantly work on their employability, has come to be understood as the crux of national, organizational and individual prosperity.'

Similarly, according to Peck and Theodore (2000), employability represents a supply side, behavioural and individualistic intervention as a means to motivate and 'flexibilise' unemployed individuals such that they adjust to the 'realities' of the labour market (see also Connor, 2010; Patrick, 2012, p. 8). Employability may, therefore, be represented as a positive and self-evident response to produce self-investing and self-managing individuals (Mertanen, Bashby & Brunila, 2020).

In Finland, employability has been extensively analysed in relation to educational attempts to produce a transformative workforce fitting an employer's needs. Thus, in keeping with neoliberal reasoning, the individual is also an active, autonomous, flexible and responsible learner who needs to construct their subjectivities through entrepreneurial discourse that stresses one's own choices and responsibility vis-à-vis employability enhancement and entrepreneurial work on the self (Boden & Nevada, 2010; Fejes, 2010; Mertanen & Brunila, 2018, p. 159; Siivonen & Brunila, 2014; Siivonen & Isopahkala-Bouret, 2016). For instance, Mertanen and Brunila (2018) examined the discourse of employability and therapisation in Finnish prison education programmes. These discourses are adopted by young adults and the prison staff, who stress the importance of hard work, life skills, goal setting

and life management, through which self-responsibility is managed and an ideal route to 'get back' to civil society is mastered.

Inspired by Goffman's dramaturgical sociology, Boland (2016) argues that as part of employability enhancement projects, jobseekers are required to turn the negative consequences of unemployment into a positive and self-controlled performance and self-presentations within the theatricalised labour market. This may be achieved through entrepreneurial self-work—that is, discovering skills and self-examination, and selling oneself through applications, networking and CV writing. This process includes self-flattering and motivational discourse as a part of active job seeking. During this, the jobseeker is a 'product' and becomes a distinguished 'brand' and 'tweaked persona', whose value should convince strangers as a means to stand out. The 'chameleon-like' ideal jobseeker's primary characteristic is employability.

3.3 RESPONSIBILISATION AND ACTIVATION WITHIN FRONTLINE PRACTICE

Responsibility stands at the core in street-level bureaucracies, since frontline workers must hold their clients and themselves accountable through their administration, whilst putting policy in practice (Matarese & Caswell, 2014, p. 59; Prottas, 1978, p. 293). Policies often contain conflicting policy definitions, which for frontline staff and their varying contexts become an arena in which they are defined and become meaningful (Caswell, Kupka, Larsen & van Berkel, 2017; Lipsky, 2010). Through narrating stories related to frontline work, workers also participate in narrating actions, characters and emotions, all of which provide insight into how actors take decisions and the kinds of identities, explanations and justifications based on various norms and beliefs they employ (Maynard-Moody & Musheno; 2003, pp. 30–31).

Frontline staff associated with activation are responsible for assessing, monitoring and supervising the unemployed through an array of techniques, tools and technologies designed to act on unemployed individuals' employability by imparting skills, orientations and attitudes (McDonald, Marston & Buckley, 2003, p. 499). Employability enhancement policies, however, are more complex than policymakers often portray them (Belt & Richardson, 2005; Marston & McDonald, 2008, p. 257). Despite the variety of expectations related to activation, local welfare staff and clients have also resisted and refused formal activation policy during implementation (see also Caswell, Eskelinen & Olesen, 2013; Eskelinen, Søren & Caswell, 2010; Keskitalo, 2008; Solberg, 2011).

Implementing activation includes informing, enabling, convincing, persuading and disciplining clients (Caswell, Larsen, van Berkel, Rik & Kupka, 2017, p. 193). For example, Marston, Larsen and McDonald (2005) identified three types of authority used in activation: empathetic, pedagogic and coercive authority invoked whether a person is interpreted as fitting the criteria of a

‘good jobseeker’ or that counterpart, the ‘passive jobseeker’ (see also Møller & Stensöta, 2019). On the basis of their analysis, a good jobseeker is highly organised, responsible, confident, takes pride in their appearance, is emotionally upbeat and willing to take risks as well as lower their expectations regarding employment opportunities. Empathetic authority is used to motivate unemployed clients to become enthusiastic or transform client’s undesirable behaviour, such as anger, to a manageable state. Pedagogic authority, in comparison, is used when an unemployed person is represented as having a deficiency that can be fixed through teaching and instruction. Coercive pedagogy is applied when empathetic and pedagogic forms of authority fail (see also Agllias, Howard, Schubert & Gray, 2016; Brady, 2018). Thus, frontline practitioners’ interpretations and performances related to activation differ based on how they construct their clients’ willingness and employability (Liebenberf, Ungar & Ikeda, 2015, p. 1017; Nothdurfter, 2017, p. 112; Nothdurter 2016; Romppainen, Jähi, Saloniemi & Virtanen, 2010). This often stems from one’s remoteness to the labour market and job readiness (see also Lipsky, 2010; Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2003).

Turgeon, Taylor and Niehaus (2014) identified discursive techniques that welfare-to-work programme managers use to legitimise their identities as good workers. Through these techniques, managers engage in ‘class talk’ through which they praise middle-class values and blame those lacking these values. Seale, Buck and Parotta (2013) also identified similar language use through which the clients of welfare-to-work programmes are represented as unmotivated, unwilling, childlike, incompetent and responsible for their lack of employment and life skills, whereas workers were represented as hard-working deserving middle-class subjects with the correct values (see also Howard, Agllias, Schubert & Gray, 2018; Purser & Hennigan, 2017)¹. Clients, therefore, are invited to comply with neoliberal expectations by adjusting their presentation, behaviour and interactions. As such, they are entrepreneurial, responsible, prudent, autonomous and active, since these performances and self-presentations are necessary for service users to convince the bureaucratic gatekeepers that they deserve care and services (Woolford & Nelund, 2013).

Previous studies on class-based employability enhancement projects have also focused on the body politics of how unemployed subjects are expected to provide an aesthetic performance of work-readiness, thereby deserving welfare as ‘presentable’ employable subjects with proper taste (Cummins & Blum, 2015; van den Berg & Arts, 2019). For example, McDonald, Marston and Buckley (2003) describe how Australian frontline staff are directed to list risk factors based on observable personal characteristics and behaviours, such as inappropriate eye contact or makeup, unusual dress and poor personal hygiene. By describing clients, frontline staff can stream unemployed people

¹ Previous research also reports activation as associated with religious language use, such as salvation possibly achieved through activation (Korteweg, 2003; Møller & Stone, 2013; Purser & Hennigan, 2017).

into appropriate levels of support and direct them towards a certain category of job-readiness. In the Netherlands, welfare officers can sanction their clients if they 'obstruct' their employment by appearance, for example, by wearing flip-flops, headphones, their body odour and showing cleavage (van den Berg & Arts, 2019, p. 303). In Sweden, by comparison, as career coaching advice, men are instructed to not 'expose a hairy chest' and women are told to 'stay away from too tight pants' (Dahlstedt & Vesterberg, 2019, p. 208). Therefore, street-level assessments on aesthetics also invites responsabilising pedagogical responses and punitive evaluations from frontline workers whose work focuses on encouraging unemployed people's aesthetic performances through, for example, exercise, dress and makeup (Broughton, 2003; van den Berg & Arts, 2019, pp. 300–301).

Haikkola (2019) completed ethnographic research on how self-governing subjects are put into practice in Finnish street-level encounters in public employment services (see also Krivonos, 2019). According to Haikkola, these attempts include authoritarian measures and governance regarding the time and behaviour of young unemployed people. In general, young unemployed Finnish people are expected to possess certain skills. These skills include motivation, activity and self-direction, which designate them as active and responsible and morally worthy in everyday encounters with public employment services. However, Haikkola (2019, p. 342) argues that young people's own goals and aspirations are overlooked in these encounters due to frontline workers' needs to urgently 'activate' them. That is, frontline workers refer to performance targets to fill activation rates themselves.

4 EPISTEMOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK, METHODS AND DATA

In this chapter, I describe the epistemological and methodological foundations this thesis by introducing my social constructionist and discursive framework. In addition, this chapter includes my justification for the semi-structured interviews and parliamentary discussions as the sources of data.

4.1 SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONIST APPROACH

The analysis of these three sub-studies relies on a broad social constructionist framework. As a theory of knowledge, social constructionism approaches reality as jointly constructed by human beings through social practices, interactions and language use (Burr, 2003). Social constructionism takes a critical stance towards the notion of objective ‘truth’, ‘facts’ and ‘internal mental states’, which are ‘out there’ for scientists to discover, and, therefore, represent opposition to notions of positivism and empiricism (Burr, 2003; Potter & Wetherell, 1987, pp. 180–181). In contrast, social constructionist approaches argue that different phenomena, such as prolonged unemployment, can be ‘read’ in an unlimited number of ways and, therefore, the interest of scientific analysis should lie where meanings are created and negotiated (Willig, 2003, p. 161). In particular, social constructionist analyses have been interested in processes through which ‘knowledge’ becomes established as a taken-for-granted and common-sense ‘reality’ (Berger & Luckmann, 1971).

In this thesis, therefore, I pay little attention to what is ‘factual’ in relation to prolonged unemployment. Instead, I focus my analysis on how prolonged unemployment is constructed within different actors’ talk, and what these constructions aim to ‘do’ and ‘achieve’. Since I adhere to social constructionism, I do not reflect upon speakers’ ‘inner feelings’, ‘mental representations’, ‘opinions’, ‘attitudes’ or ‘thoughts’. Rather, from the social constructionist viewpoint, I understand that the different actors in my datasets actively participate in constructing representations of unemployment and that these representations also construct social meaning (Edwards, 1997; Potter & Whetherell, 1987; Wetherell, 2007).

4.2 METHODS

In my analyses, I employed the methodology primarily used in discursive psychology, focussing on the analysis of resistance strategies, positioning and rhetorical fact construction amongst different actors vis-à-vis activation

policy. The discursive psychology arose from the 'linguistic turn' of psychology and social sciences, which approaches talk and text as strategic communicative actions rather than cognitive and psychological processes (Edwards, 1997; Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Wetherell, 2007; Willig, 2003; Wooffitt & Widdicombe, 2006, p. 33). Within discursive psychology, social constructionism is then epistemic, whereby descriptions are regarded as constructive rather than entities that exist beyond them. Thus, descriptions are socially and discursively occasioned productions (Edwards, 1997, pp. 48, 52).

Specifically, discursive psychology deviates from cognitivist phenomenological social constructionism by focusing on how constructions are action-oriented and used to 'do things' (Potter, 2005, p. 742). Therefore, discursive psychology perceives situated language use as a performative activity itself by aligning with a social constructionist antirealist position. This position rejects the idea that language is neutral, transparent and non-intrusive, representing a 'do-nothing domain' merely reflecting and mirroring objects and working as a route to speakers' cognition (Edwards, 1997; Burr, 2003; Willig, 2003; Wetherell & Potter, 1987). Instead, discursive psychology perceives language use in subtle ways, constructing a version of the social and natural world through which a variety of political, practical and social implications and objectives are achieved and performed (Potter & Wetherell, 1987, pp. 6, 15).

Nevertheless, my analyses do not strictly adhere to the methods of discursive psychology. I have also been influenced and inspired by Foucauldian discourse analysis that acknowledges the power of language and focuses on institutionalised practices and the social structure of discourse (Burr, 2003, p. 22; Willig, 2003, p. 159). Foucauldian discourse analysis and discursive psychology both examine the role of language in constructing social reality, whilst relying on different types of research questions and analyses, and are, therefore, conceptually separated from each other (Willig, 2003, p. 182).

In study I, I focussed on how the unemployment category is negotiated and reworked during interview talk, through which the category is implicitly and explicitly assigned to research participants. In my analysis, I loosely used elements of Membership Category Analysis, which focuses on how individuals negotiate categories tied to activities and inference rich inferences as well as common-sense characteristics (Sacks, 1992). However, my analysis also used elements and principles of discursive psychology, since I approached resistance as actions interviewees performed as a means to present themselves as deserving. In principal, discursive psychological analysis examines the ways in which categories are invoked as a means to accomplish specific goals, such as justification and blaming (Edwards, 1999, 273; Potter, 2005; Potter & Wetherell, 1987, pp. 116, 121). I perceive the resistance strategies I identified as forms of justifications vis-à-vis deservingness.

In study II, I drew from Harré and van Langenhove's (1991) idea of positioning. As such, positioning refers to a process during social interactions in which individuals become discursively produced through interactive processes. These processes are both intentional and unintentional and draw from personal and cultural resources, such as images, metaphors, characters, plots and concepts relevant to a particular discourse (Davies & Harré, 1990; Harré & van Langenhove, 1991). Thus, positioning can be understood as the discursive construction of personal stories that make a person's actions comprehensible possibly rendering the responsibilities of actions as empty (Harré & van Langenhove, 1991, pp. 395, 404). In my analysis, I focused on how positioning reflects and reveals the responsibilities related to employability enhancement amongst both unemployed individuals and frontline workers. My analysis revealed both third-order positionings (the clients) and first-order positionings (the frontline workers), as well as the subsequent actions of frontline workers (Harré & van Langenhove, 1991, pp. 396–397). Third-order positioning appears when positioning occurs outside the original conversation (Harré & van Langenhove, 1991, p. 397). In my case, these conversations consisted of telephone interviews, during which interviewees participate in explaining clients' actions originating beyond the immediate conversation. In this sense, the first- and third-order positions frontline workers produce are reciprocal, creating certain types of actions for certain positions.

In study III, I utilised the methodological principles of rhetorical discourse analysis. My analysis focussed on the rhetorical devices and fact-enhancement strategies identified by Potter (1996). As such, I focussed on the ways in which MPs constructed unemployed people's deservingness and how un/deservingness were made factual in MPs' talk. In particular, I paid attention to the MPs' management of categories, 'truth talk', extreme case formulations and maxi- and minimisation strategies. According to Pomerantz (1986), extreme case formulations refer to the means of undermining or strengthening certain claims or behaviours. In addition, such formulations propose the wrongness or rightness of behaviours and practices, justifying and defending as well as proposing phenomena as 'objective'. All of the constructions and rhetorical devices I identified were used to oppose and justify an act, which formed part of the interplay between political power relations.

4.3 DATA

My empirical material involves three 'activation' contexts tied to a specific time and social setting, as well as to political particularities during the early and mid-2010s. However, the three datasets are united by the idea that all involve attempts to activate those individuals who have been unemployed for prolonged periods. The audio-recorded interview data were collected as part

of two different research projects dealing with activating services. The parliamentary debates on activation are self-evident naturally occurring data, since they were not elicited by researchers for research purposes specifically. Thus, I understand that parliamentary discussions and interviews differ as data, since they have different purposes in their talk. For my analyses, I have focussed on the sentences of data in which prolonged unemployment is talked about and rendered meaningful. All of my datasets involve numerous interesting additional themes and discursive patterns which lie beyond the scope of the analysis presented here.

4.3.1 SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS AS DATA

I was one of three interviewers during 15 semi-structured face-to-face group interviews we conducted as a part of the Rytmi Project, which took place in 2010 and 2011. The Rytmi Project, funded by the European Social Fund, was one of the European Union's regional and national employment-related projects for 'disadvantaged groups'. These projects specifically focused on employability enhancement and the 'empowerment' of 'hard-to-employ' individuals. In this particular project, my role was to conduct, analyse and report the interview data as a part of a research team employed at the University of Helsinki. For my analysis, I have mainly used data passages from group interviews in which the interviewees were asked to describe their experiences as social and health care service users and unemployment benefit recipients. These descriptions included accounts of interviewees' own and other unemployed people's unemployment. In 2011, I conducted 10 additional one-on-one semi-structured face-to-face interviews. For individual interviews, I formulated the interview questions and transcribed the interview data myself. For my analysis, I focused on interview questions that addressed the routine experiences of unemployment, including topics such as everyday activities, financial and social situation and labour market and general societal position of unemployed people in Finland. Again, interviewees made sense of their own experiences in these interviews by making references to other unemployed people. In total, my data consists of the talk from 70 unemployed individuals residing in small- and medium-sized towns in southern Finland. The vast majority of the interviewees experienced multiple problems, such as limitations to their ability to work, mental health issues and substance misuse, all of which hampered their capabilities to enter the labour market. In total, the data consist of 440 pages of transcribed data.

I also served as one of three interviewers during 34 semi-structured telephone interviews we conducted as part of the TYP Project, which took place from late 2016 through early 2017. In the TYP Project, I was employed at the University of Helsinki and my role was to design and conduct the interviews as well as to transcribe, analyse and report the interview data. The TYP Project, funded by the Social Insurance Institution of Finland, focused on analysing

the implementation of a legally defined specialised service targeted to long-term unemployed jobseekers whose re/employment requires integrated service provision. Our telephone interviews reached 34 rehabilitation counsellors working on the frontline of the Finnish Multi-Sectoral Joint Service Promoting Employment as a part of a multi-sectoral team. Telephone interviews were conducted as a means to access a wide geographical distribution of experiences related to implementing multi-sectoral services addressing activation. The interviews resulted in 405 pages of transcribed data. For my analysis, I have mainly used data passages of interview questions related to clients' service path processes and frontline workers' roles within the service, including questions of what motivating clients means as part of interviewees' everyday frontline work.

While the research interests and objectives of these two projects differed, the principles applied to data collection through conducting interviews, ethics and reporting results were broadly similar. With both sets of interview data, I have honoured the ethical principles of informed consent, voluntary participation and confidentiality. In both projects, data pilot interviews were conducted as a means to identify potential ethical pitfalls of the interview frame (see van Wijk, 2013). As an ethical weakness, we did not communicate a thorough description of the discursive methods at the time of interviewing (for the debate, see Hammersley, 2014; Taylor, 2014). In reporting the results, however, I have paid particular attention to securing the anonymity and protecting the privacy of the participants. Anonymity is maintained by not reporting any detailed personal information about the interviewees and knowingly choosing data extracts that do not reveal any identifiable information about participants. However, I am very well aware of the power imbalance issues of selecting and interpreting the quotes (Allmark et al., 2009).

As an ethical concern, when conducting telephone interviews with frontline workers, we aimed to not cause any considerable additional work, knowing the organisational structures and limited resources frontline workers may deal with. In addition, my ethical considerations extended to unemployed participants' 'vulnerability'. I have aimed for a respectful, emotionally sensitive and non-harmful interactional style with open-ended questions, compassionate responses and confirmation that the interview settings are private and safe. As regards vulnerability, when reporting the results, I have aimed not to reinforce stereotyping, stigmas or sensationalism (see Allmark, 2009; van Wijk, 2013). However, on the same note, I perceive that the participants of my study may be resistant to the ethics review committee's and researcher's concerns around vulnerability; that is, who gets to determine that someone is a vulnerable person at higher risk of harm and in need of 'special protection' (see Bracken-Roche et al., 2017; van den Hoonaard, 2018).

My interview data carry advantages and disadvantages. For example, during group interviews, the presence of other people may have led to the disclosure of argumentative talk from some interviewees (Wooffitt &

Widdicombe, 2006, p. 32). One advantage, however, from the group interviews lies in granting insight into how views and 'experiences' are constructed, defended, modified and collaboratively made sense of during the course of interactions between people (Wilkinson, 2003, p. 187, 2006). Telephone interviews also carry specific limitations, such as the lack of nonverbal and visual cues related to the body language of the interviewee (Turgeon, Taylor & Niehaus, 2014).

In discursive research, 'real-world' settings are frequently preferred; however, semi-structured interviews are often used as data given the ethical and practical difficulties in obtaining naturally occurring data (Willig, 2003, pp. 163–164). I am aware that during interviews participants often talk about their experiences in a way that is legitimate within a particular culture and, thus, follow a fixed pattern, particularly in relation to negatively charged phenomena, which often require a culturally acceptable explanation (Järvinen, 2000, p. 373). Specifically, this is the case in interview settings in which interviewees formulate their narratives in relation to topics that deal with personal blame and the need to maintain distance from the very object of the interview as a means to achieve exoneration from guilt (Järvinen, 2000, p. 374, 378, 386; Van De Mieroop, 2011, pp. 566–567). Therefore, during interviews, interactional routines and discourse processes are tied to sociocultural and co-constructive sense-making which is rhetorical in nature, thereby constituting interviews as everything but neutral and the unproblematic elicitation of information (Gibson, 2011; Lee & Roth, 2004; Wetherell, 2007, p. 672).

Because semi-structured interviews are often designed using questions to elicit views or accounts in relation to questions, they heavily lean on turn-taking between the interviewer and interviewee, and are more formal and constrained than during everyday conversations (Wooffitt & Widdicombe, 2006, pp. 29–30, 39). Therefore, it is evident that knowledge and meaning-making during interviews results from collaboration with the interviewer. Thus, I do not treat interviews as neutrally transmitting knowledge, unadulterated facts and details of experience (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995). Instead, I perceive all questions asked by an interviewer as constructing knowledge produced during the research process. Holstein and Gubrium (1995, pp. 34, 39) call this process 'activating the narrative production', which tends to include narrative positions that shift several times during the interview by also reinforcing varying ways of accounting for the same matter. This process applies to both sets of interview data in my study. When conducting the interviews, the interviewees were encouraged to comment freely on questions proposed by the interviewers, which in all cases produced material that included rich argumentative talk around prolonged unemployment.

4.3.2 PARLIAMENTARY DISCUSSIONS AS DATA

The third dataset consisted of parliamentary debates on the ‘Activation Model for Unemployment Security’². For my analysis, I included data from three plenary sessions during parliamentary discussions, which took place in December 2017. Data were taken from the home page of the Finnish Parliament with a total length of 175 pages of transcribed data. The advantage of using parliamentary data is that they are easily accessible for analysis, and their online availability make legislative decision-making processes subject to public scrutiny (see Ilie, 2010a, pp. 4–5). However, when using parliamentary data for research purposes, it is crucial to note that the language used in parliamentary dialogues deviates significantly from the ordinary mundane conversation given its style (Íñigo-Mora, 2010, p. 336).

In general, during parliamentary discussions, elected representatives as members of political parties are engaged in argumentative discussions and discursively shape the issue of public concern by aiming to accomplish political goals, setting the agenda and building the opinion leading to future courses of action (van Dijk, 2000; Ilie, 2010a, 2016). Thus, parliamentary discussions represent specific speech acts, since they include turn-taking to support or oppose acts, which are regulated through various institution-specific sets of rules and norm-regulated interactional patterns regarding, for example, the topic, length and order of a speech (van Dijk, 2010; Ilie, 2010a).

Unlike talk during interviews, parliamentary talk is targeted to multilevel audiences and acted on behalf of many audiences including not just parliamentarians, but also journalists, the general public and TV viewers (Ilie, 2010b, 63; 2016). Therefore, parliamentary discussions become unique speech acts given that speakers literally speak to the record, since they are aware of the recording and, hence, the recording becomes an important contextual factor of such speech acts (van Dijk, 2000, p. 52). Ilie (2010b, p. 70) argues that MPs are fully aware that there are no realistic means of persuading opponents of the justifiability of their beliefs and ideas. Instead, MPs’ interventions call into question opponents’ political credibility and moral profiles, whilst enhancing their own credibility (Ilie, 2010a, p. 8).

² The Activation Model was dismantled under Prime Minister Marin’s centre-left government in early 2020.

5 RESULTS

In this chapter, I first introduce short summaries of the results from each of the sub-studies. Then, I introduce the synthesis I produced when analysing the results of my sub-studies as a whole. For this synthesis of the three sub-studies, I ask:

- 1) How do different actors of Finnish activation policy present unemployed people's agency through their discourse?
- 2) How are these agential constructs held morally responsible? And, conversely, how is freeing from responsibility enacted?

As a result, I identified three key ways in which different actors of Finnish activation policy present unemployed people's agency in their discourse. I call these constructions othered, victimised and entrepreneurial agency. All of these agential constructions hold unemployed individuals morally responsible in varying ways, including different negotiations related to responsibilities and deservingness.

5.1 SUMMARY OF STUDY I

In study I, I focussed my analysis on the question of how long-term Finnish unemployed interviewees resist the unemployment category applied to them in interview settings by addressing different deservingness cues. Data collection occurred through group and individual interviews amongst 70 long-term unemployed individuals with limitations to their ability to work. In the analysis, I identified and named three means of resistance: separating, declining and enriching.

All means of resistance were re-examined in relation to the existing literature on deservingness, specifically van Oorschot's (2000) deservingness criteria for identity, need and control. I argue that through different means of resistance the interviewees address their deservingness — that is, their proximity to 'us', their neediness and their lack of control. As such, I argue that unemployed individuals need to somehow participate in the dominant discourse of an undeserving poor when explaining their own and others' unemployment. I viewed the interview setting itself as inviting such talk, since the unemployment category is implicitly and explicitly negotiated during the interview.

However, during nearly all of the interviews, different deservingness cues co-existed. Thus, interviewees simultaneously accepted and resisted cultural stereotypes and both avoided and participated in their creation whilst

exhibiting deservingness. Thus, interviewees used various straightforward and subtle accounts as a means of resistance. That is, my participants did not simply use separation, such as castigation and the moral judgements of others, as shown in previous qualitative studies. Instead, the interviewees in my study also negotiated the category by applying structural explanations of unemployment, demonstrating solidarity with others through their accounts, presenting themselves using their own terms and simply dismissing the category applied to them. Nevertheless, all means of resistance reveal the cultural image of Finnish unemployed individuals with prolonged unemployment histories as mentally ill, with alcohol misuse problems, as lazy and, most importantly, as responsible for and in control of their own unemployment and neediness.

5.2 SUMMARY OF STUDY II

In study II, I examined the positions Finnish frontline workers constructed for their long-term unemployed clients during interview talk focused on the employability of long-term unemployed jobseekers whose re-/employment requires integrated service provision due to the multiple and often complex additional problems they face beyond unemployment. The data consisted of 34 telephone interviews with rehabilitation counsellors working as a part of a multi-sectoral team aimed at enhancing the employability of unemployed jobseekers who face multiple barriers to obtaining a job. In my analysis, I identified four main positions: motivated, resistant, unfortunate and blameworthy.

I employed positioning analysis to track how the responsibility for employability enhancement associates with both long-term unemployed individuals and frontline workers. As a result of my analysis, I found that responsibility related to employability enhancement is either shared, dependent upon frontline workers or partly or primarily individualised based upon long-term unemployed clients. The vast majority of unemployed individuals were positioned as motivated and willing to show a responsible attitude towards employability enhancement. However, the results also show that individualised responsibility for employability enhancement conforms with frontline workers' interview talk. This analysis of positions helps to identify frontline workers' orientation towards work. Therefore, I argue that positioning may be consequential by legitimising actions and non-actions towards individual long-term unemployed people as service users vis-à-vis activation.

5.3 SUMMARY OF STUDY III

In study III, I analysed constructions of unemployed people's deservingness constructed during Finnish MPs parliamentary talk. In my analysis, I explored what kinds of factuality-enhancement strategies MPs used as a means to rhetorically accomplish versions of unemployed people's deservingness and undeservingness as factual. Here, my analysis focussed on how MPs established factuality through the management of categorisations rendering them 'knowledgeable', as well maxi- and minimisation strategies, extreme case formulations and 'truth talk' (Pomeranz, 1986; Potter, 1996). In my analysis, I relied on data consisting of transcripts from Finnish parliamentary members debating during three plenary sessions about the 'Activation Model for Unemployment Security', which took place in December 2017. As a result of my analysis, I identified three discursive constructions of unemployed people's deservingness: an 'effortful citizen lacking control', a 'needy citizen deserving the welfare state's reciprocal acts' and an 'undeserving freeloader in need of an attitude adjustment'. All three discursive constructions were simultaneously maintained, resisted and co-constructed.

All of the constructions and rhetorical devices I identified represent a portion of the interplay between political ideologies and power relations. The effortful and needy constructions were primarily maintained by members of the opposition as a means to frame unemployed individuals as deserving people, whilst criticising and opposing the centre-right government's legislative attempts related to the Activation Model. Conversely, the freeloader construction was employed primarily by members of the government as a means to justify the necessity of the model and to frame unemployed individuals as undeserving. However, both members of the opposition and the government participated in the construction of undeserving and deserving unemployed subjects when co-constructing prolonged unemployment vis-à-vis activation.

5.4 SYNTHESISING THE THREE SUB-STUDIES

To provide a synthesis of the three sub-studies, I analysed how unemployed individuals' agency is presented through different actors' talk by approaching agency as a discursively accomplished phenomenon. I began my analysis by including all instances in my sub-studies that provided relevant descriptions of unemployed people's agency. Then, from these descriptions, I identified the three most dominant ways of presenting unemployed person's agency, which I labelled othered, victimised and entrepreneurial agency. The following table summarises all of the relevant instances.

Table 2 *Three most dominant ways of presenting unemployed person's agency*

Othered agency	Victimised agency	Entrepreneurial agency
<p>Presented as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - volitionally avoiding work and responsibility - lacking motivation, genuine intention and appropriate actions to seek work - dependent on welfare by 'choosing' and/or exploiting unemployment benefits - acting immorally - excluded in a self-inflicted manner - substance misuse problems and a deviant lifestyle - lazy and passive - strong-willed - not belonging to 'us' and 'our' moral community - unconstrained to act 	<p>Presented as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - unable to work and/or chronically (long-term) ill - truly needy - being unjustly treated and a target of mistreatment, neglect, prejudice and stereotyping - disabled - having a limited work ability - potentially drifting to no-exit poverty and becoming 'trapped in welfare' - hopeless - unfortunate - vulnerable - weak - powerless - lacking control - having limited room to act 	<p>Presented as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 'making an effort' - hard-working - responsible - ambitious - having a solid work ethic and the proper attitude - having the will to take the initiative in the labour market - doing one's best as an unemployed jobseeker to find a job - being work-life oriented and 'forward-looking' - showing a commitment to improves one's skills and transform one's goals in relation to the labour market - having fulfilled their reciprocal duty as taxpayers and jobseekers - being to some extent constrained to act
<p>Underserving and irresponsible agent who:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - lacks the necessary effort - should adjust one's unmotivated attitude and accept work-oriented employability goals - should internalise responsibility and a lifestyle change - should refrain from moral 'wrongdoings' 	<p>Deserving agent free from responsibility and who:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - is free from moral blame - is given a legitimate victim role - should be entitled to access adequate services 	<p>Deserving and responsible agent who:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - is fully free from moral blame and discouraging accusations - should be given support to build their confidence and motivation

In the next stage of my analysis, I focussed on the ways in which unemployed people were constructed as able to act, which constrained constructions as shaping their ability to act. I paid specific attention to the analysis of how these agential constructs designated moral blame.

Here, I perceive agency as closely interwoven with the principle of responsibility, since only agential capabilities can be held responsible for the outcomes of their behaviours (Michailakis & Schirmer, 2010, p. 936). From this perspective, agency occurs in the accounts given to our own and other people's actions and the way speakers present responsibility vis-à-vis such actions (Harré, 1995). Therefore, people explain their own and others' actions (e.g., who should be blamed and complimented) and construct constraints of agency and events in their discourse by invoking excuses and justifications (Edwards, 1999; Potter, 2005, p. 740; Potter & Wetherell, 1987, pp. 74, 92;

Scott & Lyman, 1968). Agency is, then, manifested within the multitude of discursive practices that involve taking or repudiating responsibility (Harré, 1995). For example, verbs and metaphors indicate agency, since they determine whether the unemployed subject is presented passively or as a responsible actor with agency (Dahlstedt & Vesterberg, 2019; Goodman & Carr, 2017, p. 320; Paterson, Coffey-Glover & Peplow, 2016, p. 202; Rødner, 2005, pp. 341–342; Strachle, Weiss, Wodak, Muntigl & Sedlak, 1999; Woodhams, 2012).

Previous studies recognised two distinct ways in which unemployed people's agency is typically constructed. First, unemployed people can be presented as unconstrained agents 'in control'; second, unemployed people can be presented as helpless and blameless agents, victims at the mercy of external social, political and economic forces beyond their personal control (see Ezzy, 2000, 2001; Feather, 1999, p. 41; Gibson, 2011, p. 463; Howe, 1990, p. 191, 220). For instance, Goodman and Carr (2017) showed how talking about unemployment benefits tend to couch arguments as based upon these constructs. Unemployed people are likely viewed as either unable to expend the necessary effort and hard work to look for a job or view accountability as lying beyond unemployed people and their individual effort, since 'external factors', such as a lack of jobs during times of high unemployment, are to blame (Goodman & Carr, 2017, p. 315). Hence, this lack of responsibility can be achieved through two key routes: discursive constructs of a victim with little capacity towards agency; and as an entrepreneurial agent demonstrating an effort and the initiative to find work, yet constrained by external macro-structural forces (Howe, 1990, p. 11, 178; Seu, 2016, p. 748; Vehkalahti, 2000).

I argue that the lack of responsibility and deservingness are constructed through portrayals of entrepreneurial and victimised agency, whereas assumed personal responsibility and undeservingness are constructed through accounts related to an othered agency. Therefore, I conclude that deservingness and responsibility are constructed resulting from social circumstances or an unemployed individual's own acts and characteristics. These acts are intimately linked to moral 'blamelessness' or 'blameworthiness'—that is, deservingness. All of the agential constructs I identified appear in each of the datasets. Therefore, they reveal the culturally dominant and available ways in which prolonged unemployment is talked about through negotiations of actions related to responsibilities and deservingness.

5.4.1 OTHERED AGENCY

The first agential construction I identified, labelled othered agency, is constructed through unemployed people's personal responsibility and undeservingness. The discursive practice of othering was manifested across all of my datasets, and is intertwined with the worthiness of moral blame.

Othered agency shares similarities with judgements of deservingness and imputing responsibility entirely within the agent who can be blamed for their own faults (Feather, 1999, p. 48; Feinberg, 1970, p. 30). Across all three datasets, I identified remarks that constructed an othered 'underclass' — that is, a construct of 'intergenerationally learnt' undesired and morally dubious behaviour passed down through generations and viewed as resulting from the irresponsible actions of individuals considered undeserving.

In these datasets, the othered agency is presented as a strong, in-control actor, responsible for their own actions. Othering involves constructions of unemployed people who consciously choose to avoid work due to work shyness and an eroding or non-existing work ethic. Thus, othered agents are portrayed as not having a genuine intention to look for a job and, therefore, are presented as excluded from 'our' moral community. Irresponsibility and undeservingness also result from illegitimate actions, such as exploitation or 'choosing' benefits and living at the expense of 'us' due to their laziness, passivity, self-inflicted exclusion, deviant lifestyle and substance misuse, specifically alcoholism. In my data, these descriptions were also associated with 'dirty' work and 'tainted' job tasks in rehabilitative work units (see Holmqvist, 2009a).

I argue that different actors involved in activation policy aim to achieve different objectives by presenting othered agency in their talk. First, the targets of policy (that is, unemployed individuals themselves) aim to exhibit their own deservingness through othering and distinguishing themselves from this stigmatising agential construction. It is well established that people use both direct or indirect techniques to present themselves as non-stigmatised and redirect attention away from discredited traits as a means to manage stigma (Goffman, 1968). Thus, positive self-presentations and negative presentations of the other were well-documented in previous studies related to 'stigmatising', 'deviant' and/or 'face-threatening' identities and stereotyped categorisations (Broughton, 2003; Howe, 1990, pp. 16, 148, 1998; Juhila, 2004; Marston, 2008, p. 365; McFadyen, 1995; McGormack, 2004; Patrick, 2017, pp. 155–156; Pemberton, Fahmy, Sutton & Bell, 2016; Riach & Loretto, 2009, p. 110; Rødner, 2005; Salasuo & Seppälä, 2004; Shildrick & MacDonald, 2013; Snow & Leon, 1987; Van de Mieroop, 2011).

Second, those implementing a policy (that is, frontline workers) aim to justify their own actions and inactions in relation to the responsabilisation of unemployed subjects. Through the othered agential construct, unemployment is then represented as resulting from an individual's moral wrongdoings, thereby intensifying encouragement of personal responsibility through activation represented as legitimate. Previous studies reported designations of (class-based) moral blame to unemployed individuals and constructions of undesired behaviour and a lack of responsibility related to frontline work (Agllias, Howard, Schubert & Gray, 2016; Broughton, 2003; Howard, Agllias, Schubert & Gray, 2018; Howe, 1990; Seale, Buck & Parotta, 2013; Turgeon, Taylor & Niehaus, 2014).

Third, policymakers (that is, MPs) aim to legitimise retrenchment policy and participate in blame avoidance through attributing responsibility and blame to those identifiable (unemployed) agents who can instead attract blame (see Hansson, 2015; Hansson, 2017; Stone, 1989). Thus, retrenchment, obligatory reciprocity and cost containment can be portrayed as moral and political necessities (Nygård, 2007; Wiggan, 2012, p. 399; Whitworth, 2016; Wodak & van Leeuwen, 2002).

5.4.2 VICTIMISED AGENCY

The second agential construction I identified, victimised agency, constructs unemployed people a deserving status and exempts personal responsibility. The discursive practice of victimising appeared in all of the sub-studies, which I associate with identifying genuine need and a lack of moral responsibility. Therefore, I understand that treating someone as a victim harmed by forces beyond their control simultaneously situates responsibility beyond the victim, thereby absolving them from responsibility and blame, since they are essentially innocent (Holstein & Miller, 1990, p. 106).

Across all datasets, victimised agency is presented as helpless, weak and, to some extent, powerless. Victimised agency also involves constructions of unemployed individuals as vulnerable and unfortunate, truly in need of help and attention from the welfare system, frontline workers and policymakers due to genuine and a true need amongst such constrained actors. Descriptions of victimised agency involve portrayals of those unemployed subjects who are unfit for work, who have a limited ability to work or disabilities, thereby lacking real control over their situation as unemployed individuals. For the most part, victimised agency involves descriptions of sickness and ill-health, as well as unjust treatment such as neglect and stereotyping.

Again, I argue that different actors involved in activation policy aim to achieve different objectives by presenting a victimised agency. First, the targets of the policy (that is, unemployed individuals) aim to exhibit deservingness through negotiating their genuine need and lack of control related to their 'worklessness'. Presenting a blameless agency is unsurprising, since stigma related to prolonged unemployment is in large part managed by determining whether one can be held responsible for one's own unemployment (McFadyen, 1995, p. 248). Presenting a victimised agency may then work as an attempt to maintain control over one's self-description as a means to exonerate themselves from blame and responsibility (Riach & Loretto, 2009; Van De Mieroop, 2011). In particular, health issues can be used to contrast one's own deservedness vis-à-vis other welfare recipients deemed as less deserving (see also Broughton, 2003; Howe, 1990, pp. 217–218; Snell-Rood & Carpenter-Song, 2018).

Second, those implementing policy (that is, frontline workers) aim to justify their care and support, which at times extends beyond routine

treatment. In frontline workers' talk, disability, illness and health problems are constructed as legitimate reasons not to engage in paid employment (see also Gibson, 2011, p. 461). However, as reported in previous studies, positioning an individual as a weak and helpless victim may shift rapidly to positioning that same actor as strong, powerful and responsible (see Berger & Eskelinen, 2016; Holstein & Miller, 1990, pp. 115–116; Juhila, Hall & Raitakari, 2010; Øverlien, 2014, p. 162; Hydén, 2005, p. 176; Päivinen & Holma, 2012, pp. 65–66; Dunn & Powell-Williams, 2007). Therefore, how victimised agency is negotiated within frontline practices remains crucial. Illness, in particular, may result from an agent's actions or from neglecting actions, such as not following medical advice or possibly contributing to one's bad health (Michailakis & Schirmer, 2010, p. 936, 943).

Third, policymakers (that is, MPs) aim to oppose retrenchment policy and highlight the importance of the social rights of those regarded as a 'truly needy' and deserving. These portrayals include negotiations of a legitimate sick role. Since being ill requires fulfilling a sociological position that requires legitimisation, illness is closely linked to relief from fulfilling work-related obligations (Cullen & Hodgetts, 2001; Holmqvist, 2009b; Holmqvist, Maravelias & Skålen, 2013, p. 205; Michailakis & Schirmer, 2010; Mik-Meyer & Obling, 2012; Radley & Billig, 1996).

5.4.3 ENTREPRENEURIAL AGENCY

The third and last agential construction I identified, entrepreneurial agency, constructs unemployed individual's deservingness through their personal responsibility towards making an effort and a moral duty to act as an ideal jobseeker adhering to an appropriate behaviour and attitude. The entrepreneurial construct conforms to the dominant narrative of unemployment in which unemployment represents a state of emergency in which everyone should rapidly exit (Laakso, 2018, p. 32). Then, within this framework, judgements, responsibility and deservingness are tied to the significant effort put into genuine and active job-seeking (Cullen & Hodgetts, 2001, p. 43; Feather & Dawson, 1998; Gibson, 2011, p. 461; Howe, 1990, p. 176, 200). Thus, deservingness within this agential construct based on the unemployed person's positively evaluated actions and the outcomes of those actions, as well as the perceived responsibility for the action leading to that outcome (Feather, 1999, pp. 1–3, 5).

Across my datasets, entrepreneurial agency is presented as effortful and active; however, to some extent, it is also constrained by uncontrollable events, such as inequalities and flaws in the competitive labour market and the extensive qualification requirements limiting an unemployed individual's ability to act. Constructing entrepreneurial agency involves portrayals of 'active citizenship', such as descriptions of unemployed individuals as work-life oriented, autonomous, motivated, responsible and ambitious exhibiting

ideal conduct, the correct mentality and culturally appropriate values. Entrepreneurial agents are also presented as individuals who previously fulfilled their reciprocal duty as taxpayers and as welfare recipients and jobseekers simultaneously. This implies that entrepreneurial agency works as a route to 'earn' welfare support. Actions, such as effort making and personal initiatives, an exceptional work ethic, skills building and a strong commitment to employability enhancement, are presented as negotiated in relation to deservingness.

Here, again, I argue that different actors associated with activation policy aim to achieve different objectives by presenting entrepreneurial agency in their talk. The targets of a policy (that is, unemployed individuals) aim to exhibit their own deservingness by demonstrating their personal efforts and responsible actions. Constructing entrepreneurial agency is unsurprising, since individuals are less likely to hold someone responsible if an effort is attributed (Feather, 1999, pp. 31, 33). Individuals are often quite aware of moralistic discourses, and are required to respond, reject and circumnavigate the stigma of a 'lack of reciprocity and effort' behaviourist discourses produce by providing legitimate explanations for their and others' circumstances. These may include the external constraints related to labour market transformation and macroeconomic trends causing a lack of control as well as their own will exposed to norms of reciprocity by 'giving something back' in return (Gast & Okamoto, 2016; Howe, 1990, pp. 217–218; Marston, 2008, p. 356; Pemberton, Fahmy, Sutton & Bell, 2016). Therefore, one can frame one's own situation as caused by structural underpinnings, such as a lack of jobs and childcare or low wages, rather than stemming from one's own lack of effort and bad choices (Cullen & Hodgetts, 2001, p. 42; McGormack, 2004, p. 368). Discourses on responsibility then become a key means for differentiating oneself from undeserving and irresponsible others, achieved by presenting oneself as responsible or at least potentially responsible and self-sufficient (Woolford & Nelund, 2013, pp. 308–309).

Second, policy implementers (that is, frontline workers) aim to describe the ideal client as one who shows a keen and motivated attitude vis-à-vis activation and employability enhancement. Thus, I associate entrepreneurial agency not just with accounts of a sustained and diligent effort in job-seeking, but as a commitment to the ideals and value of work often taken for granted within frontline work (see Howe, 1990, pp. 17–18, 189–190). These accounts often involve portrayals of individuals who comply with middle-class standards and a particular lifestyle. Specifically, entrepreneurial agency adheres to the neoliberal ideals of entrepreneurialism and activity, such as commitment, exhibiting initiative, the ability to pursue goals and a keen interest in employability enhancement (Dean, 1995; Rose, 2000).

Third, policymakers (that is, MPs) oppose retrenchment policy by highlighting the best efforts of (the majority of) hard-working citizens who lack 'complete control' over their situation and do not deserve the designation of moral blame as unemployed subjects. However, these portrayals of

entrepreneurial values and individual responsibility also include implicit and explicit portrayals of the undeservingness of those not demonstrating 'active citizenship'.

6 CONCLUSIONS

This thesis relied on qualitative discursive approaches applying theories and empirical analyses of deservingness and responsabilisation. Here, I demonstrated three key ways in which unemployed individuals' agency is constructed by different actors involved in activation policy in Finland. These portrayals situate the unemployed subject either as an othered, victimised or entrepreneurial agent, all of which aim to achieve different objectives depending upon the speaker and the context of talk. Freeing individuals from responsibility and moral blame is enacted specifically through accounts related to effort making and genuine need.

These three agential constructs portray unemployed subjects' deservingness and responsibilities in varying ways: either the unemployed subject is constructed as exercising a strong or with a restricted agency. Thus, deservingness of prolonged unemployment is primarily negotiated in relation to the idea of 'internal' or 'external' factors related to one's ability to act (see Ezzy, 2000, 2001; Goodman & Carr, 2017; Feather, 1999, p. 41; Gibson, 2011, p. 463; Howe, 1990, pp. 191, 220). In addition, these agential constructs link to identity negotiations based on fulfilling the class-based expectations related to the value of work, individual responsibility, effort making and legitimate reciprocal exchanges. Thus, my findings indicate that an unemployed individual's agency is balanced between expectations related to responsibility (and the lack thereof), which also interact with negotiations of deservingness. In general, responsabilisation produces a division between agents who deserve blame and those who remain blameless, whose worthiness is often validated through labour market participation. That is, those who are regarded as undeserving given their own 'poor choices' are sanctioned and penalised (Lantz & Marston, 2012, p. 859). Responsibilisation and the requirement for independent and active citizenship may be consequential specifically during last-resort support, help and control services and amongst those with complex and multiple needs (Juhila, Raitakari & Hall, 2017).

The identified deservingness and responsibility constructions in this study may result from meta-discursive representations that are culturally familiar to speakers. Essentially, these deservingness constructions are then not just a result of those actively involved in activation policy measurements. For example, the Finnish print media could represent unemployment in alternative ways (Böök & Penttinen, 1997; Renvall & Vehkalahti, 2002). In addition, reality television programmes may represent unemployment, poverty and class in specific ways, drawing upon ideologies of benefit cheats and framing undeservingness through 'entertainment', which involves humour, shaming and humiliation (see for example Biressi, 2011; Paterson, Foffey-Glover & Peplow, 2016; Patrick, 2017, pp. 190–192, 196). Makeover and intervention reality shows focus on both the deserving and undeserving poor,

good responsible citizens and bad welfare beneficiaries, with the aim of helping them towards self-reliance, entrepreneurialism, employability and individualised responsibility. This provides a contrast to state interventions that failed to transform their subjects (Biressi, 2011).

The findings of this study have to be seen in light of some limitations, for example due to constraints on research material I have used. Therefore, future studies in Finland could focus on larger cultural representations of unemployment and poverty vis-à-vis deservingness and responsibilities, including the analysis of fictional material and reality TV programmes. In addition, future empirical work could focus on how 'Finnishness' and 'being Nordic' are negotiated and portrayed as issues related to deservingness and responsibilities.

My findings also carry specific implications for studies on activation practices in Finland, relying upon ethnographic designs and naturally occurring data. Future work could focus on Finnish street-level encounters and the discursive ways in which undeserving, responsible and employable long-term unemployed subjects are constructed and negotiated in situ. In particular, importance should be placed on analysing how health issues and gratefulness are constructed and managed at the Finnish frontline of activation through a variety of practices related to self-presentations and the embodiment of both responsabilisation and deservingness.

Social constructionist work is often criticised for relativism and lack of practical applicability. I believe my study has implications that most importantly address practical consequences as regards unemployed people's social rights and responsibilities and practitioners' possibilities to assess and reflect policy makers', their own and their clients' multiple accounts and (often taken-for-granted) problem explanations of unemployment. Frontline workers have the ability to resist the demands of the activation policy and to use discretion; however, a variety of factors, such as day-to-day bureaucratic workload, influence these abilities. Therefore, future practice and research initiatives in Finland could produce knowledge towards understanding unemployment policy solutions as a collaborative learning process between frontline professionals and clients (see Andersen, Caswell & Larsen, 2017), as well as policy makers. In this process, researchers may help to introduce larger sociopolitical theories like deservingness and analysis of everyday-relevant institutionalised discursive practices, such as resistance.

The practical implications of my study are not just limited to the theme of unemployment and activation: the findings may also be relevant to understanding day-to-day application of frontline work in the fields of education, law and health services. Especially in times of 'austerity' and 'crisis', the questions of who is regarded as deserving and responsible actors and on what basis is at the core of policy making and frontline practice.

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